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Winning a Father's Blessing: Comparing "Taming of the Shrew" to "Meet the Parents"

William Shakespeare's "The Taming of the Shrew" is a comedic play that explores the societal expectations of marriage and the conventions that both sexes are "required" to follow in order to remain active members of the community. It also explores, albeit not in many scenes, the ways that a groom-to-be must accomplish the challenges put forth to them by their lovers' parents, usually the father, in order to win their "prize." In "Shrew," one of the main characters, Lucentio, is madly in love with the fair Bianca, but cannot get to her until her father has rid himself of her short-tempered older sister, Katherine. It is also important to note that Baptista will only give Katherine away to the suitor who offers the greatest dowry. Not wanting to wait for Katherine's absence, Lucentio finds that he must think of a way to win Katherine's heart while posing as a schoolmaster, as his servant Tranio is posing as him and requesting Bianca's hand on his master's behalf. In the 2000 romantic comedy film, "Meet the Parents," Greg Focker is planning on proposing to his girlfriend, Pamela Byrnes. The only problem is that he must earn the approval of her humorless, hard-to-please, ex-CIA agent father, Jack. Thus, while spending some time at her father's house to attend her sister's wedding, a series of horribly unfortunate (albeit slightly funny) events prompts Greg to come up with more lies to tell in order to stay on Jack's good side. While the protagonists of both these stories use different tactics to get what they want, they both demonstrate that while romantic love is far from an illusion, it is still necessary for a male suitor to prove their loyalty to their lover and earn the approval of the girl's father.

Both “Shrew” and “Meet the Parents” are stories that involve plans to marry a beautiful woman, only to learn of an extremely stubborn obstacle in the way. This means that the only way to get what they want is to find some way to circumvent said obstacle. Such is the case in “Shrew,” when Lucentio first lays eyes on Bianca, daughter of a merchant named Baptista, who has relationship problems of his own.

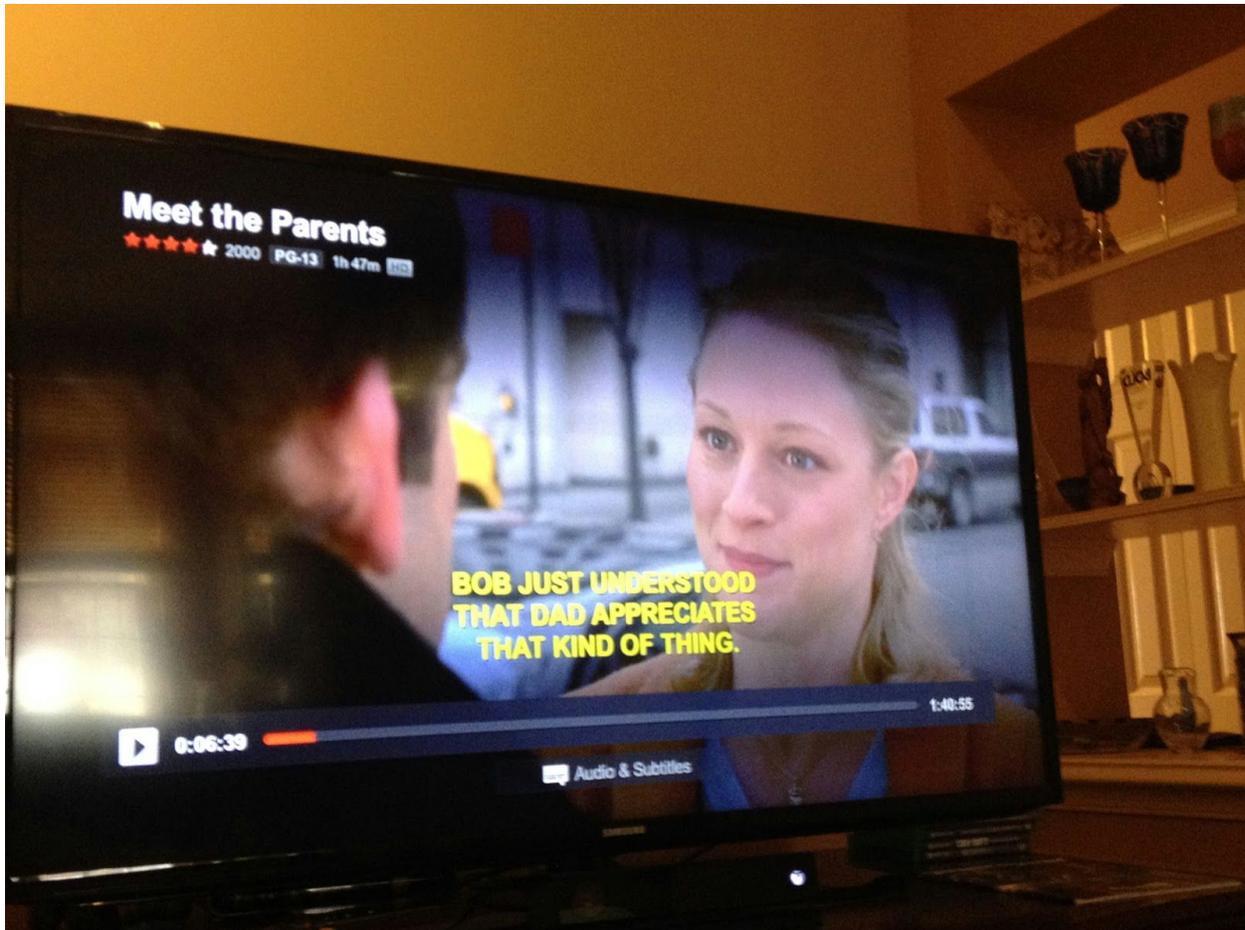
“Gentlemen, importune me no farther, for how I firmly am resolved you know: That is, not to bestow my youngest daughter before I have a husband for the elder.”

-Baptista, Act I, Scene 1 Lines

48-51

Baptista, who is swamped with suitors to the fair Bianca, has made it clear that he will not change his mind that he will not let Bianca be betrothed to anyone until he has found a husband for her older, ruder, more stubborn sister, Katherine. Having succumbed to his romantic feelings, Lucentio vows to do anything in his power to make Bianca his beloved wife. He even creates an elaborate scheme wherein he deceives his future father-in-law into believing he is a schoolmaster come to teach Bianca, giving him the chance to woo her while his servant Tranio is posing as him, asking for Baptista's blessing on his behalf. This is significant because, although seemingly good-natured and kind, Lucentio is attempting to win Baptista's blessing through dishonest means.

Although "Meet the Parents," doesn't exactly involve an elaborate scheme to fool the bride's father, it is also about a desperate man's quest to earn his girlfriend's hand in marriage. When male nurse Greg Focker is in the middle of an elaborate proposal to his girlfriend, Pamela Byrnes, she suddenly gets a call from her older sister Debbie. He overhears them talking and finds out that she is getting married to a doctor named Bob, who was kind enough to ask for her father's blessing. After assuming from what he overheard that her father is stubborn and hard to please (which was correct), Pamela kindly tells him otherwise.



Having heard this, Greg realizes that if he really wants to be Pamela's husband, he has to go down to Debbie's wedding and make a good impression on her father. Throughout the movie, in order to appeal to Pamela's father's critical attitude and humorless air, Greg has to come up with new fibs to tell the Byrnes family in order to make himself look better in their eyes.

Another important detail that makes both stories very similar is the main character's, per se, strained relationship with their lover's father. Lucentio hasn't exactly earned Baptista's mistrust like Greg Focker has earned that of Pamela's father. This doesn't necessarily mean that he holds Baptista in higher regard than Greg holds Pamela's father. After witnessing

Baptista trying to make it clear to the other suitors that Bianca won't be married until Katherine is out of his hair, Lucentio consults his loyal servant and surrogate brother Tranio on the situation. Having entirely succumbed to lovesickness and now willing to do anything to obtain his heart's desire, he is quick to call Baptista out for denying him the chance to win Bianca's love.

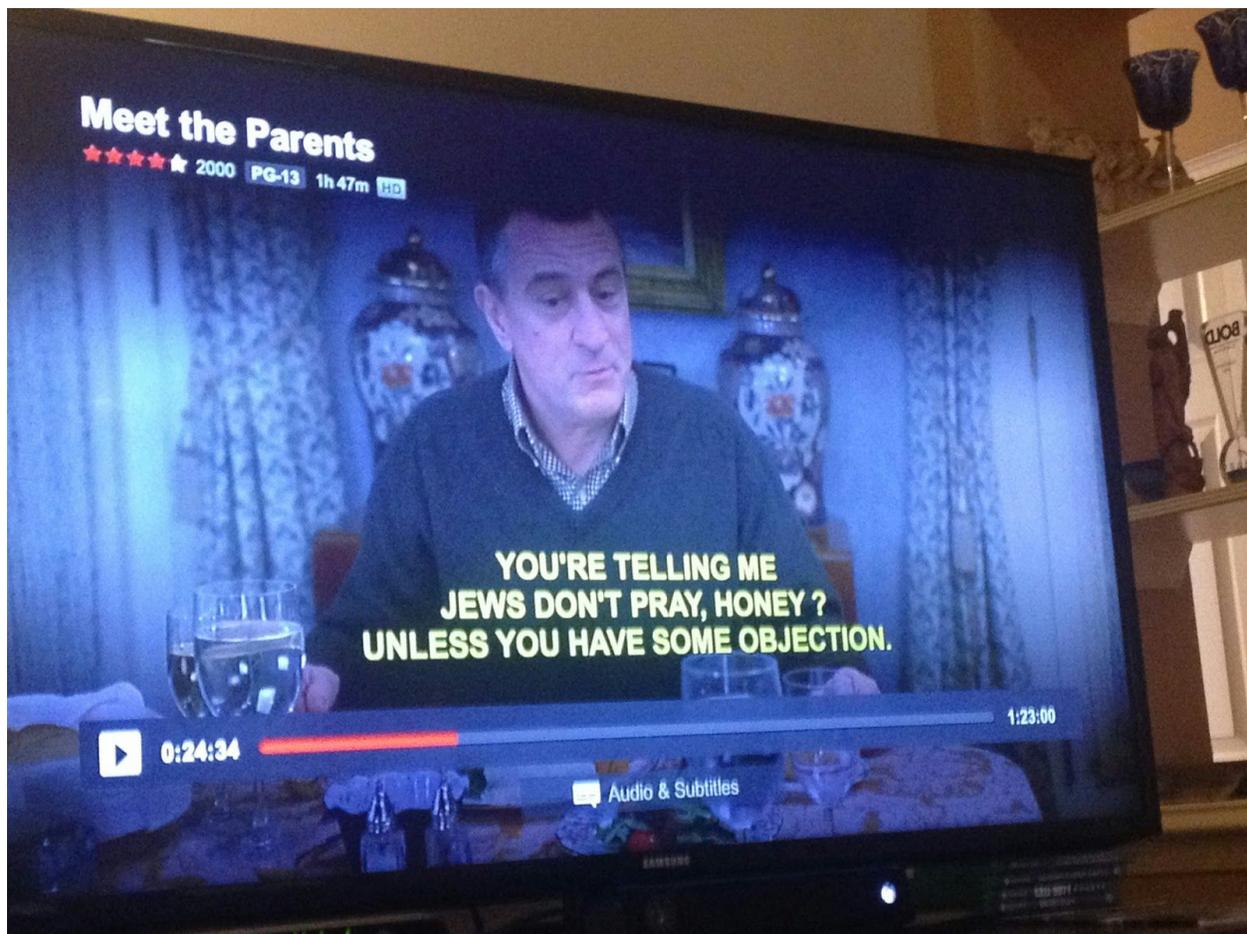
“Ah, Tranio, what a cruel father's
he!”

-Lucentio, Act I, Scene 1, Line 189

Knowing that Baptista will only allow schoolmasters to see Bianca while Katherine is single, Lucentio disguises himself as a middle-class lingual arts teacher named Cambio, with the intention of secretly wooing Bianca behind her “cruel” father's back.

Although the fact that Greg Focker is in love with Pamela is no secret to the Byrnes family, Greg is still at odds about meeting them. From the phone conversation he overhears between Pamela and Debbie, he assumes that earning his trust will be no walk in the park. He isn't exactly wrong when he assumes that Jack is hard to please either. When he and Pamela first drive up into the Byrnes lot, Jack is seen looking out of his bedroom window, glaring down at his other daughter's boyfriend with a look of disdain. This means that he hasn't even gotten to know Greg and yet he doesn't trust him. Later on, when Greg is settling in for his stay at the

Byrnes house, Jack appears to be probing Greg for weak points, subtly looking for any characteristic that he finds dubious. At the same time, however, he is wearing the facade of a gentle, welcoming man who is open to anyone who befriends his family. For example, when Greg, Pamela, Jack, and Mrs. Byrnes are sitting down for dinner, Mrs. Byrnes asks Greg to say Grace. Pam tries to spare her boyfriend the agony of doing something he'd never done before by revealing his Jewish heritage to her parents. Jack immediately puts on his suspicious face and asks why that should prevent him from saying Grace.



Having been backed into a corner and hoping to avoid further humiliation, Greg, who has never said Grace before in his life, improvises the words, not knowing how it actually goes. Fortunately

for Greg, Pamela's parents seem to accept this improvised prayer, despite Jack's obvious (albeit silent) disdain towards Greg.

Towards the end of "Taming of the Shrew," Lucentio's deception is exposed to Baptista. In order to pay for Bianca's dowry, Lucentio hires an unnamed merchant to pose as his father, Vincentio. The merchant manages to pay the dowry to Baptista and Lucentio's wedding seems to be cemented. Unfortunately, the real Vincentio shows up to visit his son and find out what he has been up to. When he finds out that a merchant has been impersonating him, he demands to speak with his son, only to be greeted by Tranio in disguise. Believing that Tranio murdered his master, Tranio calls on several officers of the law to arrest his master's father, convicting him as a raving lunatic. Fortunately, the real Lucentio shows up with Bianca in tow and begs for his father's forgiveness. Baptista, who had been witnessing the commotion the whole time, is noticeably shocked that he had been lied to by the man he trusted with Bianca's wellbeing.

**“But do you hear, sir, have you
married my daughter without
asking my goodwill?”**

-Baptista, Act 5.1, Lines 136-137

Enraged that Lucentio used dishonest means to earn his blessing for marrying Bianca Baptista agrees with Vincentio that they shall both be avenged for Lucentio's treachery. Nonetheless, it appears that by the start of the next scene, both fathers have reconciled with Lucentio and have officially given their blessings, cementing his marriage to Bianca.

Eventually, after a few days of staying with the Byrneses and trying to win their affections, Greg accompanies them to a tuxedo shop for Bob and Debbie's wedding. While there, Jack confronts Greg in one of the dressing rooms, revealing that he found a bit of marijuana in his coat pockets. This makes him suspicious, as Greg had previously told him that he wasn't on marijuana at all, obviously lying in order to get into Jack's good graces. This gives Jack the perfect opportunity to explain the Byrnes Family Circle of Trust, how they value honesty and loyalty.



Eventually, towards the end of the movie, Greg's deception is exposed in front of the entire Byrnes family and he stomps out of the house to go the airport, presumably never to return, signifying how he is out of the circle of trust. Fortunately, Jack is scolded by his wife and daughter for his obscene behavior and overprotective nature. This makes him feel guilty for making Pamela feel unhappy. In order to make amends, he calls on some of his contacts in the CIA to locate Greg. Confronting him at airport security, he forces him to tell the truth before asking one shocking question, "Do you want to marry my daughter?" This prompts Greg to explain his love towards Pamela and forces him to vow his unending loyalty to her. By the end of the movie, Bob and Debbie are married and Greg is finally engaged to Pamela.

Despite their obvious differences in setting and cultural values, both “Taming of the Shrew” and “Meet the Parents” share a common theme when it comes to love and marriage. They both demonstrate that romantic love is indeed real, but no marriage can ever take place without loyalty. Sure, a man may be undyingly loyal to his lover, but if he truly wishes to be married to her, he must prove his worth to her father. As both Lucentio and Greg Focker learned, the only way to truly win a father’s blessing is to be open and honest with him. He might distrust his daughter’s future husband at first, but if he proves that he truly does love her, their marriage just might be cemented.