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# **Taming Of The Shrew Versus: Analysis In Terms Of Leavisties, Frankfurt School, And Cultural Studies**

This ideology could be supported with the example of *The Taming of the Shrew* and a Hollywood romantic comedy classic *10 Things I Hate About You*, which is a spin-off of *The Taming of the Shrew* (similar plot, but set in different time periods). William Shakespeare was widely regarded as one of the world's greatest dramatists who was active in England during the late 16th to early 17th century. Back then Shakespearean work was not considered as 'high culture' like during today's time; his plays, which contain easy-to-understand themes and are affordable, were for the mass spectators in his Globe theatre. The Leavisties would likely consider Shakespearean drama as a pre-industrial authentic common culture of the common people. Nevertheless, F.R. Leavis himself, as written in *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (1930), suggests that "there were no 'high-brows' in Shakespeare's time. It was possible for Shakespeare to write plays that were at once popular drama and poetry that could be appreciated only by an educated minority".

Shakespearean works became labelled as 'high art' shortly after his death, following the publication of the First Folio. (Murphy, 2003) His works were deemed as 'high culture' until today; his works were given importance and incorporated into educational curriculums. Even *The Taming of the Shrew* is a comedy with simple everyday life themes (such as marriage and social class), it is deemed today as 'high culture' as it contains archaic terms and phrases that require education in order to understand, there exist fewer people who could completely understand Shakespeare.

## **Leavisties**

The Leavisties' argument on how the authentic culture of the majority had been lost by the standardization and levelling down of the industrialized mass culture can be applied to the case of the production of *10 Things I Hate About You*. As the film is a spin-off of *The Taming of the Shrew*; the core plot of the predecessor play was adapted into the setting during the late 20th century society. This clearly is a levelling down of Shakespeare high art/culture into a mass-produced and inorganic art/culture.

## **Frankfurt School**

The Frankfurt School is a school of thought associated with Goethe University Frankfurt's Institute for Social Research. Both the Leavisties and Frankfurt Critical Theorists argue that authentic art ('high culture') is lost and dominated by mass-produced popular culture that is thoughtless, unsophisticated, inferior to the elite's high culture, and damages people's ability to think critically. These two schools of thought share similar ideologies because they were both affected by the inter-war context. (Baker, 2008)

However, the Frankfurt School further elaborates this ideology on a discourse slightly different from the Leavisties. For instance, Frankfurt theorists did not suggest that high arts would result in moral elevation like the Leavisties, they only suggest that high arts offer an escape from

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ideological deprivation oppression. Moreover, Frankfurt theorists were influenced by Marxism and also further discuss this matter under the context of capitalism. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer coined the term 'culture industry' to emphasize on the subject of capitalism. They stated that the 'culture industry' consist of factories producing standardized mass/popular culture with the ultimate aim to generate as much profit as possible, and in order to achieve this aim, they would design cultural goods to reach out to the lowest common cultural standard to manipulate people into passivity (or passively continue buying their goods). (Inglis, 2005)

With the example of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *10 Things I Hate About You*, Frankfurt theorists would likely view the former as an elitist high culture and the latter as an inferior mass/pop culture. The 1999 rom-com *10 Things I Hate About You* is a great example to display Adorno and Horkheimer's idea of the 'culture industry'. The 'culture' industry, or Hollywood in this case, adapted Shakespeare 'authentic art' and reduced its form to the lowest common cultural standard possible to manipulate the audience into passivity. Most Hollywood romantic comedies contains the same structure and repetitive cliché as innovation is 'too risky' for them. With *10 Things I Hate About You*, a Shakespearean masterpiece was reduced to a standardized mass/popular cultural produce of the capitalists, manufactured processed packaged sold to use in the name of profit. Frankfurt theorists would likely argue that the film is uncreative, thoughtless, unsophisticated, and empty.

## **cultural studies (1960s – 1970s)**

cultural studies, dubbed as 'culturalism', can be considered as a direct criticism against the theories of the Leavisties and the Frankfurt School. While the Leavisties and Frankfurt theorists argue that there present certain culture (high/elitist culture) more superior than the rest (low/popular/mass culture), culturalists defend the cultures that the Leavisties and Frankfurt theorists deemed as 'inferior'. culturalists emphasized on the ordinariness quality of culture of the working class and other marginalized groups and believe that these cultures are all worth of being studied academically; their main point is that culture is found in our everyday life, not just those presented in museums. The cultural studies argue that the differentiation between high and low culture is not universal. Culturalists' main aim is not in the evaluation of cultural product, but is to study the socio-political consequences of each cultural product. (Baker, 2008)

Raymond Williams, stresses that 'culture' is both art (creative, extraordinary, and contains the finest of individual meanings) and also a whole way of life (the ordinary, traditional, and common). He argues that culture is given meanings by ordinary people through their lived experience and aims to terminate the hierarchy between high culture and everyday life culture. Richard Hoggart<sup>6</sup> portrays the working-class popular culture as nostalgic and argues that the working class is not a victim of the 'massification of culture'; they process the ability to think critically and choose whether to ignore or absorb materials of popular/mass culture (rather than passively accepting it). Edward Thompson<sup>6</sup> portrays the working class as an independent and active agent making and defining their own history, culture, and class. (Baker, 2008)

When applied to the case of *10 Things I Hate About You*, it is likely that culturalists would see the film as a cultural product worth of being studied no less than Shakespearean's *The Taming of the Shrew*. There exist few antique copy of *The Taming of the Shrew* preserved in libraries while exist thousands of *10 Things I Hate About You* CD copies, but this does not make the latter inferior or less important than the former. culturalists would aim to at evaluating the socio-

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political consequences and impact of both *10 Things I Hate About You* and *The Taming of the Shrew* rather than judging how aesthetically 'good' or 'bad' the film and play is. For instance, they would observe the portrayal of independent women in *10 Things I Hate About You* which may have impacted some audience on how they view feminism and female empowerment.

Furthermore, applied with Hoggart's arguments, we are not victims of the mass media (producers) manipulation (in making us passive). We, as audiences, know what we are consuming. For instance, many people know that *10 Things I Hate About You* is filled with exaggerated clichés (such as a hot 'bad boy' falling for a girl nobody likes) that is unlikely to happen in real life. Audiences have the ability to choose what they consume and could tell apart fantasy; most watch the film just for the sake of entertainment with awareness and consciousness of this fact.

In conclusion, the three schools of thought, the Leavisites, Frankfurt School, and cultural studies, all have similarities and differences with each other in their approach and understanding of popular culture and the hierarchization of culture. It could be summarized that the Leavisites and the Frankfurt School are generally similar on one side and cultural studies on another. Both the Leavisites and the Frankfurt School, even though contain slightly different ideologies, agreed on the fact that there are some cultures more superior than the others (hence, the notion of 'high culture' and mass/popular culture as 'low culture') while cultural studies argued that there are no such hierarchization and that all cultural products are equally worth of studying. Applied with the example of Shakespearean comedy *The Taming of the Shrew* and a modern romantic comedy *10 Things I Hate About You*, it clearly demonstrates that all of the three schools of thought's ideologies can be adapted with cultural products from any time period, whether during the 16th-17th century or in the modern 20th century.