

**The Deception and Wisdom of  
Petruccio in *The Taming of The Shrew* and  
Leontes in *The Winter's Tale***

**Name:** Yashika Vahi  
**Student no.:** 21039024  
**Course no.:** ARTS 190  
**Assignment:** 3  
**Date:** April 6, 2024

## Outline

### 1. Introduction

- Brief introduction to the characters and the symbolism of their roles
- Thesis statement exploring the motives and results of the characters

### 2. Petruchio's Nature in *The Taming of the Shrew*

- Evaluating his motives through analysing dialogues
- Summing up his role in the play and contribution to the story's progress
- The eventual consequences for his actions
- Summing up the unique ways in which he secures his win and overcomes the challenge of taming his supposed animal-like wife.

### 3. Leontes' Nature in *The Winter's Tale*

- The reason behind Leontes' madness when concerning the subject of her wife
- His destructive spiral into overthinking that brings out tragic consequences for him and his family
- His eventual redemption through acceptance of the moral burden he has to carry because of the commitment of his sins

### 4. Conclusion

- Lastly summing up both the character's roles in the story, their unique approaches as self-reliant and individualistic spirits and stating the author's possible intention

Petruchio from *The Taming of the Shrew* and Leontes from *The Winter's Tale* stand out as metaphorical pillars of patriarchal dominance and possessiveness. Both characters exhibit a hungry pursuit of control over their wives, driven by their individual desires and fears. Petruchio uses cunning strategies and manipulation to shape his wife, Katherine, into a compliant woman, while Leontes stoops to irrational jealousy and madness, falsely accusing his wife, Hermione, of infidelity. Despite their different approaches, both Petruchio and Leontes show stubbornness and a firm adherence to their individuality. This essay aims to explore the motives and consequences of their actions, revealing the eventual impact of their cruel behavior on their respective relationships and families.

In *The Taming of The Shrew*, the character of Petruchio is written to be presented as an independent and possessive man whose life's main priority is fulfilling his personal desires. Whether it's his obsession with money or with his twisted efforts to tame Katherine simply to prove his influence, he is shown to be a man who cares about no external conflicts or desires other than those which concern his own soul. His conversation with Hortensio in which he mentions, "Antonio, my father, is deceased, And I have thrust myself into this maze, Happily to wive and thrive as best I may. Crowns in my purse I have and goods at home, And so am come abroad to see the world," (1.2.50-55) gives the implication that he seeks to experience new adventures in his life and perhaps his firm decision to marry Kate even when everyone warns him against it is precisely what makes it so thrilling for him to pursue, like a challenge to win.

In face of the questions of uncertainty and jokes regarding his decision of marriage, Petruchio's declaration, "Why came I hither but to that intent? Think you a little din can daunt mine ears? Have I not in my time heard lions roar? Have I not heard the sea, puffed up with winds, Rage like an angry boar chafèd with sweat? Have I not heard great ordnance in the field, And heaven's artillery thunder in the skies?... Tush, tush! Fear boys with bugs," (1.2.200-210) demonstrate his extremely confident and resilient nature when considering relationships with other people. He has been through battles, encounters with wild animals and has been trapped at the sea during bad weather and since he has needed to be mentally prepared for such grave events throughout the story of his life, he believes he is equipped enough to take on this impossible responsibility, as everyone in the play perceives it, to tame a wildcat like Kate and at the same time, remain mentally unaffected by her rudeness and unwillingness to give in. He belittles Katharine's verbal outbursts, conveying that they are insignificant compared to the dangers he has faced. This fortifies Petruchio's patriarchal mindset and his belief in the inferiority of women.

However, although some of his dialogues and the theme of the play in general criticize the concept of feminism and equality in gender roles through their portrayal of women, Petruchio's character is a solid addition to the plot and progress of the story. He is presented as a stoic and self-reliant man, who takes up the challenge to conquer a woman, who everyone believes is like an uncontrollable and disobedient creature and who no one is brave enough to pursue and contradict.

“Why, that is nothing. For I tell you, father, I am as peremptory as she proud-minded; And where two raging fires meet together, They do consume the thing that feeds their fury...So I to her and so she yields to me, For I am rough and woo not like a babe,” (2.1.135-140)

This admission, however twisted it may be, comes off portraying Petruchio as a sort of fatherly figure, who is wise beyond his age because of the experiences he has gone through in his life and his control over Katherine is gained by his will to dominate and be even more stubborn than her in order to overpower her into submission. This ability to handle each person by mirroring their own personality grants him a position of respect in front of everyone he meets. He uniquely crafts a different illusion of himself in front of each person in the play and his ability to be mentally unaffected by others' views make him appear as a very distant and powerful person, who needs no one's help and is embracing his individuality by pursuing his personal interests in life.

Although his actions like treating servants rudely and never listening to what Kate has to say do portray him as a bully, his wisdom is evident through the lines like “To me she's married, not unto my clothes. Could I repair what she will wear in me, As I can change these poor accoutrements, 'Twere well for Kate and better for myself,” (3.2.115-120) and “Our purses shall be proud, our garments poor, For 'tis the mind that makes the body rich, And as the sun breaks through the darkest clouds, So honor peereth in the meanest habit.” (4.3.175) These confirm that Petruchio values honor, integrity, and mental strength above money or fame. By using the example of the sun breaking through clouds, he suggests that true honor and virtue can shine through even the darkest circumstances and the most humble appearances. This reflects his optimistic and idealistic outlook on life.

Moreover, Petruchio's admission, "My falcon now is sharp and passing empty, And, till she stoop, she must not be full-gorged, For then she never looks upon her lure. Another way I have to man my haggard, To make her come and know her keeper's call. That is, to watch her, as we watch these kites, That bate and beat and will not be obedient," (4.1.185-200) proves that all his actions are only a cover of deception that he puts up for the world around him for a greater purpose. His bullying is all a part of his greater wisdom that leads him to take certain steps and act a certain way to solve specific dilemmas. A true sense of originality is maintained in his character this way by him constantly surprising people around him with his words or deeds, and by his mysterious and spontaneous nature.

Lastly, in the end, we see Katherine's complete transformation, as evident in her confession, "My mind hath been as big as one of yours...vail your stomachs, for it is no boot, And place your hands below your husband's foot; In token of which duty, if he please, My hand is ready, may it do him ease." (5.2.180-190) This submission is shocking not just for the characters within the play who have seen Katherine's untamed nature but also for the readers as it creates an aura of power and influence by the deceitful yet wise Petruchio and confirms his success in implementation of manipulative and gaslighting tactics to gain dominance over a wild and proud woman like Katherine.

His determination and constant efforts to tame Katharine reflect his commitment to shaping her behaviour according to his own expectations. Through manipulation tactics, mirroring her personality, using the concept of rewards and punishments, and building mutual respect, Petruchio is able to transform Katherine's nature from a wild shrew into a submissive and obedient wife, eventually establishing a peaceful and fulfilling relationship between them.

Comparatively, in *The Winter's Tale*, we see the obsessive and stubborn character of Leontes, whose manic side comes into play when considering the possession of her wife, which he feels threatened of because of his old friend Polixenes. As Leonte declares to himself when he sees his wife and Polixenes sharing a harmless touch of hands, "Too hot, too hot! To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods. I have *tremor cordis* on me. My heart dances, But not for joy, not joy. This entertainment May a free face put on; derive a liberty From heartiness, from bounty, fertile bosom, And well become the agent. It may, I grant. But to be paddling palms and pinching fingers..." (1.2.185) His mind is driven by jealousy and rage towards anyone who tries to come close to her wife which in the play is Polixenes, or so Leontes perceives relentlessly, without listening to any rational explanations.

This might be related to a symbolic urge incorporated into his character's personality to have complete control over his wife. He is shown to insanely lash out and blab illogically when he feels that the control is slipping away. He even involves the public and holds a whole trial throwing accusations around about Camillo, Polixenes and his wife, dismissing everyone's opinions in his endless chase to prove that his excessive fears are true. This might be an emotional sickness that the character suffers, feeling the need to go to such extreme extents to prove he is not losing his mind, desperately trying to gain people's favour and their sympathy to justify his madness to himself.

"Affection! thy intention stabs the centre: Thou dost make possible things not so held, Communicatest with dreams;—how can this be?—" (1.2.175) This line by Leontes shows that he is self aware about a sort of madness taking over his brain but at the same time, his emotions are so strong that they are completely consuming his mind and letting them influence his character.

He is constantly shown to be disrespecting everyone who tries to defend those he is accusing and more so, degrading all those he is accusing themselves.

As we get towards the end of the play, only with the death of both his sons and his wife does Leontes come to realise the pure absurdity of his actions, and what consequences his misunderstandings, and reluctance to listen to reason have brought. He acts like a tyrant based on nothing but his unsupported fantasies regarding the people surrounding him and it is like a sickness that consumes him, constantly taking away his ability to be calm and listen to rational viewpoints. He is bickering nonsense and silly theories throughout the play and unwilling to listen to anyone's defence or evidence and in the end, the cost of his stubbornness leads to death of everyone in his family and a divide in his old friendship with Polixenes.

However, in any sense, he is able to redeem and restore himself by admitting that their deaths are on his head and he has to take responsibility for his sins which is clearly evident in his claim, "I'll visit the chapel where they're buried every day and will spend all my time crying over them. I'll do this for as long as I live. Lead me to my heartbreak." (3.2.275) He heavy-heartedly accepts his fate of the guilt that will hover over him as a mental, moral punishment for the recklessness of his words and behaviour.

A similarity between Petruchio and Leontes in their respected plays is their sense of domination and possession over their wives, which leads them to go to mad lengths to pursue their personal desires or fears. Where Petruchio uses his wisdom and experience to mirror his wife's personality, using manipulative strategies to fix her and make her conform to society's required standards of an obedient woman, Leontes suffers from a mental sickness which makes him go manic when it comes to his possessions, namely his wife and he also uses manipulative

tactics, completely unsupported in his claims, to spread rumours about his wife because of her supposed affair with the king's old friend, Polixenes.

Both the characters are stubborn and firm on their decisions and do not let anyone's opinions or jokes or jibes affect their own perceptions. They can both also be considered as symbols of individual fighting spirits who are not bound by any external influence and are too consumed within the workings of their own inner souls rather than of other people or things. They are consumed by thoughts and emotions of their own and function by their own personal moral code rather than conforming to the standards of the world. For example, Petruchio's received many criticisms regarding his wife but was mentally tough through those times and patient as he worked towards his goal of transforming her nature. Further, in a contrasting manner, we see the character of Leontes going through a destructive cycle of madness which makes him irrational in his speech and in his mind, making him embrace the darkest parts of his psyche and not listen to anyone's pleading which eventually ends up resulting in his family's death and great misery for himself.

In conclusion, the characters of Petruchio and Leontes provide different yet interconnected representations of male dominance and possessiveness. While Petruchio relies on manipulation and cleverness to assert control over his wife, Leontes's downfall into madness leads to tragic consequences for himself and his family. Both characters demonstrate a stubborn loyalty to their own perceptions and moral codes, regardless of the opinions or pleas of others. In the end, their actions highlight the chaotic nature of patriarchal dominance and the grave impact it can have on personal relationships and social harmony. Through the characters of Petruchio

and Leontes, Shakespeare encourages audiences to reflect on the complexities of human nature and the consequences of unchecked power and selfishness.

## **Bibliography**

1. Shakespeare, William and F. E. 1878-1935 Pierce. *The Winter's Tale*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1918.
2. Shakespeare, William. *The Taming of the Shrew*. Edited by Prof Cedric Watts, Wordsworth Editions, 1993.