Social Status Of Women In Taming Of The Shrew

Taming of the Shrew, by William Shakespeare, is a dramatic play that takes place in a time where woman's rights weren't considered. The role of a woman during the Elizabethan era was to be quiet, subservient and dependent on men. The original version of the play, by Shakespeare, tends to focus on social status, resulting in the audience to view the play as compassionate and complex. However, Mary Pickford's 1929 version of the play, tends to focus on a battle between equals where neither gender triumphs.

Petruchio's soliloquy, in Act 4 scene 1, explains to the audience how he will tame Kate. In this scene we can view Petruchio as a man capable of love or a violent misogynist. Shakespeare constructs Petruchio as an observant man who is able to see Katherine as more than just a shrew. He puts her through starvation and depravation in order to get her to see her true self. Even though his methods may seem harsh his main intention behind his treatment towards her is to get Katherine to abandon her tough exterior and in order to bring out the true Kate. Even though Katherine becomes submissive to Petruchio she doesn't lose her voice in the end.// Petruchio doesn't follow the notion of 'birthright' in the play from his refusal to treat Katherina as a woman of her social status traditionally expects to be treated. The way he treats Katherina is determined on how she acts. From this we are able to see Petruchio as a man capable of loving Katherina and tames her in order to create a happy marriage. The production becomes viewed as a compassionate and compelling romance between both genders' social status. Where we are able to see two people that still end up living in the social order that neither of them can escape but within that they find a way to be equal.

However, in the 1929 production by Sam Taylor, she has produced the play in a way to make this scene seem as if Petruchio will make it his mission to change Katherine no matter how cruel his methods are and has constructed him as cruel and heartless where audiences would view this as emotional abuse. Petruchio uses animal imagery to suggest is complete power over Katherina's desires in marriage. He compares Katherina to a bird, falcon and a hawk that he must deprive of sleep and starve in order to tame her. Katherina is described as a hawk which needs to be tamed, presenting us with a woman subjected to the same taming process as a wild bird. Petruchio's soliloquy, directed towards Katherina, mirrors similar practices of falconry. This sport involved training falcons and other birds of prey, during the Renaissance and Medieval times, where the owner performed methods of deprivation on the animals. Petruchio sees Katherine as a challenge and as a wild animal that needs to be tamed. We don't see emotions of love, instead we see Petruchio constantly forcing his will in his attempt to make Katherina act like a wife that was expected during Elizabethan society. We essentially get a picture of a society which is cruel and dominated by men who care very little for their wife and treat them as an object. This view is heightened by Taylor's production choices and how she has presented Petruchio is in this scene. This speech amplifies Petruchio's cruel manner of speaking. He is bluntly honest on his selfishness and materialism, where he only seems to be acknowledging the economic benefit of marriage. This scene presents his violent, domineering and unreasonable behavior is an essential part of his character rather than as affection for Katherine. Act 4 continues to provide key moments of Petruchio's abusive behavior. Besides keeping Katherine sleep deprived he also emotionally manipulates her in controlling her appearance. In this scene, Petruchio is presented as an uncaring, greedy and vain man who

treats marriage as an act of domination. This affects the view an audience would have on the play, where it becomes a dark comedy on the materialism and hunger for power.

In both productions there is a presence of social expectation that affects the will of Katherina. Her will is compromised either way, however a difference is found in the severity and process of change between Katherina at the start and end of the play. Kate's monologue, in Act five scene II, draws out different conclusions and can be interpreted in many ways. This moment within the play can lead us into viewing her speech as disingenuous and ironic or sincere. In Shakespeare's version, Katherina seems to be confirming the rights of patriarchal hierarchy. Shakespearean time was a period in history that was very unwelcoming for women. A heavily misogynistic culture was presented where the role of a woman was to be subservient to their husbands. Throughout the play, Shakespeare builds up the dramatic tension of the characters, leading to the climax of Kate's speech of submission. "Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, thy head, thy sovereign." The repetition used underlines the conformity that Kate has succumbed after her wedding. This is amplified by the use of alliteration with the word thy and the word lord and life. Shakespeare has used this technique to demonstrate how Katherina has been changed by Petruchio and adopted the persona of, 'Kate,' a tamed woman. Her transformation into an obedient and tamed woman is taken literally as in Act 2 Scene I, Kate questions all of Bianca's suitors with her response "is it for Gremio you do envy me so?" We can't help but get the sense that Kate isn't jealous towards Gremio but towards Bianca, in the fact that everyone sees her as the favoured sister. This reflects Kate's small desire for love, regardless of how unloving she is portrayed as. Then, when Petruchio asks to marry her even though she states she'd, "rather see thee hanged" she shows up to the wedding but feels hurt and embarrassed when he does not arrive on time. This reinforces the idea that she had hope in Petruchio and showing that he had an effect on her. Even though Kate struggled and resisted submitting to Petruchio's authority the ultimate meaning gained in this production was that in the end she was willingly ready to sacrifice herself to Petruchio in front of the other men. Kate's monologue is a crucial moment where the play comes to a leveling between both gender roles. Shakespeare understood the culture he lived in and wrote a play that would conform to the values it held. It was intended to be literal due to the misogynistic audience he wrote the play for.

On the other hand, we are also able to view this scene as cruel and misogynistic. The 1929 version of Taming of The Shrew, tends to focus on a battle between equals. Pickford undermines Kate's final speech by winking at Bianca, showing us how the power dynamic between Katherina and Petruchio hasn't changed. Kate hasn't necessarily been tamed by Petruchio, she has just learned to play the 'obedience game' in order to make her life easier. This is evident in Act 4 Scene V when Petruchio states that moon shines bright, but Kate challenges his statement in saying it is the sun that shines. Petruchio then threatens for him and his servants to return to his home. This is the point in the play where Katherina begins to understand the game Petruchio is playing. She learns that if she listens to him she can get what she wants. This doesn't show that Kate has learned to obey and submit to Petruchio, instead she submits to Petruchio knowing it's all just a game. The sarcastic tone of Kate alters the entire meaning of the play where we essentially see a woman corrupted by the system who has become meek and submissive. In the end the film presents a battle of the sexes in which neither gender clearly triumphs.

The play as a whole changes dramatically depending on how we interpret specific moments and character's actions. The play can either be seen as a crushing destruction towards woman or

as an acknowledge to them. Taming of the Shrew was one of Shakespeare’s most compelling comedy’s that sparked controversy among a variety of audiences.