

Theme of love in the taming of the shrew



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Shakespeare's 'The Taming of the Shrew' is a comedy focusing on the taming of the aggressive and verbose Katherine by Petruchio, and through this taming process, as well other elements of the play, the theme of love resonates. We see romantic love, as David Daniell states that it is a "fast moving play about various kinds of romances and fulfillment in marriage", and also parental, filial and platonic love.

Perhaps the most recognizable form of love in the novel is romantic love, as the play forms almost a deep analysis on the nature of romantic love and the different variations of such love. We are first exposed to the typical Elizabethan courtly love and Lucentio is struck by love for Bianca at first sight, a desperate, overwhelming passion as communicated through the triple structure as he states "I burn, I pine, I perish", capturing how instantly enthralled he is by Bianca. He continues on with such courtly love imagery as he uses the mythical allusion stating her beauty humbled Jove and he uses the metaphor as he speaks of her "coral lips". Lucentio uses every cliché love poetry offers and falls in love with the picture of Bianca as he wants to see her, disregarding what she must be like as an individual, and so we see this form of romantic love to be superficial and unsubstantial. This courtly love is also seen in Hortensio and Gremio in their attempts to woo Bianca as they are equally poetic as they call her "the jewel of my life", "sweeter than perfume", metaphors focusing merely on her outward beauty and glorifying that only. The superficiality of such love is evident as we see men in the play want a woman whose external nature is solely characterized by her beauty, not by a sense of her personality, and this is clear through the suitors' reaction to Katherine's wildness, making evident that "they prefer the

compliant woman to the defiant woman who seeks to preserve her individuality”, as contended by Irene G. This captures the absolute lack of depth in relationships founded on courtly love and this idea of shallowness is introduced in the induction scene itself as the Sly represents the socially less accepted concept of love as he desires a certain level of intimacy as he wants to know what to call his supposed wife, the page, and doesn’t understand that he is supposed to call her “ madam”, but asks if its “ Alice madam or Joan madam”. The Lord then states its “ Madam, and nothing else”, a phrase encapsulating the fact that true intimacy was not desired and partners treat each other with reserved politeness rather than affection.

Furthermore, as contended by critic, Irene G, “ in the courting of Bianca deception dominates”, and this is clear as in order to woo Bianca numerous false identities are employed: Lucentio becomes Cambio, Tranio becomes Lucentio, Hortensio becomes Litio. In addition, Hortensio uses music to mask his wooing and Lucentio uses Latin. They try to initiate love on the basis of lies and deceit and this presents how neither want to reveal their true nature, while the superficiality of their love for her presents the fact that they do not want to know her true nature either, so their love remains unsteady with no real intimacy.

Another form of romantic love is seen through Petruchio and Katherine as their love goes beyond the typical courtly love. Initially, we see one of Petruchio’s main motivations for pursuing Katherine is to increase his monetary worth through their marriage, this is captured through the phrase, emphasized by the internal rhyme, as he states he came to Padua to “ wive and thrive”, conveying his true intentions and reflecting the common

contemporary notion that marriage was an investment and a highly lucrative deal for the husband. Additionally, Hillegrass L contends that Petruchio pursues Katherine for the “ challenge of capturing her”, as she is continuously described as violent and difficult, as portrayed through the triple structure “ rough and coy and sullen”, qualities completely antithetical to the ideal Elizabethan woman who was expected to be obedient, soft spoken and submissive, thus luring Petruchio in as he is presented to be a greatly adventurous man and he finds that in Katherine lies another adventure. Therefore, the play presents the idea that romantic love is often founded on selfish intentions.

However, we see that despite Petruchio’s ill intentions they share a love that goes beyond what was typical in Elizabethan times, a love more intimate and genuine than all others in the play. Petruchio’s means of wooing Katherine is very different; he uses plainer language and is very frank and through the use of stichomythia between the two we see a real intellectual attraction. Petruchio does humiliate her in their wedding, he starves her, denies her of sleep, however, in his soliloquy he states it’s out of “ reverend care”, so we see he “ plays a part like an actor until Katherine is subdued”, as stated by David Daniell. Through his actions the historical censorship and control of woman in contemporary England is evoked, yet, we see his intentions are not to hurt or harm her but to transform her into a pleasant woman who is no longer shunned by society. Also, through Katherine’s final speech we see Katherine’s true feelings of affection to Petruchio as she uses language of governance, calling him her “ lord” and “ king”, and she kisses him on the street disregarding what anyone else may think. Through the course of the

play we see a real intimacy and love develop between the two and in the end we see real potential of them having a happy future, thus presenting another side to romantic love in the play.

The play also presents parental love through Baptista and his daughters. His character reflects contemporary views that a daughter was the possession of her father who would gain wealth out of her and this is evident as Baptista objectifies his daughters as something to be bartered, thus presenting a certain shallowness to parental love. Further, through Baptista, parental love is presented as conditional as he favors Bianca. As a commodity on the marriage market, Katherine is considered unvendible as her scolding tongue is a threat to patriarchal discourse and so Baptista is careless in his treatment of her, which juxtaposes with his treatment of Bianca, as Bianca is praised due to her silence and is therefore characterized as a precious commodity, and so she is loved which is evident through his references to her; “ my child”, “ poor child”, as opposed to Katherine whom he calls “ devilish spirit”. Therefore, parental love is seen as conditional as Bianca, who fits into the expectations of an Elizabethan woman, is given love and care, while Katherine, who does not meet those expectations, is not.

Moreover, as in King Lear, Shakespeare dwells on the idea of ungrateful children and wronged fathers. In contemporary times a man’s honor greatly lay in his daughters and in him being able to marry them off to respected families, but Katherine’s aggressive behavior means she is unwanted and this prevents Baptista from not only marrying Katherine off, but also from marrying Bianca off, due to Elizabethan customs that state that the oldest must marry first. This causes Baptista clear distress captured through the <https://assignbuster.com/theme-of-love-in-the-taming-of-the-shrew/>

rhetorical question, “ was ever a gentleman as grieved as I?” which evokes the great pressure he feels as a result of Katherine, making us question whether it is a lack of filial love on Katherine’s part that is the problem. The play thus highlights the importance of respect and filial duty in Elizabethan times to maintain order.

Platonic love is also seen in the play through Lucentio and Tranio, master and servant. Despite Tranio being lower in the societal hierarchy, as Lucentio’s servant, they have mutual respect and we see them as friends, which distorts the conventional master servant relationship. Their friendship transcends societal expectations and goes against a certain order that was typically so rigidly followed, and this is highlighted as they switch identities, with Tranio taking on the role of Lucentio- a visual representation of their transcendence. This presents their strong platonic love, a love that is genuine and makes social positions and labels irrelevant.

In conclusion, the play is almost governed by love in its many forms, as we see it is love that defines the plot, and subplots, as we see all characters to be part of some form of love in the play, and so the play brings into question and analyzes the different forms of it.