

Renaissance social norms within the taming of the shrew assignment

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The Renaissance era housed one of the most, if not the most, essential time periods for modern day literature. Playwrights emerged from all shapes and sizes, but one in particular, whose popularity still holds true today as it did then, stood out from amongst the crowd. This playwright is William Shakespeare, one of the most fascinating and intellectual Renaissance men who had ever lived. Famous for writing comedies, tragedies and histories, Shakespeare was known for having an ornate style of writing.

He did not incorporate much surrealism in his play but rather combined elements within the society's social norms in order to craft his works. One play in particular cleverly stretched beyond the accepted social norms in order to produce a comedic effect. This play, *The Taming of the Shrew*, incorporates much of the era's social norms and laws. Shakespeare, who was born nearing the end of the Renaissance, accurately portrays a comedic story plot that falls well within the social norms of the time.

In a quick summary, this short play captures the lives of two main characters, Petruchio and Katherine, as they struggle trying to form a relationship. Katherine, who is the eldest daughter to a rich and powerful nobleman, unrelentingly strives to scare off any man who is willing to take her hand in marriage through her use of nasty comments, rude behavior and childlike actions. Bianca, the youngest, most beautiful and flirtatious of the two, is subject to wait until her sister is wed in order for her herself to be wed as well. In enters Petruchio, an Italian nobleman who is land rich but money poor.

He intends on marrying Katherine for her wealth although he is warned by many to stay clear of her path. Blinded by egotism, he accepts the challenge and repeatedly boasts about how he will "tame" his "shrew." In the end, he succeeds in doing so and the two fall in love with one another. A side plot occurs throughout the play as well involving Bianca and her three suitors, Gremio, Hortensio and Lucentio. Each fights with their own individual attributes, wealth, music and knowledge, but in the end, it is Lucentio who wins her heart and weds her.

Surprisingly, in the end when the two sisters are tested to see who had learned the most through the entire ordeal, it is Katherine who presents herself to be more principled in what it means to be a devoted wife. Bianca, on the other hand, had grown up being unconditionally admired by many and was limited to flirtatious behavior and nothing more. During the Renaissance, it was socially acceptable to marry solely based on wealth. "The institution of marriage in the Renaissance Period was both secular and sacred.

Secularly, it served as a union of two parties interested in acquiring property, money or political alliances" (StudyWorld, par. 1). As Petruchio states, "I come to wive it wealthily in Padua; If wealthily, then happily in Padua" (1. 2. 72-73). He chooses to wed Katherine because she has the largest wealth status of any women in the land. The reason why the wealth went directly to Katherine was because of the common law in the time period which stated that "after the head of the household dies, land descended to the eldest son to the exclusion of his siblings. But if there was no son, land went to the heiresses" (StudyWorld, par.). Land and wealth were indifferent, so, in this

case, Katherine inherited most of the wealth: Petruchio: Then tell me, if I get your daughter's love, What dowry shall I have with her to wife? one half of my lands, Baptista: After my death, the And, in possession, twenty thousand crowns ["\$8, 000] (2. 1. 119-122). Aside from the wealth, the reason why Petruchio desperately wanted to marry Katherine was because of the importance of family. To preserve the power of the family, it was important to have strong family ties for the reasons of security, wealth, ownership, titles and overall, the continuing of the family name. Prescriptive literature emphasized the importance of family and, specifically, children for maintaining the health of the civic body' (Krohn, par. 1). Petruchio's father, Vincentio, who enters further along in the story, is a very wealthy nobleman. The reason also being why Petruchio selects Katherine over any other woman is because it is less likely that Petruchio would obtain such immediate wealth from his father due to them having very loose ties, so, as a nobleman, Petruchio needs to find a wife with much wealth.

Although Katherine did have more riches over Petruchio, it did not disregard the secular right of male dominance over females. " Misogynistic stories abounded in Shakespeare's time, stories of men exercising their " rightful" dominance over women. Shakespeare lived and wrote in a patriarchal world in which the father ruled the family and the husband ruled the wife" so it was not seen as offensive for a man to: command his wife, call her impolite names in public, demand to see her presence at once, or be the sole decision maker of her everyday affairs (Blake, sec. , par. 2). Men were viewed as the dominate sex and were recognized as scholars more over than women. "

Some men were drawn to the seas out of a curiosity to discover more about

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the world. These explorations led to trade for gold and ivory and, soon after, slaves" (Renaissance Exploration and Trade, sec. 1). Although these sights seem like they were sought after and easily discovered, they were actually very dangerous and any perished along the way.

With very little advance in technology, sailors did not know what land lied ahead and by whom it was inhabited. They risked their lives for the sake of curiosity and bringing honor to their family and/or their homeland. After Petruchio and two friends demand to each see their wives at once, it is only Katherine who comes immediately and reestablishes to the rest of the women what she had learned through her experience: Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, Thy head, thy sovereign, one that cares for thee, And for thy maintenance commits his body

To painful labour both by sea and land, To watch the night in storms, the day in cold, Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe, And craves no other tribute at thy hands But love, fair looks, and true obedience, Too little payment for so great a debt. (5. 2. 155-163). Renaissance period, no women cast were allowed in the play. Men were the only actors allowed on stage so, naturally, it was common for homosexual men to play the roles of women. " Shakespeare produced openly homoerotic writings accepted by the lower and upper classes of his period at a time understood to be virulent homophobic.

The question that remains is how could Shakespeare produce homosexual themes and allude to such relationships without fostering animosity among the contemporary viewers of his plays. Further complicating the answer,

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Shakespeare and his contemporaries wrote plays for all male casts where young male actors would cross-dress to play the female characters. These plays had elaborate flirtation, wooing, and romantic involvement between male and female characters regardless of the gender identity of the actors. Audience acceptance of these actions and topics appear to contradict the culture of the Elizabethan eriod" (Sherrin, sec. , par. 1). Shakespeare's play, *The Taming of the Shrew*, accurately presents the social norms of the time period. Though slightly exaggerated for comedic effect, it does display many secular laws and commonplace actions that went on during the Renaissance. It exhibits the law of marriage, land grants, importance of family, male dominancy, female obedience, male careers as well as other standards that seem obscure in todays society. His play fell in perfectly with the common conceptions of the Renaissance and therefore is seen as an accurate piece of historic literature.