



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 7. Issue.3. 2020 (July-Sept)

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

DAUGHTERS OF SHAKESPEARE- A STRONG WILL TO PLEASE AND PROVIDE
CONTENTMENT TO FATHERS

DARSHANA CHAKRABARTY

Graduate Student, Department of English, Arizona State University, USA
Email: dchakr18@asu.edu



Article information
Received:14/06/2020
Accepted: 30/06/2020
Published online: 17/07/2020
doi: [10.33329/ijelr.7.3.1](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.7.3.1)

ABSTRACT

The society that Shakespeare painted in his plays portrays a very intricate and complex relationship between men and women. This source of a master and slave, or owner and owned bond starts from home for most women. Fathers are the first masters that daughters are taught to serve and be loyal to, so much so, that they make it their one and only purpose in life to please and satisfy their fathers through complete submission of self and indissoluble obedience. Fathers are the first men in their life whom they put on a pedestal and worship blindly. A careful reading of some of the bard's plays will reveal this relationship which is very common in a patriarchal society. This short article deals with daughter/father bond of Katherine of *The Taming of the Shrew* and Ophelia of *Hamlet* and their painful struggle to achieve their only end of life, father's acceptance and affection.

Keywords: Shakespeare, daughter, father, slave, master, please, content, patriarchal

Fathers and daughters of Shakespeare's plays hold up a relationship which is analogous to a relationship shared between a master and the unconditional slavery and obedience of a slave. Early England of the Shakespearean times was a highly patriarchal society where women were constantly suppressed and expected to be obedient in every sphere of their lives, whether a daughter, a wife or a mother or sister. As Barbara Lewalski explains: "a women's subjections, first to her father and then to her husband, supposedly imaged the subjection of all English people to their monarch, and of all Christians of God" (Lewalski 2). Female obedience was not just desirable but also essential for the proper functioning of the society as both male and female had separate defined and strict rules of conduct. Women had to submit themselves to the wishes and desires of men in a male dominated community. They were not expected to be heard but only seen. Silence, obedience and chastity were most desired and expected of women. Female silence was insisted upon by the conduct books of the time which stated the codes of conduct for the proper behavior in women. Juan Luis Vives's *The Education of a Christian Woman* argues that "modest and restrained speech will become her, not loud or arrogant or typical of a man's spirit" (134), and even states, "I do not wish that a young woman be talkative, not even among her girl companions" (130). Although the codes were generally followed by upper class women, even the lower-class women saw it as ideal behavior and submitted themselves to the will of men when they made presence at work in public sphere. This submission to a male is first experienced at home for most women, submission to their fathers and to their unquestionable will. This need for

surrendering themselves to their fathers is so embedded in their nature from their infancy that they consider it to be their only purpose and aim of their lives. Shakespeare's heroines, Katherine and Ophelia from *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Hamlet*, respectively, portray this inferior and acquiescent position of daughters to their father figures who are made to believe that their greatest and fundamental object in life is surrender and absolute and eternal devotion and obedience to their fathers, their happiness lies in the happiness of their fathers. Ranging from headstrong to innocent and fragile heroines, they are seen to place their fathers on a pedestal and worship them like loyal devotees, like a domestic pet dog who deems his only objective is to faithfully follow his master.

Shakespeare's one of the earliest comedies, *The Taming of the Shrew*, is quite a controversial play "focusing as it does on the battle between the sexes and on the process by which a strong-willed woman is made to submit to the control of her husband. When the play is read, and especially when it is experienced in performance, it is, however, much more interesting and complex than its title might suggest." (Howard, Introduction)

"What, will you not suffer me? Nay, now I see
She is your treasure, she must have a husband,
I must dance barefoot on her wedding day
And, for your love to her, lead apes in hell.
Talk not to me. I will go sit and weep
Till I can find occasion of revenge."

-Katherine (2. 1. 31-36), (Shakespeare, *The Taming of The Shrew*)

In the exposition of the comedy, *The Taming of the Shrew*, Katherine has been shown to be "strong willed" and having a "sharp tongue and independent spirit" (Howard 417). The above quoted lines of the play are delivered in Act 2 scene 1 when Katherine binds Bianca, thrashes her and their father, Baptista, comes to Bianca's rescue. The lines reflect how Katherine envies Bianca for being her father's "treasure", while she is despised upon every time by Baptista. She can understand how her free spirit will not only be unaccepted by her father but also become a burden on him. She envies the love and the special bond that her younger sister and her father share between them. Choosing to gain her father's affection over her own happiness, she resolves to marry Petruccio, the one she utterly despises, and uphold an image of an ideal wife. We witness a strong, powerful woman surrender to the demands of her father and later her husband only to establish her position as the ideal daughter in her father's eyes, to please her father, struggling to accomplish daughters' primary and fundamental duty to abide by fathers' wishes.

"No shame but mine. I must, forsooth, be forced
To give my hand, opposed against my heart,
Unto a mad-brain rudesby, full of spleen,
Who wooed in haste and means to wed at leisure."

-Katherine (3.2. 8-11) (Shakespeare, *The Taming of The Shrew*)

She is received with much more humiliation in Petruccio's house. Not being given the respect of the mistress of the house, Katherine is treated as a slave. She is deprived of food and sleep, but she still resists herself from lashing out on Petruccio. In Act 4 Scene 3 we see her beating Grumio for not giving her any meal, but no sooner does Petruccio appear, she recollects herself and just says- "Faith, as cold as can be" (4. 3. 37). She is so desperate to visit her father, to show him her changed nature and win back his love that she agrees to anything and everything Petruccio asks her to do. The play has always instigated feminists to question and criticize the horrifying ways husbands had ultimate control over their wives, establishing the superiority of the male over the other inferior weak sex- "Almost uniformly, feminists have wanted to query the play's central premiss: namely, that a headstrong woman should be forced by whatever means to transform herself, at least outwardly, into a compliant wife." (Howard 418). Katherine is unfed, dressed in the most bizarre fashion and she resists from flying into a rage. Katherine's pretentiousness of becoming an obedient wife, her "outwardly" action of taming her wild spirit inside is her way of showing her affections towards her father. There is a

difference between her appearance and reality as she still retains her free spirit within and shows a tamed nature without.

Katherine's last speech exposes her sarcasm and pretentiousness of being a submissive wife. Act 5 scene 2 she pretends to be tamed and let her "Lord" win the bet. For her the win is when Baptista exclaims how very "changed" she seems, and she shows to be a better obedient wife than Bianca. She may not have been a good daughter but showing her father her better self as a better wife than Bianca is her "revenge". May be Shakespeare gives us a hint of Katherine's pretentiousness when Lucentio expresses a doubt at the end of the play- "'Tis a wonder, by your leave, she will be tamed so." She is thus successful in taking her revenge on Bianca, when she outsmarts her in being a more obedient, tamed and ideal wife to a man and winning her father's fondness for her. She is successful in fulfilling her life's purpose of gaining appreciation from Baptista and still manages to hide successfully from her husband her free spirit which she still retains- "her incongruous behavior in the finale is a deliberate ploy to win Petruccio's bet, suggestive even of the power she holds in their present and future relationship." (Werener)

"Who's there?" Shakespeare's one of the most famous plays Hamlet begins with the question which later turns to be a tragedy, leading to more questions about the truth, Hamlet's actions and revenge, Claudius' crime, Gertrude's guilt, trustworthiness of the Ghost and Ophelia's "innocence" and "immaturity" (Jameson 17)

"Polonius: I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth

Have you so slander any moment leisure

As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet."

Ophelia: I shall obey, my lord."

-Polonius to Ophelia (1. 3. 619-622), (Shakespeare, Hamlet)

Ophelia has always been seen as "too soft, too good, too fair" (Jameson 170), like most women of the Shakespearean times she has been always seen as "a puppet in her father's hands" and "a doll without intellect". Although Ophelia appears to be naïve and innocent, "there is pain and struggle beneath that sweet surface." (Dreher 77) Hamlet's declaration of his love for Ophelia is opposed by both her brother, Laertes, and her father Polonius, calling it "not permanent- sweet, not lasting/ The perfume and suppliance of a minute;/ No more." Ophelia's hesitation and doubt in obeying her brother and Polonius shows that she is aware of the importance and respect she can gain by accepting and reciprocating Hamlet's, the future king's proposal of love and affection. But her love and obedience for her father wins over her possible infatuation for Hamlet and the possibility of becoming the Queen one day. More often it is interpreted that "The patriarchy upholds the traditional ideal of sweet, innocent and fundamentally passive young woman who obeys her father and elder brother." (Dreher). But a close reading of the play perhaps reveals Ophelia's love and worship for her father far more than she ever had of Hamlet. Of Hamlet's proposal she exclaims "I do not know, my Lord, what I should think" but to Polonius' advice she agrees immediately.

Ophelia's love for her father and her strong desire to please her father is noticeable. Later in the play when Hamlet expresses strange behavior before Ophelia, perhaps due to her rejection, which Ophelia could have kept a secret to herself and not reveal to anyone if she truly wanted to be with Hamlet. Instead, she almost immediately conveys the strange incident to Polonius by herself, without any exterior influence or compel. The act shows her determination to satisfy and make her father prouder and more affectionate towards her, the only thing that she is taught to care about. She even agrees with Polonius to spy on her while she feigns her love for Hamlet. Her continuous pretentiousness and infiltration help her father and King Claudius conspire against Hamlet.

Hamlet's ruthless and humiliating behavior is not as successful in bringing sorrow in Ophelia's life as much as her father's murder brings. She is completely devastated, helpless and alone- "I can not/ Choose but weep to think they would lay him i' th' cold ground." Having lost the purpose of her life, loving and conforming to her father, she finds no significance or sense in living anymore. Her empty meaningless life haunts her, turns her insane with grief, thus pushing her towards death.

Much like Katherine, Portia from *The Merchant of Venice* (Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*) regrets for not having any power in choosing her husband but conforms to her dead father's desires even if she has the option of not following it. Portia exudes a strong masculinity throughout the play, when she is seen ordering her servants, managing her state of affairs and controls her timid husband, Bassanio. Her liking for Bassanio causes her to wittily reveal the right casket through music, thus securing him as her husband. But eternal devotion to father or perhaps her habitual manner of pleasing him, even after his demise, compels her to follow his orders of conforming to the casket lottery. In *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, *Macbeth*), Lady Macbeth's ambitious, powerful, and untamed nature invokes fear as well as awe in readers' minds. She manipulates Macbeth to take the crown before it is handed down to him, to establish his control and dominance on the state and create his own destiny. In spite of possessing such strong and passionate character Lady Macbeth recoils when she is about to murder the king as King Duncan resembled her father. Her innate love and duty towards her father surfaces making her unable to kill Duncan- "Had he not resembled/ My father as he slept, I had done't" (2. 2. 12-13). Shakespeare's *King Lear* (Shakespeare, *King Lear*) is entirely devoted to this theme of a father-daughter relationship, where at the end we see Cordelia and King Lear overcoming all barriers in their bonding and being reconciled-

"...We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage;
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
And ask of thee forgiveness. So we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies..." (5. 3. 8-13)

For Shakespeare the tool of the dynamics of father-daughter relationships were very useful in basing many of his plays, but the more he matured as a playwright, the more he moved beyond traditions and conventions and progressively challenged the societal expectations. With Katherine, Ophelia, Portia, or Miranda, he also created Jessica, Desdemona, or Celia.

However, the daughters talked of in this paper highlight that the daughters' actions are sometimes not forcefully directed or commanded by fathers, but it is their innate will to always please and satisfy them which guides their thoughts, decisions or actions. This further insinuates the awareness of Shakespeare of what his audience/readers would endure and just how far he could make them tolerate. In several occurrences, Shakespeare starts with a strong-headed, rebellious and vociferous daughter who transforms into an obedient and tacit woman to content her father and appear flawless. Perhaps Shakespeare realized that the character was defying a primary and essential societal belief and must mold the character according to the anticipation of the 17th century audience. Shakespeare manages to find a loophole for the audience for the acceptance of a strong-willed woman by curbing her formerly defiant behavior and voice but not under any other pressure but because she herself wishes to please her father.

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