

Shakespeare: Advocate for Women in The Taming of the Shrew

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When William Shakespeare makes a point, he seldom makes it in a straightforward manner. Instead, with carefully chosen words, he presents multiple layers of meaning that invite several possible interpretations. This is purposeful and politically expedient. As a playwright, who depends on a full theater to provide his living wages, he cannot afford to alienate his audience; however, despite the risk, Shakespeare chooses controversial themes. No literary theme has caused more political inflammation than the “querelle de femme, or ‘the woman question’,” (Flachmann 5). Religious leaders created contradictory views of women by simultaneously condemning Eve and revering the Virgin Mary. In the secular arena, Neoclassical scholars embraced the tenets of humanism, which proclaimed women inferior to men. The average couple, who lived during the Renaissance, incorporated bits and pieces of all the popular ideals, but the strong influence of the church and the embedded traditions of society supported a patriarchal position. Men exerted strong control over the women in their lives, and if these women resisted or complained, men labeled them shrews. Physically subdued, often a woman’s voice was her only weapon of defense, but her cries for help seldom reached sympathetic ears. The men supported each other to protect their own dominant power, and the women were helpless to give assistance to one another. Many popular ballads indicated “the approved remedy for a domineering wife was physical violence, the more ingenious and excruciating the better,” says Ann Barton in her introduction to Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* (138). Shakespeare does not support this violent treatment of women, nor does he walk through the streets of London campaigning for their better treatment. Instead, he writes a

comedy entitled *The Taming of the Shrew* and uses humor to gain the attention of his audience. Shakespeare develops the character Petruchio into a ludicrous example of a patriarchal husband and Katherina into the ultimate shrewish wife. By emphasizing the ridiculous nature of both Petruchio's extreme and abusive taming methods and Katherina's outrageous and shrewish behavior, Shakespeare cajoles the audience into reconsidering its ideas about and its treatment of women. Satire has always been a writer's tool for pointing out flaws in society, and Shakespeare skillfully uses this comedy to demonstrate the positive qualities of a respectful and affectionate relationship over one dominated by either a shrewish wife or an abusive husband.

There are several sources that likely contributed to the plot and themes of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. A character in the mystery plays, Mrs. Noah, is one possibility. Anne Barton says the following about Mrs. Noah and similar Renaissance women:

[Mrs. Noah was] that indomitable scold who would not leave her "gossips" and get into the ark at her husband's bidding even though the whole world was drowning in the Flood. Intractable, violent, and sharp-tongued wives, some of them fond of cuckolding their husbands as well as merely ordering them about, represented a familiar comic type in Tudor interludes and farces. (138)

A work with a similar title, *The Taming of a Shrew*, is another possible source, but there are no extant copies. The only proof of its existence is found in references to the work by other authors. Roman comedies by Plautus and Terence as well as popular ballads provided many additional examples of shrewish women (Barton 138). R. W. Maslen suggests that one possible source that has been largely overlooked is *The Image of Idleness*, an anonymously-written epistolary novel first published in 1555 (25). References that compare falconry and unconventional methods for taming shrewish women are present in both *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Image of Idleness*

circumstantially linking the two. Maslen and Barton agree that Shakespeare did not base *The Taming of the Shrew* on a single source but rather on this general body of popular misogynistic material.

Shakespeare may have taken his idea for the theme of *The Taming of the Shrew* from *The Image of Idleness*. Bawdin Bachelor in *The Image of Idleness* is similar to the character Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Michael Flachmann says the following about Bachelor's character and the theme of the novel:

The extended use of irony, which reveals Bachelor's many flaws, gives to the *Image* a double-edged satiric thrust. The work is of course, a satire on women, but it also ridicules men's attitudes toward women through the culpable persona of its overbearing narrator and his hackneyed advice on how to tame a wife. (7)

Petruchio is an actor not a narrator like Bachelor, but Shakespeare does, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, present a satire on the behavioral and attitudes of men and women toward each other.

Another possible contribution to *The Taming of the Shrew* by *The Image of Idleness* is Petruchio's idea that he should train his new bride the way a falconer trains a haggard, "a type of falcon that cannot be trained" (Smith, par. 28). In the novel, "Bachelor's recipe for domestic happiness, which is indebted to Vives' *The Office and Duty of an Husband* (1553), compares wives to hawks, who should be led by kindness and shrewd training to accept their husbands' proper authority" (qtd. in Flachmann 5). When Petruchio and Gremio use the falconer imagery in Shakespeare's play, they dehumanize the women. By comparing women to wild birds, Shakespeare emphasizes the cruel and unrealistic attitude that some men have toward women. In reference to Baptista's treatment of Bianca, Gremio says, "Why will you mew her [Bianca] up, / Signior Baptista, for this fiend [Katherina] of hell, / And make her [Bianca] bear the penance of

her [Katherina's] tongue?" (1.1.88-90). Mew is a falconer's term for caging a falcon, and Gremio is displeased that Baptista is treating his daughter like a caged bird. Petruchio is quite proud of himself when he employs his taming methods on Katherina the day of their wedding. The following lines are an excerpt from Petruchio's boastful soliloquy on taming his new bride:

Thus have I politicly begun my reign,
And 'tis my hope to end successfully.
My falcon now is sharp and passing empty,
And till she stoop, she must not be full-gorg'd, [. . .]
Another way I have to man my haggard,
To make her come, and know her keeper's call [. . .] (4.1.188-194)

Petruchio intends to employ his falconry methods until Katherina "stoops" in obedience to him. Shakespeare's emphasis on the falconry metaphor for taming women illustrates the low opinion that men held of them. The lines are satirically comical, but, on the other hand, they also wound the conscience of the rational person. Shakespeare also indicates how society hides behind the church to justify this cruel treatment of women when Petruchio says, "That all is done in reverend care of her" (4.1.204). Reverend is a word that is most often used to describe someone or something connected with the clergy. By associating this word with Katherina in the context of Petruchio's taming scheme, Shakespeare sends two messages: taming is beneficial for Katherina and the Church sanctions his methods. The falconry references borrowed from *The Image of Idleness* are effective components of Shakespeare's defense of women.

To effectively present a defense of women, Shakespeare must make Katherina a sympathetic character, or the audience will want to punish rather than defend her. At the same time, Shakespeare must make Katherina strong and extremely shrewish, or Petruchio's severe

taming methods will lose their satiric and entertaining comic qualities, becoming macabre and ghastly acts. Amazingly, Shakespeare strikes the proper balance. While showing enough of Katherina's shrewish behavior to prove that she deserves her derogatory moniker, he also shows a vulnerable side of her personality that is hidden beneath her blustering and blistering verbal blasts. Katherina's relationships with her immediate family prove to be Shakespeare's vehicle of choice to introduce the audience to the vulnerable and wounded young woman, cowering behind her shrewish armor. This vulnerable Katherina pulls on the heartstrings of the audience.

Katherina's behavior is so bad that when Baptista offers to allow Gremio to court her, Gremio replies, "To cart her rather; she's too rough for me" (1.1.55). Carting was a "form of public punishment in which a woman suspected of prostitution is carted through the streets and mocked," according to Gary Schneider in his article "The Public, the Private, and the Shaming of the Shrew" (par. 23). However, there is no question that Katherina is a chaste woman. Her shrewish behavior has insured her chastity, so this comment by Gremio is extremely painful to Katherina. She asks her father: "I pray you, sir, is it your will / To make a stale of me amongst these mates?" (1.1.57-58). According to the footnotes in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, a stale is a laughingstock or in this case a harlot. "Mates" takes on a double meaning of potential husbands and rude fellows. The painful truth is that Baptista does not defend Katherina; instead, he tells Katherina that she may stay with these abusive men as he sends Bianca into the protection of the house (1.1.74-101). Revealing her jealousy and hurt feelings, Katherina makes a mocking comment to her father: "Why, and I trust I may go too, may I not? / What shall I be appointed hours, as though (belike) / I knew not what to take and what to leave?" (1.1.102-4). Baptista is obviously neglectful of Katherina while he is protective of Bianca. Revealing this inequitable treatment, Shakespeare leads the audience to consider that Katherina has some justification for

her caustic responses.

The root cause of Katherina's shrewish behavior is unknown, but Shakespeare provides the circumstances for a plausible explanation. There is no mention of Baptista's wife, so it is likely that Katherina's mother is deceased. Bianca is the baby in the family, and Baptista appears to be more closely attached to her than he is to Katherina. If Baptista's wife died giving birth to Bianca or sometime shortly afterward, Baptista might have been more personally involved in Bianca's care than he had been in Katherina's. Naturally, as an immature child, Katherina would have been jealous of the attention that her baby sister received and would have adopted behavior patterns to get and maintain the attention of her father. The young Katherina would have thought that even negative attention was better than no attention, so once Katherina adopted this negative pattern of behavior, her father and the household staff would have labeled her a shrew. After receiving her label, Katherina would continue to fulfill the expectations of the adults around her. The negative patterns of behavior that had begun in her immediate family because she had no mother and lacked the attention of her father would be nurtured and brought to full maturity in public by society. Although the play does not provide information about Katherina's family history, through the interaction of the characters, Shakespeare shows a wounded woman, wrapped in a protective shell of shrewish behavior. This invitation to feel sympathy for Katherina does not demonstrate Shakespeare's approval for her shrewish deportment, but it does indicate that Shakespeare suggests her family and society have contributed to the circumstances that make her the shrew she is.

Petruchio recognizes that Katherina's shrewish behavior is a response to society, so he begins immediately to remove the reasons for her shrewish behavior. Deciding to "kill her with kindness," Petruchio makes a long speech proclaiming that he will say something positive for

every shrewish expression that Katherina utters (2.1.169-181). By implementing this technique, Shakespeare uses Petruchio to present his definition of the proper relationship between a husband and his wife. As Petruchio begins the process of defining this proper relationship, he encourages Katherina to be the kind of bride he wants by telling her she already possesses the desired qualities. Petruchio lets Katherina know that he has heard the ugly stories and rumors about her that are circulating around town, but he assures her that he does not believe any of them since he has met her personally (2.1.243-251). Since social opinion and position are important to Katherina, Petruchio intentionally hurts her when he tells her that the people in her community do not like her. On the other hand, Petruchio tells Katherina that it does not matter what society says about her because he knows that she is a wonderful person. Emphasizing his relationship to Katherina as positive and her relationship to the rest of society as negative, Petruchio shifts the focus of attention toward Katherina's personal relationship with him. Katherina does not have to fight for Petruchio's love and attention like she had to fight for Baptista's. Petruchio establishes that Katherina is highly regarded in this personal relationship, and the outsiders do not matter. In this context, Katherina has nothing to react against, but out of habit, she continues to challenge this strange suitor, Petruchio.

At their first meeting, Petruchio and Katherina engage in an energetic and emotionally charged verbal exchange. Katherina strikes Petruchio when her verbal attacks are ineffective. Generally, Katherina's words are effective artillery to keep her adversaries sufficiently subdued, but she has never met anyone like Petruchio. He tells her that he will cuff her if she hits him again. Stopping her immediately, Petruchio gains control of the situation, keeping their sparring verbal rather than letting it escalate into physical violence. By eliminating physical violence from the relationship, Petruchio protects Katherina, and as Petruchio protects Katherina's self-

respect and physical health, he also preserves their future physical relationship as one of fulfillment rather than one based on conquest through brute force.

Petruchio also establishes a pattern for the couple to engage in intellectual and provoking banter. Each has the opportunity to demonstrate quick wit through the turn of a phrase. This first conversation between Petruchio and Katherina is replete with puns and comical verbal gymnastics that provide the audience with a demonstration of equal intellects battling for supremacy (2.1.182-278). Shakespeare gives subtle hints of his defense of women throughout the play. For instance, during this first verbal exchange, Shakespeare refers to a traditional song, “The Notbrowne Mayde” (Breuer, par. 3). The song defends women against the charge that they are fickle. It is significant that Shakespeare does not choose to allude to one of the many popular misogynistic verses or songs of his day, but instead uses a song that comes to the defense of women. Petruchio says, “Kate like the hazel-twigg / Is straight and slender, and as brown in hue / As hazel-nuts, and sweeter than the kernels” (2.1.253-255) Horst Breuer in his article, “Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*,” says,

In the ballad, nutbrown is a byword for beauty, simplicity, loyalty, and strength of will. [...] Nutbrown is not only the color of Kate’s hair; it also suggests homeliness, vital energy, and a sweet, rich personality under the protective shell of outwardly forbidding behavior. (par. 3-4)

Breuer points out other parallels found when comparing the play and the ballad. “Kate’s deprivations in Petruchio’s ‘taming school’ resemble the impending distress of the outlawed couple in the ballad: rough diet, hard bedding, exposure to cold and rain, [and] separation from relatives and friends” (par 4). Petruchio recognizes that underneath her rough exterior is a woman with all the qualities that he wants. The difficulty is breaking and removing the shrewish

shell, and that is how Petruchio justifies using harsh methods on Katherina.

Shakespeare also addresses the question of hierarchy within the relationship through Petruchio's repeated use of the nickname, Kate. Manuel Sanchez Garcia, in his article "Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* 2.1.182-90," discusses the various meanings and connotations that derive from the word Kate during their verbal battle. One meaning is "choice viands; dainties, delicacies" (Garcia, par. 2). Viands are tasty foods. This dehumanizing characterization of Katherina is at least palatable if not sexual, but some of the other implied meanings are not so complimentary. This word is also associated with cat in the following ways, quoted by Garcia from the Oxford English Dictionary: "'a term of contempt for a human being; one who scratches like a cat; a spiteful or backbiting woman' (OED cat sb. 1.2a) and 'a prostitute (slang)' (OED cat sb. 1.2b)" (par. 2). Another connotation of the word connects Kate to a bird, particularly a finch. During the Renaissance, "finch" was a "term of endearment between lovers" (Garcia, par 3). Petruchio, a stranger, goes too far when he addresses Katherina in such a familiar way. Garcia also notes that the use of the nickname is "only suitable for contexts in which some kind of power is acknowledged by both the addresser and the addressee: for instance, an adult talking to a child, or an individual addressing a socially inferior person" (par. 4). Petruchio begins his first conversation with Katherina by calling her "Kate." This intimate act subjugates Katherina to Petruchio and is boorish and offensive. Barging into Katherina's home, Petruchio not only speaks with too much familiarity, but also he uses a term that exudes power, insults, and sexual connotations. Katherina has every reason to respond angrily to him, and she does with equal tone and ability. This first meeting prepares the audience for several significant verbal exchanges between Petruchio and Katherina that trace the development of their marital relationship.

After Petruchio dehumanizes Katherina to the level of a bird and a cat, she responds in kind by calling him a “moveable,” which is a piece of furniture, specifically a three-legged stool (2.1.197). She continues by calling him an ass, a buzzard, a craven, a crab, and a crab apple. An ass is a beast of burden, and many men treated women as such. A craven is a cock that will not fight, so she emasculates him with this sexual insult. Buzzard has the connotation of a fool, and by using this term, she discounts Petruchio’s intellect. Crabs pinch and hurt the people who handle them just as Petruchio hurts Katherina’s feelings. Shrewish women were often called crabs, so by using the term crab, Katherina places Petruchio on equal footing with herself. Anyone who has bitten into a crab apple knows that it is a sour fruit that produces an unpleasant taste that lingers long in the eater’s mouth. Katherina means that the bitterness Petruchio creates for her will remain long after his departure. Without saying men and women are equally intelligent, Shakespeare proves it is true to his audience through Katherina’s clever responses to Petruchio’s banter.

Shakespeare does more than prove Petruchio and Katherina are intellectual equals. He demonstrates the unfair way that society judges women. When Shakespeare presents a man who uses dehumanizing terms to describe a woman, it is her problem because she is inferior. On the other hand, when Katherina uses dehumanizing terms about Petruchio, it is still her problem because she is inferior. Shakespeare leads the audience to discover the unfairness of dehumanizing language directed toward men or women. When Katherina aims the dehumanizing remarks at Petruchio, the audience can hear the hurtful words with a different and more sympathetic understanding. Once the audience accepts that dehumanizing remarks about men are unfair, then it can also determine that it is unfair to dehumanize women with the same type of remarks. In this subtle way, Shakespeare illuminates the unfair negative opinion society

holds about women.

For Shakespeare's defense of women to work, after creating the shrewish but sympathetic character of Katherina, he must present Petruchio as an intense character who goes to unreasonable extremes with his methods of taming Katherina. One way that Shakespeare creates Petruchio's extreme character is by making the audience question Petruchio's sanity. When Petruchio and Grumio arrive in Padua, Grumio runs into town saying, "Help, [masters], help, my master is mad" (1.2.18). When Petruchio is late for the wedding, Katherina says, "No shame but mine. I must forsooth be forc'd / To give my hand oppos'd against my heart / Unto a mad-brain rudesby full of spleen / Who woo'd in haste, and means to wed at leisure" (3.2.8-11). Katherina believes that her father has promised her to a madman. Petruchio arrives for the wedding in ridiculous, unmatched, ragged clothes, which Baptista and Katherina find an embarrassment. Tranio defends Petruchio's behavior at first: "He [Petruchio] hath some meaning in his mad attire" (3.2.124). After the wedding, Tranio decides that both Katherina and Petruchio are mad: "Of all mad matches never was the like" (3.2.242). Gremio calls him a "mad-brain'd bridegroom," and Bianca says, "That being mad herself [Katherina], she's madly mated" (3.2.163; 3.2.243-244). Tranio plants the thought that Petruchio has a plan, but Petruchio's behavior is so bazaar that the audience has ambivalent feelings about him.

Petruchio's sanity is questioned further when Grumio arrives home before Katherina and Petruchio, full of tales about their journey. Grumio tells how Katherina's horse stumbles, falling into a miry place and landing on Katherina. Petruchio leaves Katherina under the horse while he beats Grumio for allowing Katherina's horse to stumble. Katherina manages to free herself and pulls Petruchio off of Gremio (4.1.72-84). Petruchio's behavior is so ridiculous that Curtis, another servant, says, "By this reck'ning [,] he is more shrew than she" (4.1.85) Peter, another

servant in Petruchio's household, says, "He kills her in her own humor" (4.1.180). Shakespeare uses the language of death to condemn Petruchio's harsh tactics. Murder is an immoral act, and so is using harsh methods to tame a wife. In this respect, Shakespeare indirectly says that Petruchio's shrewish behavior is that of someone who is criminally insane.

Thus, Shakespeare ties together the ideas of madness and shrewish behavior. In his soliloquy after arriving at his home with Katherina, Petruchio says, "And thus I'll curb her mad and headstrong humor" (4.1.209). Petruchio and Katherina have both been called mad and shrewish by each other and by other characters in the play. Shakespeare wants the audience to associate the shrewish behavior of Katherina and Petruchio with the condition of madness. Part of defining a proper relationship for a husband and wife is determining what it is not proper. Shakespeare indicates that a proper relationship between a husband and a wife does not include shrewish behavior, which is associated with insanity.

When Petruchio first arrives in Padua, he announces, "I come to wive it wealthily in Padua; / If wealthily, then happily in Padua" (1.2.75-76). There can be no mistake that according to Petruchio's words his first interest is money. A few lines later, Shakespeare refers to Geoffrey Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale* when Petruchio says he will marry a rich woman "[be] she as foul as Florentius love" (1.2.60). Sir Florent is the knight who promises to marry a foul old woman if she will tell him the answer to a riddle that will save his life. She correctly answers the riddle; the thing women want most is sovereignty. Sir Florent is extremely unhappy to be married to this foul woman until he grants her sovereignty, and she becomes his beautiful and faithful bride. While Petruchio contends that wealth is the key to happiness, he refers to this well-known tale about a knight who obtains happiness by giving his wife sovereignty. The relationship between the old woman and Sir Florent is one where each partner yields to the other. It is not money that

makes a happy marriage. Equity in the relationship is what makes a happy union, and Shakespeare suggests this subtly by having Petruchio associate himself with Chaucer's Florentius.

Petruchio says, "Crowns in my purse I have, and goods at home, / And so am come abroad to see the world" (1.2.57-58). When Petruchio discusses Katherina's dowry with Baptista, he says, "You knew my father well, and in him me, / Left soly heir to all his lands and goods, / Which I have bettered rather than decreas'd" (2.1.116-118). David W. Cole questions the truth of Petruchio's statement in his article, "Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*." Petruchio never pays for anything during the play. He arrives at the wedding in mismatched clothes that would not require a large cash investment, if any investment at all (3.2.43). When Petruchio sends the tailor away from his home, he tells Hortensio, his friend, to promise payment for the clothes he made for Katherina (4.3.163-164). The contrast between Petruchio's speech about money and his actual display of money is another element that directs attention of the audience to the issue of marrying for money. Petruchio's dubious monetary position also casts doubt on his character and makes the audience wonder if he is a proper suitor, thus, again eliciting sympathy for the "shrewish" Katherina.

Baptista appears to be so desperate to rid himself of Katherina that he does not care what kind of man Petruchio is. Katherina tells Baptista, "Call you me daughter? Now I promise you / You have show'd a tender fatherly regard, / To wish me wed to one half lunatic, / A madcap ruffian and a swearing Jack, / That think with oaths to face the matter out" (2.1.284-288). Baptista does not respond to Katherina. Instead, Baptista believes Petruchio when he says that he and Katherina agreed in private "[t]hat she shall still be cursed in company" (2.1.305). By telling Baptista this lie, Petruchio takes Katherina's voice away from her. Baptista will not

believe another word she speaks. At the same time, Petruchio defends Katherina to Baptista: “Father, ‘tis thus: yourself and all the world, / That talk’d of her, have talk’d amiss of her. / If she be curst, it is for policy” (2.1.290-292). Shakespeare keeps shifting the focus away from Katherina’s relationship with her family to the new relationship that is forming between Petruchio and herself. Katherina is in a vulnerable position. Baptista continues to reject Katherina while he promises her in marriage to a lunatic. Baptista’s lack of concern for Katherina’s happiness draws more sympathy from the audience. Shakespeare continues to develop the audience’s sympathy for Katherina through her relationships as well as other means. One of the other means is the symbolic use of clothes to enlist sympathy from the audience and to define the characters of the play.

The first time that clothes take on a symbolic meaning is when Petruchio arrives in town for the wedding. Baptista says, “Fie, doff this habit, shame to your estate, / An eye-sore to our solemn festival!” (3.2.100-101). Petruchio eventually replies, “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” (3.2.117-120). Dale G. Priest in his article, “Katherina’s Conversion in *The Taming of the Shrew*: A Theological Heuristic,” says, “I refer to his [Shakespeare’s] use of clothing as a teaching device” (par. 11). Petruchio teaches Katherina and everyone who attends the wedding that the material things they have are not as important as their personal relationships. Petruchio only seems to contradict his previously stated plan, to marry for money as Shakespeare uses Petruchio’s slovenly appearance and biting remarks to direct the audience’s attention to the relationship between the couple and away from the extravagant social spectacle that would normally surround their wedding day. Despite Petruchio’s remarks against material possessions, he collects a handsome dowry from

Baptista upon his marriage to Katherina, thus fulfilling his plan to marry for money.

Another time that clothing takes on a special significance is when the haberdasher and the tailor arrive with the new clothes that Petruchio has ordered for Katherina. Katherina wants to keep the hat that Petruchio has the haberdasher make for her. Katherina says, "I'll have no bigger, this doth fit the time, / And gentlewomen wear such caps as these" (4.3.69-70).

Petruchio replies, "When you are gentle, you shall have one too, / And not till then" (4.3.71-72).

Katherina's behavior is closely associated with the clothes. The insinuation is that Katherina's shrewish behavior can be removed like a set of old clothes and replaced by new, proper and gentle actions. After inspecting the cap, Petruchio examines a dress he ordered from the tailor for Katherina (4.3.86-91). Criticizing every fashionable feature, he protests most intensely about the slits that are cut in the sleeves. Petruchio compares the sleeves on the dress to the slits cut into the crust of an apple-tart. In both cases, the materials hidden by the outer coverings are revealed to the outside observers. When the outer fabric of the sleeve is cut away, beautifully colored lining materials puff through the slits, adding a delightful effect. When the crust of the apple-tart is pierced, the sweet aromatic filling peeks out, tantalizing the eye and tempting the tongue. Petruchio says, "What's this? a sleeve? 'tis like [a] demi-cannon. / What, up and down carv'd like an apple-tart? / Here's snip and nip and cut and slish and slash, / Like a censer in a barber's shop" (4.3.88-91). MacD. P. Jackson writes in his article, "Petruchio's Barber's Shop *The Taming of the Shrew*, IV.iii.91" that the word censer is incorrectly copied from the original text. Jackson says, "I suggest, therefore, that Petruchio should exclaim, 'Here's a snip and nip and cut and slish and slash / Like to a tonsure in a barber's shop'" (par. 7). According to Jackson,

Ann Thompson's is the standard gloss. Like other editors, she explains the

reference as to an incense-burner with holes in the lid, though she admits that the use of perforated fumigators in barber's shops of the time "is not supported by any other contemporary reference." ("Petruccio's Barber Shop," par. 2)

Tonsure is the word for haircut (Jackson, "Censor," par. 3). The symbolism has significant impact on Shakespeare's audience. The barber is the man who makes adjustments to the client's image, by shaping and controlling his outward appearance. The barber plays an important role in creating a socially acceptable image for his client. Like the barber, Petruccio influences Katherina's outward appearance by choosing her cap and dress, which determines the presentation she will make to the outside world. There is, however, an important difference in Petruccio's goal and that of the barber. The barber wants to create a beautiful external image, but Petruccio wants to reveal Katherina's good inner qualities. By utilizing clothing as a tool, Petruccio works to free and nurture Katherina's positive inner qualities.

In "Controlling Clothes, Manipulating Mates: Petruccio's Griselda," Margaret Rose Jaster considers apparel "a battle-site" in gender relations. Jaster says,

The considerable expenditures on apparel in this time period had the very real effect that the lady sported her husband's estate on her person; he was also responsible for her dressing within her class. [...] The very fact that the husband presents his bride with gifts of expensive clothing suggests a pecuniary on-upmanship between the father of the bride, who dowers his daughter, and the new husband, who expensively clothes her. (par. 5-6)

Petruccio resists playing this social game. First, he comes to the wedding in socially inappropriate clothes and refuses to change when Baptista confronts him. Later, Petruccio orders the tailor and haberdasher to make Katherina's new wardrobe; then he sends them away,

to teach Katherina that material things are insignificant. Petruchio says, “Well, come, my Kate, we will unto your father’s / Even in these honest mean habiliments; / Our purses shall be proud, our garments poor, / For ‘tis the mind that makes the body rich” (4.3.169-172). Petruchio takes full responsibility for their humble attire and tells Katherina to lay any shame on him (4.3.181). Shakespeare keeps shifting the focus away from society and onto the couple. Using the metaphor of clothing, Shakespeare defends Katherina by illustrating that underneath the shell that society has created is an honorable wife for Petruchio. Shakespeare makes certain that Katherina and Petruchio both dress in humble attire because Petruchio brings Katherina down only to a level equal with him, not beneath him.

Jaster compares Katherina to the character Griselda in “The Tale of the Marquis” from the *Decameron* by Boccaccio (1450-1457). Katherina is not passive and malleable like Griselda. Possessing a strong personality that defies male authority figures, Katherina shows a strong sense of independence as she battles for control over her life. Griselda, on the other hand, complies with all instructions from the Marquis without dissent. Because of these differences in their personalities, it appears that Griselda and Katherina are contrasting rather than comparable characters.

When Petruchio and Katherina arrive at Petruchio’s house, he does not let her eat or sleep. Making her circumstances worse, Petruchio often flies into rages and unmercifully beats the innocent servants in front of Katherina. Katherina even receives a sermon about continence on her wedding night (4.1.119-187). All of these events have to do with training Katherina to have self-control and showing Katherina her shrewish self using Petruchio as her mirror. Petruchio’s behavior is extreme and harsh, but he presents each deed as a loving act toward Katherina. According to Petruchio, nothing is good enough for Katherina, and if she cannot have

the best, she will have nothing. This taming method is a way to force Katherina to lower her expectations and to see how ridiculous shrewish behavior is. Katherina begins to plead for Petruchio to have mercy on the servants. She does not like to see innocent people punished. The inner compassion locked inside of Katherina begins to leak out as small acts of kindness. Petruchio's harsh methods begin to have positive results. Now it becomes more obvious that Katherina has the good qualities that Petruchio says she does.

There is a turning point for Katherina in the play, and it is like an epiphany. It is time for Petruchio and Katherina to return to Padua to visit Baptista (4.5.1-48). As they begin their journey, Petruchio tests Katherina by saying that the moon is beautiful when it is the sun that is shining. Katherina argues with him, and each time she does, Petruchio tells her they will go back home until she accepts what he says. Finally, Katherina decides that she will go along with whatever Petruchio says, and she does. The couple begin to play a verbal game with Petruchio leading and Katherina following his lead. This verbal game is not adversarial like that of their first meeting. The pair work together harmoniously for the first time. Their relationship is changed forever. Enjoying each other and working together each partner finds the experience rewarding, but the relationship still exists within the parameters of Shakespeare's patriarchal society. While the couple enjoys the verbal exchange, the game is strictly led by the husband. This is Shakespeare's example of the ideal relationship for a married couple.

Gary Schneider presents an article, "The Public, the Private, and the Shaming of the Shrew" stating,

For a woman to be publicized means to be confronted with the social role appropriate to her gender and class—one which is informed by patriarchy

and its social, economic, and political imperatives. The bulk of *The Taming of the Shrew*, in fact, bears on the publicizing of Kate. This publicizing effort is enacted by public ceremony and social ritual that, in the play, frequently revolve around marriage customs. (Schneider, par. 4)

When considering Schneider's argument, it is important to note that Petruchio avoids several public rituals and behaves unconventionally during others. Petruchio calls attention to himself and away from Katherina by dressing and behaving ridiculously at the wedding. When it is time for the wedding feast, Petruchio will not let Katherina stay, but makes her leave with him. Upon the couple's return to Padua, Petruchio makes certain that they are dressed in humble clothes rather than the traditional, conspicuous finery. Also, in the last scene of the play when Katherina offers to put her hands below Petruchio's feet, he substitutes a kiss for this act of submission. Petruchio makes a largely successful attempt to break away from social expectations, which include the publicizing of Katherina. Schneider takes his argument further to say, "That is, taming is accomplished in Petruchio's house not by acts that produce public shame, but by acts of severe asceticism—by private privation" (par. 32). This argument trades the metaphor of a falconer for the metaphor of an ascetic. Parallels can be made to asceticism with examples from the play such as the denial of sleep, food, sex, and extravagant clothing while living in an enclosed space, but falconry terms are used throughout the text, and, considering Petruchio's own statements, he views himself as a falconer not a religious instructor. Whether one sees Petruchio's taming as asceticism or falconry, Shakespeare uses Petruchio's actions to discount society and develop the personal relationship of the couple.

One of the most controversial scenes in the play is the last. In this scene Petruchio says, "Katherine, that cap of yours becomes you not; / Off with that bable, throw it under-foot"

(5.2.121-122). Ervin Beck, in his article “Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* 5.2.125-26,” characterizes the scene as follows: “Traditionally seen as a final sign of Katherine’s conditional subservience, Petruchio’s telling Katherine to remove her cap may instead be a sign that he thereby liberates her from subordination to him” (Beck, par. 2). Beck bases his argument on the church’s “tradition of women having their heads covered during worship—and even in everyday life—to show respect to Christ by showing respect to their husbands. Kate’s wearing of a cap stands for submission to her husband” (Beck, par. 7). Katherina does not remove her cap and throw it on the ground as an act of rebellion but as an act of obedience. Petruchio tells her to take off her cap; he elevates Katherina’s position in their relationship; he frees her from abject submission to him. Katherina’s response to Petruchio reflects an attitude of respect as opposed to one of resignation. After Petruchio tells Katherina to remove her cap, she presents a grand soliloquy, calling for wives to submit to their husbands in gratitude for all their husbands do for them. Beck’s interpretation is backed by Petruchio’s earlier reference to Sir Florent from Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath’s Tale.” In Chaucer’s prologue to the “Wife of Bath’s Tale,” Dame Alison, the Wife of Bath, tells how she gains the sovereignty over her fifth husband. Alison says one day her husband hit her, knocking her down. Believing that he has killed his wife, the husband is overcome by guilt and absolute panic. When he discovers that Alison is still alive, he spontaneously gives her sovereignty to mend their rift and to quell his grief (347). Later, in the fictional tale related by the Wife of Bath, Sir Florent cannot choose between an unfaithful, beautiful wife and a faithful but foul wife, so he lets his wife choose, giving her sovereignty out of frustration (356). The circumstances in *The Taming of the Shrew* are very different. Petruchio is so pleased when Katherina comes to him when he sends Grumio for her that he releases her from forced subservience. Petruchio gives Katherina sovereignty willingly and

spontaneously based on his feelings for her. When Katherina offers to put her hand under Petruchio's foot as a symbol of subservience to him, he asks her for a kiss instead (5.2.177-180). A bride putting her hands below her husband's foot to show subservience to him was a Renaissance bridal custom. George Walton Williams gives an example from Shakespeare's *The Second Part of Henry IV* describing the use of the hand under the foot indicating a state of equality rather than subservience: "This Percy was the man nearest my soul, / Who like a brother toil'd in my affairs, / And laid his love and life under my foot" (3.2.61-63). Williams goes on to say, "Shakespeare makes entirely clear that the grades that define ruler and subject—congruent to those that define husband and wife—are not incompatible with equality" (par. 9). Petruchio's substitution of a kiss symbolizes the more equitable and affectionate relationship that has developed between the pair.

Shakespeare does not condone shrewish behavior, but neither does he condone Petruchio's outrageous taming strategies. Petruchio's scheme to tame Katherina is as exaggerated and as comical as Katherina's shrewish behavior. By emphasizing the extreme nature of both characters, Shakespeare creates a great deal of humor in the play. After laughing at the ridiculous antics of both characters, the audience is better able to compromise its own views of the treatment of women in their society. Shakespeare's use of falconry to describe a good marriage relationship illustrates his support of patriarchal dominance, tempered by the necessity of considering the wife's well-being. The falconer (husband) must maintain control of the hawk (wife) without breaking her spirit. Although Shakespeare's ideal marriage is governed by the husband, it raises women to a level of respect that is above absolute robotic subjugation. Petruchio never strikes Katherina, nor does he allow her to strike him. In a day when some husbands routinely beat their wives, Petruchio's behavior is a significant improvement.

Shakespeare also demonstrates Petruchio's affection for Katherina by substituting a kiss for the "hand under the husband's foot" ritual. At the culmination of the play, Katherina displays respect for Petruchio, and Petruchio displays genuine affection for Katherina. Although Shakespeare's ideal marriage might not satisfy the liberated women of the twenty-first century, he succeeds in defending Renaissance women against the tyrannical subjugation that some patriarchal husbands imposed on their wives.

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Biography

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