

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW



Shakespeare

Born in England in 1564, William Shakespeare was a playwright, poet, and possibly the most famous writer, ever. At least 38 plays, 150 sonnets, and two narrative poems have been attributed to him, and his plays have been translated into more than 50 languages. Today he continues to be celebrated for his psychologically complex characters and timeless insights into the human condition.

Plot Overview

«The Taming of the Shrew» is a Shakespearean play written around 1590-1592 about a woman named Katherine and a wealthy suitor, Petruchio. Despite initial resistance, Katherine eventually falls in love with Petruchio. The play begins with wealthy nobleman Baptista Minola, who rules out Bianca's marriage until Katherine is wed. Petruchio, a wealthy suitor, courts

Katherine through flattery and persistence. After the wedding, he uses tactics to «tame» her, including depriving her of food and sleep. Despite initial resistance, Katherine eventually conforms to Petruchio's will. The play ends with a banquet where the couples reconcile, and Katherine delivers a speech on the duties of wives to their husbands. Despite controversial themes, «The Taming of the Shrew» remains one of Shakespeare's most popular and frequently performed plays.

Character List

Katherine (Kate)

Katherine is the elder daughter of Baptista and is known for her sharp tongue and fiery temperament. She's strong-willed. She is often described as a «shrew,» meaning she is outspoken and difficult to control. Katherine's reputation precedes her, and many men are intimidated by her, making her a challenging prospect for marriage.

Petruchio

Petruchio is a gentleman from Verona. Loud, boisterous, eccentric, quick-witted, and frequently drunk, he has come to Padua “to wive and thrive.” He wishes for nothing more than a woman with an enormous dowry, and he finds Kate to be the perfect fit. Disregarding everyone who warns him of her shrewishness, he eventually succeeds not only in wooing Katherine, but in silencing her tongue and temper with his own.

Bianca

Bianca is the younger daughter of Baptista and is portrayed as sweet-natured and gentle, in stark contrast to her sister Katherine. Bianca is the object of desire for many suitors due to her beauty and amiable personality. However, Baptista's rule that she cannot marry until Katherine does complicates matters and adds tension to the story.

Baptista

Minola Baptista is one of the wealthiest men in Padua, and his daughters become the prey of many suitors due to the substantial dowries he can offer. He is good-natured, if a bit superficial. His absentmindedness increases when Kate shows her obstinate nature. Thus, at the opening of the play, he is already desperate to find her a suitor, having decided that she must marry before Bianca does.

Baptista's decision to marry off Bianca only after Katherine is wed sets the stage for much of the conflict and competition among the suitors.

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Lucentio

A young student from Pisa, the good-natured and intrepid Lucentio comes to Padua to study at the city's renowned university, but he is immediately sidetracked when he falls in love with Bianca at first sight. By disguising himself as a classics instructor named Cambio, he convinces Gremio to offer him to Baptista as a tutor for Bianca. He wins her love, but his impersonation gets him into trouble when his father, Vincentio, visits Padua.

Tranio

He's Lucentio's loyal servant. He helps his master in his plan to win Bianca's heart.

Gremio and Hortensio

They are two gentlemen of Padua. Gremio and Hortensio are Bianca's suitors at the beginning of the play. Though they are rivals, these older men also become friends during their mutual frustration with and rejection of Bianca.

tion by Bianca. Hortensio directs Petruchio to Kate and then dresses up as a music instructor to court Bianca. He and Gremio are both thwarted in their efforts by Lucentio. Hortensio ends up marrying a widow.

Grumio

He is Petruchio's servant and the fool of the play—a source of much comic relief.

Biondello

Lucentio's second servant, who assists his master and Tranio in carrying out their plot,

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Chapter 1

A young man named Lucentio arrives in Padua with his manservant, Tranio. Lucentio was educated in Pisa and Florence and has come to Padua to further his studies at its famous university. As he announces to Tranio, he is young and eager to learn new things. Tranio pleads that they should not forget the pleasures of life in their academic pursuits. The noisy entrance of a crowd interrupts their discussion.

The crowd is composed of Baptista Minola; his daughters, Katherine and Bianca; and Bianca's two suitors, older men named Hortensio and Gremio. Most of the noise comes from Katherine, who seems to be caught up in a rage, screaming and cursing at everyone present. When Baptista informs the suitors that they are free to court Katherine, but that he will not allow Bianca to marry before Katherine does, they respond that no one would ever marry a devil like her. Katherine threatens them with violence in return.

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Amid all the noise, though, Lucentio takes particular notice of Bianca, who behaves much more mildly than her sister. After Baptista leaves with his daughters, Hortensio and Gremio agree that they have but one option: to look for someone to wed Katherine. However, they are not optimistic about their chances of finding a willing man. In the meantime, they say, they will also look for a schoolmaster for Bianca—Baptista had mentioned that he was looking for one, and they hope to earn favor with Bianca’s father by helping him.

The old men walk away, and Lucentio gushes to Tranio that he has fallen in love with Bianca and is determined to court her. Knowing that he cannot do so publicly, given Baptista’s forbiddance, he resolves to woo her in secret. He suddenly recalls that Hortensio and Gremio mentioned procuring a schoolmaster, and he decides to disguise himself as a teacher in the hope that by tutoring Bianca he will be able to declare his love for her and win her heart. Tranio, for his part, will pretend to be Lucentio and study at the university.

At this point, the main story—which is being presented as a play for Christopher Sly—fades for a moment, and Sly reemerges. He declares briefly that he is enjoying this entertainment, but he implies that he would prefer to be left alone with his wife.

A brash young man named Petruchio, newly arrived in Padua, goes with his servant Grumio to see Hortensio, whom he knows from Verona. Grumio and Petruchio become embroiled in a comic misunderstanding at the door, but eventually Hortensio comes down to greet Petruchio and ask why he is in Padua. Petruchio responds that, upon his father's death, he set out to look for a wife, hoping to marry a rich man's daughter and thereby augment his family fortune.

Hortensio, determined to find a potential suitor for Katherine so that he himself may marry Bianca, recognizes his opportunity and decides to convince Petruchio to marry the shrew. Being a friend, he first tries to offer a warning about her, but Petruchio does not care about her behavior.

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Gremio and Lucentio enter on their way to Baptista's house, interrupting Hortensio and Petruchio. Lucentio has already disguised himself as a schoolmaster and has presented himself to Gremio, who gladly agrees to have him tutor Bianca.

Gremio brags to Hortensio that he has found a schoolmaster for Bianca, unaware of the fact that Lucentio will be courting the girl himself. Hortensio then tells Gremio the good news—that Petruchio wishes to woo Katherine. Gremio can hardly believe it, but Petruchio confidently claims that he will be victorious. At this point, Tranio enters, disguised as Lucentio, with Biondello as his servant. He very conspicuously asks the suitors to direct him to the house of Baptista Minola, vaguely implying that he might be interested in one of the women there.

Hortensio and Gremio have a hard time restraining their anger, for now there will be three competing suitors for Bianca.

Lucentio, of course, has arranged for Tranio to make this entrance in order to distract Hortensio and Gremio and give him more time for his own wooing. Tranio persuades the suitors that they can all be friends while they compete for Bianca, and he wins their good graces by offering to buy them a drink. The whole company considers this an excellent suggestion, and they all depart together.

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Petruchio. What's this? mutton?

First Servant. Ay.

Act IV. Scene I.

Open-Ended Questions

1. What motivates Lucentio to disguise himself as a schoolmaster and court Bianca?
2. How does Petruchio respond to Hortensio's warning about Katherine, and what does this reveal about his character?
3. Describe the plan that Lucentio and Tranio hatch to achieve their goals in Padua.
4. What is the significance of Baptista Minola's decision that Katherine must marry before Bianca?
5. Discuss the dynamics between Hortensio, Gremio, and Petruchio. How do their intentions and goals intersect or conflict?

Quotation Questions

1. Petruchio tells Hortensio, «I come to wive it wealthily in Padua; If wealthily, then happily in Padua.» What does this reveal about Petruchio's motives?
2. When Lucentio sees Bianca for the first time, he gushes to Tranio that he has fallen in love with her. How does this influence his actions moving forward?

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3. Baptista Minola tells the suitors that they are free to court Katherine, but that he will not allow Bianca to marry before Katherine does. What impact does this decision have on the characters involved?

Complete the following Sentences:

1. Lucentio's initial focus in Padua is on, but his plans quickly change when he becomes infatuated with
2. Katherine's aggressive behavior causes Baptista's daughters' suitors, and, to view her as an undesirable match.
3. Petruchio, on the other hand, is primarily focused on when considering marrying Katherine, despite her reputation.
4. Tranio's disguise as Lucentio serves as a distraction for other suitors, allowing Lucentio to
5. Hortensio and Gremio's initial anger towards Tranio is assuaged when he offers to

Discuss Questions:

1. Discuss Lucentio's sudden shift from academic pursuits to pursuing Bianca. How does this shift impact the romantic plot of the story?
2. Analyze Petruchio's confidence in handling Katherine's challenging behavior. How does his attitude differ from Hortensio and Gremio's, and what does this say about his character?
3. Explore the motivations behind Hortensio and Gremio's willingness to recruit Petruchio as a suitor for Katherine. What does this reveal about their attitudes toward Katherine and their own ambitions?

Write Short Notes About:

1. Lucentio
2. Petruchio
3. Tranio