

# Baptista's lack of authority: a character analysis of a faltering father



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The wealthy Baptista Minola of Padua, Italy is one of the most prideful characters in William Shakespeare's comedy *The Taming of Shrew*.

Baptista's pride stems from his large estate and untaken daughters who will inherit his capital, assets of which he misuses in attempt to become a more influential and powerful character. Baptista attempts to gain power by using his position of fatherhood and wealthy landownership by telling Bianca's two suitors "not to bestow [his] youngest daughter before [he had] a husband for the elder" (1. 1. 50-54) to obtain control over others and their actions. By dictating the actions of others, Baptista is encouraged to believe that he is a multifaceted figure of authority. Conversely, many characters deceive Baptista out of his authority by admittedly "Bend[ing] thoughts and wits to achieve [Baptista's daughters]" (1. 1. 181), thus belittling his actual power and influence. Therefore, while Baptista Minola may assert himself to be the most powerful figure in his society, he is unveiled to be less powerful than he deems himself to be.

Lucentio's success in deceiving Baptista demonstrates Baptista to be less powerful than he believes. Upon overhearing Baptista's rules regarding his daughters, Lucentio and Tranio immediately disregard Baptista's orders by organizing a plan to pursue the exact opposite of what he commands.

Lucenio's manipulation increases Baptista's self-esteem by encouraging him to still believe that he has much control over his daughters' actions.

Nevertheless, the two clever men create a plan to peruse Bianca before Katherine by transforming Lucentio into a "schoolmaster [to] undertake the teaching of the maid" (1. 1. 196-97) while Tranio disguises himself as

Lucentio. With this plan in hand, Lucentio hopes to win Bianca's love before

anyone else while Tranio acts as Lucentio since no one knows their identities yet. The two men further deceive Baptista by giving the pedant “[Sir Vincentio’s] name and credit [to] undertake” (4. 2. 109-10) to fool Baptista into believing that Lucentio’s father approves of the marriage, proving Baptista to be gullible, hence ineffective in his supremacy. While both Lucentio and Tranio are well aware of Baptista’s apprehensions, both still decide to neglect his control by disguising themselves and the pedant to mislead Baptista into the approval of Lucentio and Bianca’s marriage, which prove the extent to which characters consider Baptista’s power to be very questionable. Bianca’s rebellious relations with Lucentio further reveal Baptista to be less powerful than he considers. Once Lucentio had professed his scheme to Bianca, she continues to flirt with him in mentioning “ And may you prove, sir, master of your heart” (4. 2. 8-9) as well as many other flirtatious remarks throughout their private tutoring sessions while knowing that it is against Baptista’s rules. While Bianca is well aware that her father does not want her flirting with anyone until Katherine is married, Bianca fails to dutifully notify Baptista of her private budding involvement with Lucentio. Moreover, Bianca later proves Baptista to lack power and control in not providing an obedient daughter who obeys her husband. When Lucentio later orders Biondello to “ bid your mistress come to me”(5. 2. 82), Bianca directly refuses by sending Biondello to tell her husband “ That she is busy, and she cannot come” (5. 2. 88-89). To all the characters’ shock, Baptista ultimately lacked control over Bianca by raising a woman who is noncompliant to her husband. If Baptista were as powerful as he deemed to be, he would have easily trained Bianca to be the complete dutiful, obedient, and respectful young lady that early centuries expected women to be.

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Hortensio's betrayal in plotting against Baptista's guidelines further proves Baptista to lack ultimate power. A powerful and influential character should neither be spoken-back-to nor questioned. Nonetheless, upon hearing Baptista's request, Hortensio criticizes, "To cart [Katherine], rather. She's too rough for me...Mates, maid? How mean you that? No mates for [Katherine] (1. 1. 55-61). In his words, Hortensio perceives Baptista's power as questionable by rudely criticizing both Baptista's shrewish daughter and his outlandish demands, two assets that significantly define him and therefore is a direct insult to Baptista. Though Hortensio eventually obey Baptista in finding a man to wed Katherine, he only does so that "Petruccio [could] do [him] grace and offer [him] disguised in sober robes to old Baptista as a schoolmaster well seen in music, to instruct Bianca, that so [he] may, by this device at least, have leave and leisure to make love to [Bianca] and unsuspected court her by herself"(2. 2. 131-38). Not only does Hortensio criticize Baptista, but also pursues actions against Baptista's orders by creating a plan to woo Bianca in secrecy. This pursuit against Baptista's controls is considerably worse than Lucentio's neglect of Baptista's guidelines because Hortensio is a suitor of Bianca's who is profoundly trusted by the Minola family. While Baptista thinks that his guidelines make him more powerful, it actually instigates characters to belittle his actual influence demonstrated by Hortensio's indifference toward Baptista Minola and his control.

The method in which Petruccio takes advantage of Baptista's daughter and fortune prove Baptista to be a weak character. Petruccio only visits Padua "to wive it wealthily in Padua"(1. 2. 76-77) hence marrying Katherine for the

opportunity to inherit fortune. Nevertheless, Baptista accepts the first and only man willing to win Katherine's love, an indication of Baptista's desperation and hopelessness as a father. With this, Baptista may believe that he has struck power by getting a man to marry Kathrine, however he is proved wrong when Petruchio disrespects the Minolas by showing up late when Baptista "want[ed] the bridegroom when the priest attends" (3. 2. 4-6). Not only does Baptista have zero control of Petruchio's lateness, but also his wardrobe. When Petruchio arrives late to his wedding in an outlandish costume, Baptista states to Petruchio, "[we are sad] that you come so unprovided. Fie, off this habit, shame to your estate, an eyesore to our solemn festival" (3. 2. 99-102), and directs Petruchio to change his wardrobe immediately. Instead of respecting Baptista's directions, Petruchio remarks back to Baptista, "To me she's married, not unto my clothes...But what a fool am I to chat with you when I should bid good morrow to my bride and seal the title with a lovely kiss!" (3. 2. 119-25). By talking back to Baptista, Petruchio straightforwardly neglects his power and acts as though he has more authority than him. Baptista was most concerned about being publically embarrassed by his son in law's wild behavior and foolish wardrobe instead of having any concern of Petruchio's intentions and motivations for marrying Katherine. In return, Petruchio resents his authority and finds Baptista to be no more than a token for his best interests similar to how Baptista only pursues things for selfish reasons. Therefore, Petruchio demonstrates authority over Baptista by not respecting Baptista's authority.

Lastly, Baptista's difficulty controlling Katherine validates his lack of control and influence. Under Baptista's control, Katherine acts out of rage in

swearing frequently, smashing Hortensio over the head with his own lute, and physically abusing the people who make her angry. When Baptista does attempt to control Katherine by commanding Katherine to stay where she is while he talks to Bianca in private, Katherine resents his control by replying back to him, " Why, and I trust I may go too, may I not? What, shall I be appointed hours as though, belike, I knew not what to take and what to leave, ha?" (1. 1. 105-07). While Katherine is evidently wild and noncompliant under Baptista's control, Petruchio later gains complete control over her in a short amount of time. For example, when Petruchio commands Katherine to come to him accompanied with all the other wives , Katherine fulfills his request and further informs the other ladies that they should all do the same because " Such duty as the subject owes the prince, Even such a woman oweth to her husband"(5. 2. 164-165). This speech of Katherine's displays that she is ultimately controllable, but Baptista was just not influential enough to control her. Baptista never gained the authority over Katherine that Petruchio did because Baptista was too consumed in himself to care for his children properly. Katherine is obedient to her husband because he " love[s] thee well in that thou lik'st it not" (4. 3. 88) and she is unable to be livid with someone who loves her. Baptista never told Katherine how much he loved her, which is why he could never gain complete control over her. Baptista's ongoing treatment of his daughters' love as a business disables him from gaining respect and control of Katherine. Since Baptista is unable to gain control of Katherine, she acts in a shrewish manner that men of Padua consider to be " too rough for them" (1. 1. 55), a factor that makes characters feel inclined to disguise themselves out of adhering to Baptista's power.

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Baptista believes that everyone highly respects him because of his wealth and position of being a father of two large inheritors. In reality, his power is considered uncertain by many characters that continually challenge and disregard his power in attempts to pursue their own ambitions. For illustration, Baptista's daughters ultimately disregard his authority by instances of Bianca pursuing an affair with Lucetio when she was not supposed to, and Katherine not letting Baptsita control her by acting shrewishly. Baptista is further shown to be less powerful than he deems when Hortensio plans a scheme to pursue actions against Baptista's commands and Lucentio disguises himself and others to trick Baptista into approving their marriage. If Baptista were of supreme power, he would have not been disrespected or deceived out of his power by other characters.

## **Works Cited**

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