

Themes in The Taming of the Shrew

This resource is designed as a reference guide for teachers. We have listed the major themes and motifs within *The Taming of the Shrew* and provided examples of scenes where you can study them.

Themes

- Marriage
- Love and money
- Class, role and social status

Motifs

(Recurring elements and patterns of imagery in *The Taming of the Shrew* which support the play's themes)

- Clothes and disguise
- Animals

Themes

Marriage and the relative positions of men and women in this relationship.
Some related scenes:

- Act 2 Scene 1: Petruchio arranges with Baptista to marry Kate, pretending that "Tis bargain'd 'twixt us twain' when in fact Kate has protested the marriage and the arrangement has been made between the two men.
- Act 3 Scene 1: Lucentio courts Bianca much more easily and quickly than Petruchio has courted Kate.
- Act 3 Scene 2: Petruchio humiliates Kate at their wedding, being late, bizarrely dressed and calling her 'my goods, my chattels ...'.
- Act 4 Scene 1: At Petruchio's country house, he 'tames' Kate through deprivation and irrational behaviour, comparing her to a wild falcon he must train to obey.
- Act 4 Scene 2: Hortensio decides to marry a wealthy widow and wishes to learn from Petruchio how to tame his new bride.
- Act 4 Scene 3: Kate is further frustrated when Petruchio finds fault with the new clothes designed for their arrival back in Padua.
- Act 4 Scene 6: The newlyweds return to Padua, Kate finally agreeing that the sun is the moon if her husband says it is and an old man is a young woman for the same reason.
- Act 5 Scene 1: Petruchio insists that Kate kiss him in public. Refusing at first, at last she does and afterwards calls him 'love'. Petruchio calls her 'my sweet Kate.'
- Act 5 Scene 2: At Lucentio's banquet Petruchio strikes a bet with the other new husbands to see which wife is the most obedient: after the other two women ignore their husbands' instructions, Kate delivers her famous speech.

Love and money and the nature of love and whether it is always for sale.
Some related scenes:

- Act 1 Scene 1: When Baptista informs Bianca's suitors that they will have to wait until his elder daughter is married, Kate asks her father, 'Is it your will/To make a stale of me amongst these mates?'
- Act 1 Scene 2: Petruchio determines to marry Katherine because she has a rich father.
- Act 2 Scene 1: Petruchio arranges with Baptista to marry Kate, pretending that "Tis bargain'd 'twixt us twain' when in fact Kate has protested the marriage.
- Act 3 Scene 2: Petruchio calls Kate 'my goods, my chattels; she is my house/My household stuff, my field, my barn...'

Class, role and social status and the extent to which we can successfully escape predetermined roles and expectations, including gender roles.

Some related scenes:

- The Induction: A lord plays a practical joke on the drunken beggar, Christopher Sly, who is induced to think he is also a lord.
- Act 1 Scene 1: Katherine rages at Bianca's would-be suitors as her father defines the marriage conditions.
- Act 2 Scene 1: Tranio is disguised now as Lucentio while Lucentio pretends to be Cambio, the schoolmaster. Hortensio is also disguised as a schoolmaster.
- Act 4 Scene 2: Lucentio and Tranio plot to find a successful conclusion to their deception.
- Act 5 Scene 1: The deceptions of the sub-plot are revealed and with some recrimination all the deceivers revert to their original roles.
- Act 5 Scene 2: At Lucentio's banquet Petruchio strikes a bet with the other new husbands to see which wife is the most obedient: after the other two women ignore their husbands' instructions, Kate delivers her famous speech.

Motifs

Clothes and disguise as a means of temporarily changing social role; as ineffectual ultimately in changing the person within.

For example:

- 'What think you, if he were convey'd to bed, / Wrapp'd in sweet clothes, rings put upon his fingers, / A most delicious banquet by his bed, / ...Would not the beggar then forget himself?'
Induction
- 'Sirrah, go you to Bartholomew my page, / And see him dress'd in all suits like a lady'
Induction
- 'Master, has my fellow Tranio stol'n your clothese? / Or you stol'n his?'
Act 1 Scene 1
- 'Now shall my friend Petruchio do me grace, / And offer me disguis'd in sober robes / To old Baptista as a schoolmaster'
Act 1 Scene 2
- 'See not your bride in these unreverent robes; / Go to my chamber, put on clothes of mine'
Act 3 Scene 2
- 'To me she's married, not unto my clothes'
Act 3 Scene 2
- 'And now, my honey love, / Will we return unto thy father's house / And revel it as bravely as the best, / With silken coats and caps, and golden rings...with amber bracelets, beads, and all this knav'ry'
Act 4 Scene 3
- 'Enter Tranio as Lucentio, and the Pedant dressed like Vincentio'
Act 4 Scene 4

Animals as representing human qualities, especially of the two main characters; hunting imagery as symbolic of power and control

For example:

- 'Dost thou love hawking? Thou hast hawks will soar / Above the morning lark. Or wilt thou hunt?'
Induction
- 'Come, come, you wasp; i'faith, you are too angry'
Act 2 Scene 1
- 'Well ta'en, and like a buzzard'
Act 2 Scene 1
- 'she is my goods, my chattels, she is my house, / My household stuff, my field, my barn, / My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything'
Act 3 Scene 2
- 'He that knows better how to tame a shrew, / Now let him speak'
Act 4 Scene 1
- 'My falcon now is sharp and passing empty. / and till she stoop she must not be full-gorg'd'
Act 4 Scene 1
- 'Am I your bird? I mean to shift my bush, / And then pursue me as you draw your bow'
Act 5 Scene 2

- 'Tis well, sir, that you hunted for ourself. / 'Tis thought your deer does hold you at a bay'
Act 5 Scene 2
- 'Twenty crowns? / I'll venture so much of my hawk or hound, / But twenty times so much upon my wife'
Act 5 Scene 2