

Disguises in 'the taming of the shrew'



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In Shakespeare's comedy *The Taming of the Shrew*, a number of individuals assume different identities through an array of varying illusions. Deception is a prominent thematic concern within the play, as a multitude of characters adopt disguises, only to reveal their true personalities. Bianca conceals her genuine temperament through her misleading behaviour, while both Hortensio and Lucentio don physical guises of schoolmasters' clothing; for his part, the merchant who pretends to be Vincentio is disguised under duress. Although these characters are not always central to the play and are more minor in this sense, they are made more important through Shakespeare's employment of deceit and misconceptions, as a psychological disguise is much more convincing than a physical disguise.

Bianca tries to hide her true disposition by conducting herself in a much sweeter manner that doesn't parallel with her actual behaviour, which many individuals begin to realise through the flaws in her demeanour. Her father sympathises with her as a "poor girl, she weeps," reinforcing her alleged "fair and virtuous" nature. This suggests to readers that she is the epitome of innocence and beauty, that she didn't deserve to be victimised or terrorised by her sister Katherina. "Weeps" indicates a much deeper sorrow, demonstrating that her father's view of her is reverent, clouded by favouritism. Her actions appear to go unpunished, unlike Katherina's, one who doesn't conceal her true personality from anyone. Shakespeare frequently hints at Bianca's growing assertiveness throughout the play as her character gradually develops. Bianca expresses that "I learn my lessons as I please myself," subtly suggesting a starkly different view of the youngest daughter. Shakespeare portrays to the readership that she is

privileged and in possession of a personality, inconsistent with the fabricated innocence that she enforces on the surface. She blatantly reveals her true self near the end as “ the more fool you for laying on my duty.” In demonstrating a strong woman’s opinion, the author illustrated an attitude which was uncommon and disagreeable during that era. The readers are positioned to feel as though Bianca has undergone a transformation, as they notice her façade has finally disappeared to reveal a domineering, self-assured woman. However, Bianca managed to obscure herself for quite an extensive period of time, whilst her suitors having assumed physical disguises, found it increasingly difficult to mask their honest selves.

Both Lucentio and Hortensio, concealed by schoolmasters’ outfits in order to win Bianca’s love cannot maintain the deception, and consequently their individualised characters are revealed. Lucentio, awe-struck by Bianca, transforms himself into “ Cambio,” a teacher, and is to “ undertake the teaching of a maid.” Tranio states that Bianca is not as virtuous as she may seem, but Lucentio is blinded, his true personality already shown through the stark contrast between him and his servant Tranio. He tries to show Bianca that he is a marriageable prospect by confiding in her that he is “ disguised thus to get your love.” He promptly exposes his true identity, not hidden for very long. Lucentio’s naivety and foolishness becomes apparent when Bianca has cost him “ a hundred pounds since supper-time.” His annoyance is not the result of losing a sum of money, but rather Bianca’s unrestrained show of disrespect towards him. He uses the money as an excuse to berate her wilfulness, the cause of his publicised embarrassment. Through this, the readers see that he is still young and impulsive, not ready for marriage. The

two schoolmasters are unable to collaborate effectively together as fellow teachers, their disguises already tarnished from the beginning. Hortensio falsely presumed Bianca would let herself be wooed by a schoolteacher, and began to see that his masquerade would not work; that instead his true self would have been more favourable. He also displays a different side to the audience as he uncovers major aspects of himself, that it is "kindness in women, not their beautiful looks, shall win my love." He displays unexpectedly virtuous behaviour, yet the readership are also shown that Hortensio gives up easily; he is readily led astray from his goal and does not possess a great deal of determination. Shakespeare argues that disguises may conceal an individual, but that personality will eventually be revealed. Lucentio's disguise is also made more unstable as he implicates more individuals in his plan.

The Pedant who comes to Padua disguised under duress as Lucentio's father, is ultimately seen for who he really is. With the fear of being murdered, he feels indebted to Tranio as Tranio explains he does "you courtesy," making it sound as though he is performing such a good deed, when in fact he is taking advantage of the merchant. There is a selfish hidden agenda, the author illuminating that a good disguise often needs multiple individuals involved, yet can also become risky and dangerous. As a result the merchant takes on the role quite seriously, as "he is mine and only son." Tranio is conniving and cunning, convincing him that he comes "to Padua careless of your life?" This is a volatile plan, based on the assumption and hope that the Pedant has not heard contradictory news. Shakespeare implores the reader to see through his ideology that people cannot be trusted based on

appearance, as many have ulterior motives. The writer uses the specific example of the Pedant as he knowingly exercises the deception of " Signor Baptista" who " may remember me near twenty years ago." Here, he is not speaking fondly of a friend, but rather he is sceptical that his façade will not work against an individual who he has met and is now willingly misleading. The fact that he knows Baptista reinforces this view as he would have trusted this candid merchant. It is implied that beneath the respectable veneer of a Pedant, he may be not be the honest merchant that he portrays himself to be.

Irrefutably, the characters' facades were exposed; it simply proved too difficult to uphold these artificialities over such a period of time. The characters in *The Taming of the Shrew* all hid themselves through disguises under which they increasingly revealed more about themselves, demonstrating that individuals' personalities will eventually be discovered. Bianca displayed her true disposition, which severely contrasted with the beliefs about her innocence and beauty, whilst the physical disguises which Lucentio and Hortensio adopted were much less effective. The two schoolmasters discovered more about themselves and showed such new insights to the reader, while the merchant disguised under duress depicted his focus on self-preservation. All of the characters' qualities were made apparent to the readers as Shakespeare implicitly exhibited his own attitudes.