

Taming of the shrew



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Taming of the Shrew Essay: In the critical essay “ Role-Playing in the Taming of the Shrew”, author Richard Henze argues that William Shakespeare’s play, “ The Taming of the Shrew”, begins as part of that jest and as a play, a pretense, within the pretense of Sly's role as lord” (Henze). Henze also goes on to state, “ What Petruchio does during... the taming of Kate is like the Lord with Sly”.

As evident in both the induction and play, manipulation contributes to a majority of the comedy that ensues between characters, leading to conflict, character development and plot progression with Kate and Petruchio, and Sly and the Lord; revealing its’ ability to make both the plays’ and inductions’ events similar. In the induction of the play, Christopher Sly, a poor drunkard, stumbles out of a bar and passes out in a pile of garbage.

As a Lord and his servants pass by and witness Sly in the garbage, they decide to play a prank on him; bringing him to the Lord’s chambers and convincing him that he has been asleep for fifteen years. Although Sly emerges as the drunkard from the trash heap, the persuasion of the Lord, the Servingmen and Bartholomew (as a Page) eventually lead Sly to lose his accent and speak in prose, such as a stereotypical noble should. Am I a lord, and have I such a lady? Or do I dream? Or have I dreamed till now? I do not sleep: I see, I hear, I speak, I smell sweet savors and I feel soft things.

Upon my life, I am a lord indeed and not a tinker nor Christopher Sly (Ind. ii. 68-73). “ However quickly the beggar forgets himself...we do not forget that the beggar is only a beggar; however real Sly is to himself as lord, he is not a real lord to us. ” (Henze) The dramatic irony that situates itself in the

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audience in the Induction provides an air of comic relief that is also apparent in the antics of Kate and Petruchio. The Taming of the Shrew, acted by the players welcomed by the Lord, begins as... a jest and as a play... within the pretense of Sly's role as lord. But here Sly's transformation remains a jest... The Taming of the Shrew becomes more than a joke; it acquires substance and meaning in spite of its apparent repetition of the medieval jest about the crude taming of a shrewish wife (Henze) While Sly seems to easily buy into the idea that he has been asleep for 15 years and is truly a lord, it takes Kate a longer period of time to begin “ acting” as Petruchio’s wife. Through the humorous conflicts the two had through Kate’s courting and their memorable wedding, one might believe that Petruchio is the one to have tamed Kate.

But due to Kate’s cunning and stubborn nature, she is resourceful enough to realize that if she does what her husband says, than she can get whatever she so desires. On the other hand, Sly never has this realization and is oblivious to the humor surrounding his situation. According to Henze, both Petruchio and the Lord utilize manipulation in different manners in order to achieve their own personal goals, which also results in humor or various forms of irony. It is evident in The Taming of the Shrew that Henze is correct in his interpretations. Persuade him [Sly] that he hath been lunatic, and when he says he is say that he dreams, for he is nothing but a mighty lord... It will be pastime passing excellent...” (Ind. i. 5) This quote from the play highlights the Lord’s desire for comedy to ensue and the manipulation that he utilizes in order to attain satisfaction. Sly’s susceptibility to the Lord’s jests may not entirely depend on the Lord’s skill of manipulation, but also in

the fact that he is a drunkard and cannot interpret reality accurately. “ To make her come and know her keeper’s call.

That is, to watch her as we watch these kites, she eat no meat today, nor none shall eat. Last night she slept not, nor tonight she shall not... That all is done in reverent care of her and in conclusion she shall watch all night. This is a way to kill a wife with kindness, and thus I’ll curb her mad and headstrong humor” (IV. li. 73-74). In order to “ tame” Kate, Petruchio utilizes manipulation both directly and indirectly. At he and Kate’s wedding, he arrives late, dressed in unflattering garb and upon a sickly horse in order to make the people of Padua sympathetic towards her.

He also treats his servant, Grumio, without respect and proceeds to harm him, leading Kate to reveal her passionate side. Both the Lord and Petruchio both succeed in their own way in manipulating Sly and Kate respectively. Although Sly is never revealed to have discovered the Lord’s jest, Kate has manipulated Petruchio to an extent as well. As examined in Henze’s interpretation of *The Taming of the Shrew*, both the Lord’s and Petruchio’s manipulations are similar in what they are used for; personal gain or enjoyment.

The Lord wanted a hearty chuckle while Petruchio wanted a wife that truly loved him. Both men were successful in their various attempts to fulfill their desires, as both Sly and Kate fell victim, to an extent, to their manipulations.

Works Cited: 1. Shakespeare, William. *The Taming of the Shrew*. Ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine. New York: Washington Square Press, 1992. Print. 2. Henze, Richard. " Role-Playing in *The Taming of the Shrew*. "

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