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The Taming of the Shrew: Shakespeare's Mirror of Marriage

Coppélia Kahn

The Taming of the Shrew depicts the subjection of a willful woman to the will of her husband. The literary antecedents of the heroine's character have long been acknowledged; Kate's shrill tongue, anger, and intransigence mark her as the conventional shrew. But the degree to which Petruchio's characterization is molded by a social, rather than a literary, stereotype has gone unnoticed. He is animated like a puppet by the *idée fixe* that a man must command absolute obedience from his wife. In effect, he embodies the prevailing system of patriarchal marriage, its basic mechanisms displayed in exaggerated form.

Shakespeare lived in an age devoted to the maintenance of order through hierarchy, an age in which the creation of Eve from Adam's rib was both historical fact and article of faith. But he is never an advocate of order for order's sake; he never fails to question the moral grounds and practical effect of hierarchy. While endorsing the principle, he is skeptical of the practice: if Richard II is the only true anointed king, he is also, as king, a failure. If Petruchio must command and Kate submit so that harmony (or at least decorum) may be maintained, the division of power and status according to sex alone is, he shows, irrational and ultimately illusory.

As Robert Heilman demonstrates, the taming is best viewed as a farce which "carries out our desire to simplify life by a selective anesthetizing of the whole person; man retains all his energy yet never really gets hurt."¹ Farce, according to Heilman, deals with people as though they lack normal physical, emotional, and moral sensitivity, and are capable only of mechanical responses. In making Kate react almost automatically to the contradictory kinds of treatment Petruchio administers (flattery before the wedding, and force afterwards), Shakespeare molds her to the needs of the farce. In the first three acts, before the taming begins in earnest, she is portrayed in terms of her resistance to male efforts to dispose of her in marriage. Our strongest impression of her is that she fights back. But though she declares she'll see Petruchio hanged before she marries him, marry him she does, and though she flatly refuses to obey his first command to her as a wife, she exits mutely with him at the end of Act III. Contrary to our expectations, she doesn't retaliate with all the shrewish weaponry said to be at her disposal. In the end, as I shall show, she subverts her husband's power without attempting to challenge it, and she does so in a gamesome spirit, without hostility or bitterness. Thus Shakespeare allows the male to indulge his dream of total mastery over the female without the real-life penalties of her resentment or his guilt.

But the farce has another purpose which Heilman and other critics fail to see. It exaggerates ludicrously the reach and force of male domi-

nance and thus pushes us to see this wish for dominance as a childish dream of omnipotence. In short, the farce portrays Petruchio's manliness as infantile. A 1904 editor of the play roundly declared, "It will be many a day . . . ere men cease to need or women to admire, the example of Petruchio."² How pitiable that we should still need and admire it, almost seventy years later. That we do is revealed by the prevailing tendency of criticism to justify Petruchio's methods in Petruchio's terms, endorsing that version of masculinity which the farce undercuts as well as indulges. Though it has long been recognized that Shakespeare gives Kate's "shrewishness" a psychological and moral validity lacking in all literary predecessors, critics still argue that Petruchio's heavy-handed behavior is merely a role briefly assumed for a benign purpose. They claim that he is Kate's savior, the wise man who guides her to a better and truer self, or a clever doctor following homeopathic medicine.³ They have missed the greatest irony of the play. Unlike other misogynistic shrew literature, this play satirizes not woman herself in the person of the shrew, but *male attitudes toward women*. My purpose is to reveal the ways in which Shakespeare puts these attitudes before us.

I

Long before Petruchio enters, we are encouraged to doubt the validity of male supremacy. First of all, the transformation of Christopher Sly from drunken lout to noble lord, a transformation only temporary and skin-deep, suggests that Kate's switch from independence to subjection may also be deceptive, and prepares us for the irony of the dénouement. More pointedly, one of the most alluring perquisites of Sly's new identity is a wife, and his right to domineer over her. As Scene 1 of the Induction begins, Sly suffers public humiliation at the hands of a woman when the Hostess throws him out of her alehouse for disorderly conduct. After he awakens from his sleep in the second scene, it is the tale of his supposed wife's beauty and Penelope-like devotion and patience that finally tips the balance, convincing him that he really is the aristocrat of the servants' descriptions:

Am I a lord, and have I such a lady?
 Or do I dream? Or have I dreamed till now?
 I do not sleep: I see, I hear, I speak,
 I smell sweet savors and I feel soft things.
 Upon my life, I am a lord indeed
 And not a tinker nor Christopher Sly.
 Well, bring our lady hither to our sight,
 And once again a pot o' th' smallest ale.⁴
 (Ind. 2. 68-75)

He then glories in demanding and getting his "wife's" obsequious obedience:

Sly.
 Where is my wife?
Page. Here, noble lord. What is thy will with her?

Sly. Are you my wife and will not call me husband?
 My men should call me "lord;" I am your goodman.
Page. My husband and my lord, my lord and husband,
 I am your wife in all obedience.
 (Ind. 2. 102-107)

The humor lies in the fact that Sly's pretensions to authority and grandeur, which he claims only on the basis of sex, not merit, and indulges specifically with women, are contradicted in his real identity, in which he is a woman's inferior. Similarly, as I shall argue later, Petruchio seems to find in Kate the reflection of his own superiority, while we know that he is fooled by a role she has assumed.

In the main play, the realistic bourgeois ambiance in which Kate is placed leads us to question the definition of shrewishness which the characters take for granted. In medieval mystery plays and Tudor interludes, shrews were already married to their pusillanimous husbands and were shown as domestic tyrants. Male fears of female freedom were projected onto the wife, who was truly a threatening figure because she treated her husband as he normally would have treated her. When the husband attempted rebellion, he usually lost.⁵ Shakespeare departs from this literary tradition in order to sketch Kate as a victim of the marriage market, making her "the first shrew to be given a father, to be shown as maid and bride."⁶ At her entrance, she is already, for her father's purpose, that piece of goods which Petruchio declares her to be after the wedding. Baptista is determined not to marry the sought-after Bianca until he gets an offer for the unpopular Kate, not for the sake of conforming to the hierarchy of age as his opening words imply, but out of a merchant's desire to sell all the goods in his warehouse. His marketing technique is clever: make the sale of the less popular item the prerequisite of purchasing the desirable one. As Tranio sympathetically remarks after Kate's marriage is arranged, "Twas a commodity that lay fretting by you" (II. 1. 321). Knowing that Gremio and Hortensio are interested only in Bianca, Baptista tactlessly invites them to court Kate, and does so in her presence. The two suitors then begin to insult her. Gremio refers to her as a prostitute by offering to "cart" her through the streets, a punishment for prostitutes, instead of to court her. When she indignantly asks her father, "Is it your will, sir, to make a stale of me amongst these mates?" (I. 1. 57-58), she is only reacting to the insult and aptly characterizing her situation as that of a whore being loosed to anyone who'll have her for the best price.

That money, not his daughter's happiness, is Baptista's real concern in matchmaking becomes evident when Petruchio brusquely makes his bid for Kate. Previously, Petruchio's desire to marry solely for money, even though he had inherited his father's fortune, was comically exaggerated. The rhetorical expansiveness of his speech made humorous the profit motive which Baptista takes seriously:

. . . if thou know
 One rich enough to be Petruchio's wife—
 As wealth is burden of my wooing dance—

Be she as foul as was Florentius' love,
As old as Sibyl, and as curst and shrewd
As Socrates' Xanthippe or a worse,
She moves me not, or not removes, at least,
Affection's edge in me, were she as rough
As are the swelling Adriatic seas.
I come to wive it wealthily in Padua;
If wealthily, then happily in Padua.

(I. 2. 65-75)

Both Petruccio and Baptista pretend to make Kate's love the ultimate condition of the marriage, but then Petruccio simply lies in asserting that she has fallen in love with him at first sight. Her father, though he doubts this far-fetched claim ("I know not what to say") claps up the match anyhow, for on it depends Bianca's match as well. Both marriages provide insurance against having to support his daughters in widowhood, promise grandsons to whom he may pass on the management and possession of his property, and impart to his household the prestige of "marrying well," for the wealth of the grooms advertises Baptista's own financial status. Petruccio's and Tranio/Lucentio's frequent references to their respective fathers' wealth and reputations remind us that wealth and reputation pass from father to son, with woman as mere accessory to the passing. As Simone de Beauvoir states in *The Second Sex*,

The interests of property require among nobility and bourgeoisie that a single administrator take charge. This could be a single woman; her abilities were admitted; but from feudal times to our days the married woman has been deliberately sacrificed to private property. The richer the husband, the greater the dependence of the wife; the more powerful he feels socially and economically, the more authoritatively he plays the *paterfamilias*.⁷

As the wedding party waits anxiously for the tardy groom (Act III, scene 1), Baptista alludes to "this shame of ours" and Kate corrects him: "No shame but mine." Baptista's first person plural reveals that he thinks in terms of his reputation as *paterfamilias*; Kate's insistence that the shame resides with her, the woman conned into marrying a man she doesn't love and then deserted by him at the church door, doesn't penetrate her father's consciousness. His next lines shock us because they apply the stereotype of the shrew to Kate when we have been seeing her as a particular woman wronged by the socio-economic system of marriage:

Go, girl, I cannot blame thee now to weep.
For such an injury would vex a very saint,
Much more a shrew of thy impatient humor.

(III. 2. 27-29)

Even the Bianca plot emphasizes heavily the venal aspects of marriage, though it is usually characterized as romantic, in contrast to the realism and farce of the taming. In Act II, scene 1, Baptista awards Bianca to Tranio/Lucentio solely because he offers more cash and property as "widowhood" (that is, claims to have more total wealth) than Gremio does.

As George Hibbard has shown, the scene satirizes the hard-headed commercial nature of marital arrangements.⁸ Baptista's chivalric "Tis deeds must win the prize" puns on title deeds to property, and the length and specificity of each suitor's inventory of wealth calls inordinate attention to the fact that dutiful, submissive Bianca, courted in high-flown style by the ardent Lucentio, is still a piece of property, to be relinquished only with the guarantee that Baptista will profit if the groom expires. Always the clever businessman, Baptista accepts Lucentio's bid pending his father's assurance of his fortune, but keeps Gremio in reserve should the deal fall through.

II

It is time to turn with Kate from the father to the husband. From the moment Petruchio commands his servant "Knock, I say," he evokes and creates noise and violence. A hubbub of loud speech, beatings, and quarrelsomeness surrounds him. "The swelling Adriatic seas" and "thunder when the clouds in autumn crack" are a familiar part of his experience, which he easily masters with his own force of will or physical strength. Like Adam, he is lord over nature, and his own violence has been well legitimized by society, unlike Kate's, which has marked her as unnatural and abhorrent. But let us examine the nature of Petruchio's violence compared to Kate's.

The hallmark of a shrew is her scolding tongue and loud raucous voice—a verbal violence befitting woman, since her limbs are traditionally weak. It is interesting that Kate is given only twelve lines in her entrance scene, only five of which allude to physical violence:

I'faith, sir, you shall never need to fear:
Iwis it [marriage] is not halfway to her heart.
But if it were, doubt not her care should be
To comb your noddle with a three-legged stool
And paint your face and use you like a fool.

(I. 1. 61-65)

Here she threatens Hortensio in response to his greater threat, that no man will marry her. These lines have a distinctly defensive cast; Kate refers to herself in the third person, and denies any interest in a mate because two prospective mates (Hortensio and Gremio) have just made it clear that they have no interest in her. Kate's vision of breaking furniture over a husband's head is hypothetically couched in the subjunctive. Yet later Tranio describes her speech in this scene as "such a storm that mortal ears might hardly endure the din" (I. 1. 172-173). Throughout the play, this kind of disparity between the extent and nature of Kate's "shrewish" behavior and the male characters' perceptions of it focuses our attention on masculine behavior and attitudes which stereotype women as either submissive and desirable or rebellious and shrewish. Kate is called devil, hell, curst, shrewd (shrewish), and wildcat, and referred to in other insulting ways because, powerless to change her situation, she *talks* about it. That her speech is defensive rather than offensive in origin, and psychologically necessary for her survival, is eloquently conveyed by her own lines:

My tongue will tell the anger of my heart,
Or else my heart, concealing it, will break,
And rather than it shall I will be free
Even to the uttermost, as I please, in words.
(IV. 3. 77-80)

Though she commits four acts of physical violence onstage (binding and striking Bianca, breaking a lute over Hortensio's head, hitting Petruchio and then Grumio), in each instance the dramatic context suggests that she strikes out because of provocation or intimidation resulting from her status as a woman.⁹ For example, the language in which her music lesson with Hortensio is described conveys the idea that it is but another masculine attempt to subjugate woman. "Why, then thou canst not break her to the lute?" asks Baptista. "I did but tell her she mistook her frets / And bowed her hand to teach her fingering," replies Hortensio (II. 1. 147, 149-150). Later Petruchio explicitly attempts to "break" Kate to his will, and throughout the play men tell her that she "mistakes her frets"—that her anger is unjustified.

On the other hand, Petruchio's confident references to "great ordinance in the field" and the "Loud 'larums, neighing steeds, trumpets' clang" of battle bespeak a lifelong acquaintance with organized violence as a masculine vocation. The loud oaths with which he orders his servants about and startles the priest in the wedding service are thus farcical exaggerations of normal masculine behavior. In its volume and vigor, his speech suggests a robust manliness which would make him attractive to the woman who desires a master (or who wants to identify with power in its most accessible form). Grumio characterizes his master in terms of his speech, in lines which recall the kind of speech attributed to Kate:

O' my word, and she knew him as well as I do, she would think scolding would do little good upon him. She may perhaps call him half a score of knaves or so—why, that's nothing. And he begin once, he'll rail in his rope-tricks. I'll tell you what, sir, and she stand him but a little, he will throw a figure in her face and so disfigure her with it that she shall have no more eyes to see withal than a cat. You know him not, sir.

(I. 2. 107-115)

If Petruchio were female, he would be known as a shrew and shunned accordingly by men. Behavior desirable in a male automatically prohibits similar behavior in a female, for woman must mold herself to be complementary to man, not competitive with him. Indeed, if manhood is defined and proven by the ability to dominate, either in battle or in the household, then a situation which does not allow a man to dominate is existentially threatening.¹⁰ When Petruchio declares, "I am as peremptory as she proud-minded," he seems to state that he and his bride-to-be are two of a kind. But that "kind," bold, independent, self-assertive, must only be male. Thus his image of himself and Kate as "two raging fires" ends on a predictable note:

And where two raging fires meet together
They do consume the thing that feeds their fury.
Though little fire grows great with little wind,
Yet extreme gusts will blow out fire and all.
So I to her, *and so she yields to me,*
For I am rough and woo not like a babe.
(II. 1. 132-137; emphasis mine)

His force must necessarily triumph over Kate's because he is male and she is not. Those critics who maintain that his is acceptable because it has only the limited, immediate purpose of making Kate reject an "unbecoming" mode of behavior miss the real point of the taming. The overt force Petruchio wields over Kate by marrying her against her will in the first place, and then by denying her every wish and comfort, stamping, shouting, reducing her to exhaustion, etc., is but a farcical representation of the psychological realities of marriage in Elizabethan England, in which the husband's will constantly, silently, and invisibly, through custom and conformity, suppressed the wife's.

At the wedding in Act III, scene 1, Petruchio's behavior travesties the decorum, ceremony and piety which all those present feel ought to accompany a marriage. It is calculated to deprive Kate of the opportunity to enjoy the bride's sense of triumph, of being the center of admiration and interest; to humiliate her in public; to throw her off her guard by convincing her he is mad; and to show her that now nothing can happen unless and until her husband pleases. The final effect of the wedding scene, however, is less comical than the rhetorically delightful accounts of Petruchio's off-stage antics. When all the trappings are stripped away (and they are, by his design), the groom is simply completing the legal arrangements whereby he acquires Kate as he would acquire a piece of property. When he declares he'll "seal the title with a lovely kiss," he refers not just to Kate's new title as his wife, but also to the title-deed which, sealed with wax, passed to the purchaser in a property transaction. (The pun recalls Baptista's "deeds," a similar play on words discussed above.) Tranio remarks of Petruchio, "He hath some meaning in his mad attire," and he is right. When Petruchio says "To me she's married, not unto my clothes," he assumes a lofty morality, implying that he offers Kate real love, not just its worldly show. This moralistic pose becomes an important part of his strategy in Act IV when he claims to do nothing that isn't for Kate's "good." But in the brutally plain statement he delivers at the conclusion of the wedding scene, he momentarily drops this pose:

She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house,
My household stuff, my field, my barn,
My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything.
(III. 2. 230-232)

His role as property-owner is the model for his role as husband; Kate, for him, is a thing. Or at least she will become a thing when he has wrenched unquestioning obedience from her, when she no longer has mind or will of her own. It is impossible that Shakespeare meant us to accept Petruchio's

speech uncritically: it is the most shamelessly blunt statement of the relationship between men, women, and property to be found in the literature of this period. After the simple declarative statements of possession, quoted above, which deny humanity to Kate, the speech shifts to chivalric challenges of imaginary “thieves” who would snatch her away. Is she goods, in the following lines, or a medieval damsel?

. . . Touch her whoever dare,
I'll bring mine action on the proudest he
That stops my way in Padua. Grumio,
Draw forth thy weapon, we are beset with thieves.
Rescue thy mistress, if thou be a man.

(III. 2. 233-237)

The point is that Petruchio wants to think of her in both kinds of terms. The speech concludes grandly with the metamorphosis of Petruchio into a knight-errant:

Fear not, sweet wench; they shall not touch thee, Kate.
I'll buckler thee against a million.

(III. 2. 233-239)

The modulation of simple ownership into spurious chivalry reveals the speaker's buried awareness that he cheapens himself by being merely Kate's proprietor; he must transform the role into something nobler.

Petruchio's thundering oaths and physical brutality reach a crescendo at his country house in Act IV, when he beats his servants, throws food and dishes on the floor, stomps, roars and bullies. These actions are directed not against his bride but at his servants, again in the name of chivalry, out of a fastidious devotion to his bride's supposed comfort. But his stance is rooted realistically in his status as lord of a manor and master of a household which is not Kate's but his. He ordered her wedding clothes, chose their style and paid for them. Kate wears them not at her pleasure but at his, as Grumio's jest succinctly indicates:

Petruchio. Well, sir, in brief, the gown is not for me.

Grumio. You are i' th' right, sir; 'tis for my mistress.

(IV. 3. 153-154)

In the famous soliloquy which opens “Thus have I politically begun my reign” (IV. 1. 182-205), Petruchio reduces Kate to an animal capable of learning only through deprivation of food and rest, devoid of all sensitivity save the physical. The animal metaphor shocks us and I would suggest was meant to shock Shakespeare's audience, despite their respect for falconry as an art and that reverence for the great chain of being emphasized by E. M. W. Tillyard. I suppose Kate is actually being elevated in this speech, in view of previous references to her as her husband's horse, ox, and ass, for a falcon was the appurtenance of a nobleman, and a valued animal. But the blandness of Petruchio's confidential tone, the sweep of his easy assumption that Kate is not merely an animal, but *his* animal, who lives or dies at his command—has a dramatic irony similar to that of his

exit speech in the wedding scene. Both utterances unashamedly present the status of woman in marriage as degrading in the extreme, plainly declaring her a sub-human being who exists solely for the purposes of her husband. Yet both offer this vision of the wife as chattel or animal in a lordly, self-confident tone. Urbanity is superimposed on outrage, for our critical scrutiny.

III

Shakespeare does not rest with showing that male supremacy in marriage denies woman's humanity. In the most brilliant comic scene of the play (IV. 5), he goes on to demonstrate how it defies reason. Petruchio demands that Kate agree that the sun is the moon in order to force a final showdown. Having exhausted and humiliated her to the limit of his invention, he now wants her to know that he would go to any extreme to get the obedience he craves. Shakespeare implies here that male supremacy is ultimately based on such absurdities, for it insists that whatever a man says is right because he is a man, even if he happens to be wrong. In a male-supremacist utopia, masculinity might be identical with absolute truth, but in life the two coincide only intermittently.

Why does Kate submit to her husband's unreason? Or why does she *appear* to do so, and on what terms? On the most pragmatic level, she follows Hortensio's advice to "Say as he says or we shall never go" only in order to achieve her immediate and most pressing needs: a bed, a dinner, some peace and quiet. Shakespeare never lets us think that she believes it right, either morally or logically, to submit her judgment and the evidence of her senses to Petruchio's rule. In fact, the language of her capitulation makes it clear that she thinks him mad:

Forward, I pray, since we have come so far,
And be it moon or sun or what you please.
And if you please to call it a rush-candle,
Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me.
.....
But sun it is not when you say it is not,
And the moon changes even as your mind.

(IV. 5. 12-15, 19-20; emphasis mine)

At this point, Hortensio concedes Petruchio's victory and applauds it; Petruchio henceforth behaves and speaks as though he has indeed tamed Kate. However, we must assume that since he previously donned the mask of the ardent lover, professing rapture at Kate's rudeness, he can see that she is doing the same thing here. At their first meeting he turned the tables on her, praising her for mildness and modesty after she gave insults and even injury. Now she pays him back, suddenly overturning his expectations and moreover mocking them at the same time. But he is not fooled, and can take that mockery as the cue for compromise. It reassures him that she will give him obedience if that is what he must have, but it also warns him that she, in turn, must retain her intellectual freedom.

The scene then proceeds on this basis, each character accepting the other's assumed role. Kate responds to Petruchio's outrageous claim that the

wrinkled Vincentio is a fair young maiden by pretending so wholeheartedly to accept it that we know she can't be in earnest. She embroiders the fantasy in an exuberant declamatory style more appropriate to tragedy than comedy:

Young budding virgin, fair and fresh and sweet,
Whither away, or where is thy abode?
Happy the parents of so fair a child!
Happier the man whom favorable stars
Allots thee for his lovely bedfellow!

(IV. 5. 36-41)

Her rhetoric expresses her realization that the power struggle she had entered into on Petruchio's terms is absurd. It also signals her emancipation from that struggle, in the terms she declared earlier: ". . . I will be free / Even to the uttermost, as I please, in words."

Of course, a freedom that exists only in words is ultimately as limited as Petruchio's mastery. Though Kate is clever enough to use his verbal strategies against him, she is trapped in her own cleverness. Her only way of maintaining her inner freedom is by outwardly denying it, which thrusts her into a schizoid existence. One might almost prefer that she simply give in rather than continue to fight from such a psychologically perilous position. Furthermore, to hold that she maintains her freedom in words is to posit a distinction without a difference, for whether she remains spiritually independent of Petruchio or sincerely believes in his superiority, her outward behavior must be the same—that of the perfect Griselda, a model for all women. What complicates the situation even more is that Kate quite possibly has fallen in love with her tamer, whose vitality and bravado make him attractive, despite his professed aims. Her failure to pursue her rebellion after the wedding or in the country house supports this hypothesis as does the tone of her mockery in Act IV, Scene 5, and thereafter, which is playful and joyous rather than bitter and angry as it was in the first three acts.

Finally, we must remember that Shakespearean comedy celebrates love; love by means of any contrivance of plot or character. Here Shakespeare parts company with sterner moralists such as Jonson, or more relentless social critics such as Ibsen. As Northrop Frye states, "In comedy and in romance, the story seeks its own end instead of holding the mirror up to nature."¹¹ Though Shakespeare quite astutely mirrors aspects of the human condition in the comedies, that is not his main purpose. In this play as in the other early and middle comedies, he aims to present an idealized vision of life as the triumph of love in marriage. The match between Kate and Petruchio bespeaks a comic renewal of society, the materialism and egotism of the old order transformed or at least softened by the ardor and mutual tolerance of the young lovers. Shakespeare wants to make us feel that Kate has not been bought or sold, but has given herself out of love. Thus he makes her walk a tightrope of affirming her husband's superiority through outward conformity while questioning it ironically through words. Portia, Beatrice, Viola and Rosalind perform similar athletic feats on their

way to the altar, but their wittiness, unlike Kate's, ends with the wedding.

Words, as an instrument of command and an assertion of individuality, have been important throughout the play. In the first scene, the mere fact that Kate protested her father's plan for disposing of her, instead of submitting wordlessly, marked her for the male audience as a shrew, while Bianca's demure silence defined her as the epitome of desirability. Petruchio shrugged off the challenge of taming Kate by comparing her scolds to the noise of thunder, lions, and cannon, and mustered a volume of abuse far greater than hers when dealing with his servants. Kate whetted his desire by matching him taunt for taunt at their first meeting, and he lectured her to dumb amazement during their honeymoon on diet, continency, and fashions in dress. On the way back to Padua, she finds in words a way out of subjection, creatively evolving a rhetoric of satirical exaggeration. This rhetoric and the ironies it produces are Shakespeare's way out of the difficulty he encountered in writing a critique of marriage in the form of a comedy which must, somehow, celebrate marriage.

In the last scene, Shakespeare finally allows Petruchio that lordship over Kate, and superiority to other husbands, for which he has striven so mightily. He just makes it clear to us, through the contextual irony of Kate's last speech, that her husband is deluded. As a contest between males in which woman is the prize, the closing scene is analogous to the entire play. It was partly Petruchio's desire to show his peers that he was more of a man than they which spurred him to take on the shrew in the first place. Gremio refers to him as a Hercules and compares the subduing of Kate to a "labor . . . more than Alcides' twelve" (I. 2. 256-257). Hortensio longs but fails to emulate his friend's supposed success in taming. Lucentio, winner in the other wooing context, fails in the final test of marital authority. Petruchio stands alone in the last scene, the center of male admiration.

As critics have noted, the wager scene is punctuated by reversals: quiet Bianca talks back and shrewish Kate seems to become an obedient wife. In a further reversal, however, she steals the scene from her husband, who has held the stage throughout the play, and reveals that he has failed to tame her in the sense he set out to. He has gained her outward compliance in the form of a public display, while her spirit remains mischievously free. Though she pretends to speak earnestly on behalf of her own inferiority, she actually treats us to a pompous, wordy, holier-than-thou sermon which delicately mocks the sermons her husband has delivered to her and about her. It is significant that Kate's speech is both her longest utterance and the longest in the play. Previously, Petruchio dominated the play verbally,¹² and his longest speech totalled twenty-four lines, while Kate's came to fifteen. Moreover, everything Kate said was a protest against her situation or those who put her in it, and as such was deemed unwomanly, or shrewish. Petruchio's impressive rhetoric, on the other hand, asserted his masculinity in the form of command over women and servants and of moral authority. Now Kate apes this verbal dominance and moralistic stance for satirical effect.

In content, the speech is thoroughly orthodox. Its sentiments can

be found in a dozen treatises on marriage written in the sixteenth century.¹³ The arguments that a woman's beauty is her greatest asset and depends on her amiability; that her obedience is a debt rendered in return for financial support; that the household is a hierarchy like the state, with husband as lord and wife as subject; that the female's physical delicacy fits her only for meekness—all were the platitudes of male dominance. Kate offers them with complete seriousness, straightforwardly except for a few verbal ironies, such as the reminder of her husband's rhetorical patterns in "thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, / Thy head, thy sovereign," which echoes his "my goods, my chattels; . . . my house, / My household stuff, my field, my barn, / my horse, my ox, my ass, my anything." The grave moral tone of the speech, as I have noted, comes from Petruchio also, but its irony emanates primarily from the dramatic context. First, it follows upon and resembles Kate's rhetorical performance on the road back to Padua. It is a response to her husband's demand that she demonstrate her obedience before others, as she did then before Hortensio, and as such it exceeds expectations once more. It fairly shouts obedience, when a gentle murmur would suffice. Having heard her address Vincentio as "Young, budding virgin," we know what she is up to in this instance. Second, though the speech pleads subordination, as a speech—a lengthy, ambitious verbal performance before an audience—it allows the speaker to dominate that audience. Though Kate purports to speak as a woman to women, she assumes the role of a preacher whose authority and wisdom are, in the terms of the play, thoroughly masculine. Third, the speech sets the seal on a complete reversal of character, a push-button change from rebel to conformist which is, I have argued, part of the mechanism of farce. Here as elsewhere in the play, farce has two purposes: it completes the fantasy of male dominance, but also mocks it as mere fantasy. Kate's quick transformation perfectly fulfills Petruchio's wishes, but is transparently false to human nature. Towards the end of her lecture, Kate hints that she is dissembling in the line "That seeming to be most which we indeed least are." Though she seems to be the most vocal apologist for male dominance, she is indeed its ablest critic.¹⁴

On one level, the dénouement is the perfect climax of a masculine fantasy, for as Kate concludes she prepares to place her hand beneath her husband's foot, an emblem-book symbol of wifely obedience. On a deeper level, as I have tried to show, her words speak louder than her actions, and mock that fantasy. But on the deepest level, because the play depicts its heroine as outwardly compliant but inwardly independent, it represents possibly the most cherished male fantasy of all—that woman remain *untamed*, even in her subjection. Does Petruchio know he's been taken? Quite probably, since he himself has played the game of saying-the-thing-which-is-not. Would he enjoy being married to a woman as dull and proper as the Kate who delivers that marriage sermon? From all indications, no. Then can we conclude that Petruchio no less than Kate knowingly plays a false role in this marriage, the role of victorious tamer and complacent master? I think we can, but what does this tell us about him and about men in general?

It is Kate's submission to him which makes Petruchio a man, finally and indisputably. This is the action toward which the whole plot drives, and if we consider its significance for Petruchio and his fellows we realize that the myth of feminine weakness, which prescribes that women ought to or must inevitably submit to man's superior authority, masks a contrary myth: that only a woman has the power to authenticate a man, by acknowledging him *her* master. Petruchio's mind may change even as the moon, but what is important is that Kate confirm those changes; moreover, that she do so willingly and consciously. Such voluntary surrender is, paradoxically, part of the myth of female power, which assigns to woman the crucial responsibility for creating a mature and socially respectable man. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare reveals the dependency which underlies mastery, the strength behind submission. Truly, Petruchio is wedded to his Kate.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Robert Heilman, "Introduction," *The Taming of the Shrew* by William Shakespeare, ed. Robert Heilman, The Signet Classic Shakespeare (New York: New American Library, 1966), p. xxxii.
2. R. Warwick Bond, "Introduction," *The Taming of the Shrew* by William Shakespeare, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1904). Quoted by Robert Heilman, "*The Taming Untamed, or, The Return of the Shrew*," *MLQ*, XXVII (1966), 147-161.
3. Here are four examples of this viewpoint:
 - a) "But 'taming' is only a metaphor. We can describe the action just as well by saying that Petruchio cures Kate of chronic bad temper . . . more shrew than she, he 'kills her in her own humor.'" Richard Hosley, *The Pelican Shakespeare* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 17.
 - b) Muriel C. Bradbrook, "Dramatic Role as Social Image: a Study of *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Shakespeare-Jahrbuch*, XCIV (1958), pp. 132-150, states: "Though at one point it is suggested that 'he hath some meaning in his mad attire,' no one seems to disagree when Bianca sums up at the exit of the pair [Kate and Petruchio], 'Being mad herself, she's madly mated.' The central point, the knot of the play, is here" (p. 142).
 - c) In his *Shakespeare's Sexual Comedy: a Mirror for Lovers* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), Hugh Richmond characterizes Kate's behavior before the wedding as "obviously pathological," produced by "a mind close to breakdown." Thus, "her disintegrating personality seems to justify almost any kind of shock therapy. . . . Petruchio's physical violence is only a figure for Katherine's, and 'kills her in her own humor'" (pp. 90-91).
 - d) Heilman, "Introduction," p. xli: "Kate's great victory is, with Petruchio's help, over herself."
4. All quotations from *The Taming of the Shrew* are taken from the Signet edition, cited in note 1 above.
5. For a review of medieval shrew literature, see Katherine Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: a History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), pp. 88-93. Muriel Bradbrook, "Dramatic Role," pp. 134-138, discusses Tudor treatments of the shrew. For an example of shrew

literature contemporary with Shakespeare, see *Tom Tyler and his Wife* (ca. 1578), ed. Felix E. Schelling, *PMLA*, XV, no. 3 (1900), pp. 253-289. Strife, the hero's wife, humiliates and tortures him, forcing him "To serve like a knave, and live like a slave." His friend disguises himself as Tom and secures Strife's surrender immediately by beating her. However, when Tyler confesses that not he but another man did it, she turns on him again and resumes her tyranny.

6. Bradbrook, "Dramatic Role," p. 139.
7. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1949; rpt. New York: Bantam-Knopf, 1953), pp. 93-94.
8. George Hibbard, "The Taming of the Shrew: a Social Comedy," *Shakespearean Essays*, ed. Alwin Thaler and Norman Sanders, Special Number: 2, *Tennessee Studies in Literature* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1964), pp. 16-30. Hibbard's remarks on the financial aspects of marriage in the play are most helpful. He is more sensitive to Kate's position as woman and as marriage-commodity than any critic I have read.
9. In her first manifestation of violence, she torments Bianca only in response to Bianca's more underhanded treatment of her in the first scene, when she subtly lorded it over Kate by acting as though she were a martyr to her elder sister's failure to attract suitors. Actually, Bianca's confinement is not Kate's fault; it is the whim of their father. When Kate declares, "Her silence flouts me," she means that Bianca intends her ostentatiously submissive attitude as a slap at her vocally rebellious sister. Kate responds to Bianca's slyness with blows, an "unfeminine" but understandable outlet.
 After she breaks the lute on Hortensio's head, she strikes Petruchio, an outburst she could have avoided had she been able to think of an appropriately lewd rejoinder to his obscene remark, "What, with my tongue in your tail?" Invention fails her, as cunning later does when she fails to realize that Grumio, like his master, is only torturing her with the promise of food, and (in her last physical outburst) strikes him.
10. I am indebted to Lee Edwards for this comment.
11. Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective: the Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), p. 8.
12. Space does not allow me to compare the style and dramatic impact of Kate's and Petruchio's speech respectively. In quantitative terms, however, Petruchio speaks 564 lines in the play, Kate 207, less than half as many. In several scenes, notably IV. 1, Kate is conspicuously silent while her husband utters a volley of commands, oaths, and admonitory remarks.
13. Carroll Camden lists and summarizes the contents of such works in *The Elizabethan Woman* (Houston: University of Texas Press, 1952), pp. 61-75, 77-82. Katherine Rogers, *Troublesome Helpmate*, pp. 140-151, reviews Puritan treatises on marriage. Of the latter, two of the most easily obtainable are *A Preparative to Marriage* (1591) by Henry Smith, in his *Works*, ed. T. Fuller (Edinburgh: J. Nichol, 1866) vol. I, and "The Marriage Ring," by Jeremy Taylor, in *The Whole Works*, ed. R. Heber, rev. ed. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1862-5), vol. IV.
14. On this point I find myself in disagreement with Richard Henze, "Role Playing in *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Southern Humanities Review* 4 (1970), 231-40, who sees Kate as playing a succession of "complementary" roles at Petruchio's direction, culminating in the role of obedient wife which has by then become "natural" to her.

Kate's pose of submissive wife is one of many instances in which characters assume roles or identities not their own. Christopher Sly, Tranio and Lucentio, Hortensio, and the Pedant all take on false identities, whereas Kate, Bianca, and the Widow behave so as to conceal their true natures. This common element of "supposes" (so named from one of Shakespeare's sources, Gascoigne's play *Supposes*) has long been recognized as a major source of meaning in the play. In the context of the play's treatment of marriage, the fact that not only Kate and Petruchio but also the other two couples assume sex-determined poses which their true personalities belie lends greater weight to the idea that masculine and feminine roles in traditional marriage are false.

New Journal

A new quarterly, *Scholia Satyrice*, has begun publication at the University of South Florida under the editorship of Ralph Wyly. The journal will publish original satire, especially pieces spoofing learned lumber, pseudo-articles, gnarled footnotes, and similar happy infelicities, but will also include articles of general criticism, particularly those devoted to the "tradition of learned wit." Send manuscripts to the Editor, English Department, University of South Florida, Tampa.