

WS: Hello there, I am William Shakespeare, one of the greatest playwrights of all time. (1) At the moment it is the late 1500's, Elizabeth I is the Queen of England and England is prospering. As part of the Renaissance, there has been a renewal of a love for education, and Queen Elizabeth herself is a great lover of the theatre. It is a fantastic time to be a playwright. The theatre is common ground for all social classes so I make sure to include a bit in my plays for every one. There is the bawdy jokes and physical theatre for the peasants, action for the middle classes and some more refined and intellectual language and characters for the upper classes.

Anyway, I would like to introduce you to two of my characters from two of my favourite plays: Bianca from 'The taming of the Shrew' and Hamlet, from 'Hamlet'. These plays both have many things in common despite the fact that 'Hamlet is a tragedy' and 'the taming of the shrew' is a comedy. First of all, here is the intelligent, if troubled, Prince of Denmark.

Hamlet: I am Hamlet, the main character of the play 'Hamlet'. (1) I suppose this play is mainly about me avenging my fathers' death by killing my uncle Claudius, although this is not all that happens of course. A lot of people would think that I took too long to kill Claudius. That I should have been more like Prince Fortinbras, who came in quickly after my death and claimed back Denmark as revenge for his fathers' death. Fortinbras father lost this land to my own father in a bet. But you can see it was more difficult for me, there were many things to consider.

Firstly, although my fathers' ghost had said to me 'against thy mother aught: leave her to heaven' essentially telling me to leave my mother out of it, I couldn't stop thinking about her and hating her for marrying Claudius. What was I to do with her? Then I had to make sure that Claudius was, indeed, guilty of this crime. I did this by commissioning some travelling players to act out the events of a Kings death, in the same way my father died, with his brother pouring poison in his ear. This was a play within a play and one of the main structural techniques that Shakespeare used in writing the play. (2)

Actually, I have read quite a few of Shakespeare's plays and 'Taming of the shrew' has a play within a play too. Only, the purpose of that play within a play was to show how you cannot change your social class, (4) though you may try, by changing your clothes and belongings. But I am getting side tracked.

Once I had seen Claudius' reaction to the play, and therefore seen that Claudius was, indeed, guilty, I had to actually kill him. I had an opportunity once, while he was praying but if I had killed him then, he would have surely gone to heaven, and my purpose was not just to kill him, but to make him go to hell. So he escaped that time.

Anyway – I had to consider the fact that Claudius was a King, and second only to God and the Angels in the Great Chain of Being. If I killed him this would upset this divine chain. (3) Then again, he had killed my father, also a King, and I was avenging him, so maybe it was all right. As I said one time, if I killed him, 'Am I then revenged, to take him in the purging of his soul, when he is fit and seasoned for his passage? No! The great chain of being comes into 'The taming of the Shrew' as well, as Katarina defies the chain by not submitting to her father and the suitors. I spend many hours considering such things, often out loud in soliloquies (3).

One thing I did decide to do was to feign madness in order to cover up the planning of my revenge and my information seeking about my fathers' death. This is one of the main themes in this play: deceit. It is also a main theme in the play 'The taming of the Shrew'. In that play, many characters pretend to be like other people. For example: a drunkard, named Christopher Sly, is dressed up like a Lord, Tranio, who is Lucentio's servant, dresses as Luciento and Luciento dresses as a tutor in order to woo Bianca. However, at the end, they are all revealed for who they are. . Shakespeare seems to be saying that you cannot change your social class, and who you are, no matter how you try to disguise it or how you deceive people. (4)

But back to deceit in my own play. While I was faking madness I spoke in prose, that's every day speak. An example of this is my line 'Nothing but to show you how a King may go a progress through the guts of a beggar'. I do this to show Claudius that I am mad and so not only is this a strange thing to say, but it is spoken in prose. Usually only lower class or common characters spoke in prose and the upper classes, such as me, spoke in blank verse and iambic pentameter. (2)

WS: Yes, so that is Hamlet for you. Quite condescending to women he was. Some people think that I am like that too. For they say I portray the role of women so terribly in my play 'the taming of the Shrew'. But I'll let you decide for your self. Here is the lovely and obedient Bianca.

Bianca: Savle, my name is Bianca. (1) I was so interested to hear what Hamlet had to say because I went to see the play not two days ago. But, I am from my subject. I am sister to Katarina. The main character of our play. During the play I am in love with a man named Lucentio but I cannot marry him until my older sister, Katarina, is married. **And of course, no one wanted to marry here since she was so headstrong and disobedient. Why could she not just accept her place in the great chain of being? This chain of being is rather difficult. It interfered with Hamlets revenge plan as well. The chain dictates that men are to dominate over women and so we women must submit to our fathers, to our suitors and later to our husbands. Oh, but once she married Petruchio, Katarina seemed to quieten down. (4)**

And then, of course, once she married, so could I. I had many suitors and my father decided who I married based on the man who offered the most money. Oh, I was glad Lucentio offered the largest dowry and so we were married. Although, at the end of the play, Lucentio was quite angry with me since I made him lose a bet by not coming when he called. **It seemed that though we fell in love very romantically, this was not great for our long term marriage. (5)** Katarina started out hating Petruchio, but gradually began to respect him and they now have what seems a much better marriage than us. It was such a relief when those two married though, my father was getting worried that Katarina would never be married. Oh it would've been such an embarrassment to him. And to her of course, for she would be an old spinster, or have to become a nun. For being a nun is what many respectable women become if they are not to be married. Actually, this comes up in Hamlet too. Hamlet tells his lover, Ophelia, 'Get thee to a nunn'ry', when telling her not to marry or have kids, since they will only be sinners like him.

But anyway, it was important for my father to find Katarina a good husband as it is her husband who will inherit fathers belongings, money and land when he dies. It would usually go to the eldest son, but we have no brothers, and Katarina is the oldest of us, so it is her husband who will inherit.

Of course, father also wants us to both marry since marriage means our economic futures will be assured and he can be sure we will be well cared for when he dies. (5) So you can see why it is good to be married. In fact, Katarina was not opposed to being married herself; she was simply annoyed that her opinion wasn't asked for before Baptista and Petruchio decided on the marriage. And so of course, she abused my dear father. Its funny since Hamlet also abused his mother a lot in his play. Poor Baptista,

You know, many of Shakespeare's characters are well educated; it is quite the fashion as education is very highly valued. Hamlet, for example, is a very well educated young man.

You know, marriage has been very good to my sister and has changed her. It seems that Petruchio did, indeed, 'tame' her. His plan was to, and I quote, 'kill a wife with kindnesses.

WS: Thank you Bianca and Hamlet for both for coming in today, since I know you both have very busy lives. So there you have it, my two most favourite characters from my two favourite plays. Farewell.