

CHAPTER ONE

SEXUAL POLITICS IN *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW*

A Critical Analysis of Various Approaches

Stripped down to its bare bones, *The Taming of the Shrew* is a play about sexuality, gender and power. It would be far too simplistic to assume that the play is merely a light-hearted illustration of the age-old differences between the sexes, which itself, incidentally, has its roots in a myriad of issues so intertwined and interlinked that it would be almost impossible to isolate or separate these with complete accuracy. Although the play does indeed illustrate some aspects of the battle of the sexes, it also affords a rare and uniquely sensitive insight into the underlying conflicts inherent in the struggle. The best one can reasonably hope to do is to take a close look at the tangle and identify the most crucial contributive factors in an objective manner so as to gain a clear picture of the situation as it stands.

Critical opinion of *The Taming of the Shrew* spans a vast and varied spectrum, depending mainly upon gender-specific ideas of particular schools of thought, both classical and modern. Some of these are still considered viable, and there are some which have since been dismissed as manifestations of old-fashioned sexism but which have the potential to yield valuable insights upon the male-female relationship after attention and analysis. Then, of course, there are the critical analyses which are truly worthy of the name, oftentimes holding forth

on widely differing opinions, but always brilliantly incisive, beautifully substantiated and so well-argued that the reader inevitably finds himself agreeing with every word despite the fact that most of them flatly contradict each other.

Interestingly enough, although some of these views pick one or two specific tangents to focus upon, a comparison of male and female critical analysis of *The Taming of the Shrew* shows that both of these tend to fall together into two main catchments of opinion, despite several original angles on various aspects of the play. Not surprisingly, these two most common opinions are centred upon the crucial critical controversy surrounding the moral argument of the play – is *The Taming of the Shrew* about male supremacy or is it actually a sly dig at male chauvinism? Freedman categorizes this diverging fork nicely:

'Whether Kate is a shrew or merely a misunderstood young woman, whether Petruchio is a bully or a philosopher, whether the play upholds or undermines degree, is farce or philosophical comedy..... all are matters of heated debate in Shakespearean scholarship. For those critics who take Kate's final speech and Petruchio's bullying at face value, the characters are rather stereotypical, the moral is clearly in favour of male supremacy, and the genre is closer to farce. Others read the characters as more realistic, the genre as closer to comedy, and the argument as an ironic, if veiled, attack on a doctrine of male superiority. Whether they write about plot, characters, argument, genre or structure, critics routinely adopt one of two diametrically opposed positions in this play.' (1991:119)

Indeed, contrary to common expectations, there does not seem to be an exclusively feminine view or an exclusively masculine one, despite the fact that there are variations on similar themes. Both male and female critics generally seem to pick one or the other of these two standpoints upon which they then base their arguments and then usually make one or two original contributions upon the matter. This perhaps serves to suggest that although the gender of the critic plays an important role in his world-view, gender-bias in itself does not seem to

preempt reasonably objective criticism of the work of a male playwright whose artistry seemed to have transcended gender in pursuit of shared humanity.

However, while the lion's share of literary criticism on *The Taming of The Shrew* falls into these two widely-differing arguments, it must be mentioned at the outset that there is yet another line of thinking within which this diverging fork of critical opinion is somewhat united. Although much less popular than the two general stands mentioned before, a few critics have seen the patriarchal elements of the play to be both upheld as well as criticized. The play is both deadly serious as well as farcically comic, the characters are individual as well as symbolic, and Shakespeare seems to have known exactly what he was doing in the confusing composition of reality in farcical circumstances. Nevertheless, as before, while there are slight differences of interpretation from critic to critic, these opinions have been rather haphazard in terms of the overall intent of the play. Also, there has not been an in-depth justification of Shakespeare's shrew-taming or the final capitulation of the shrew. This I have tried to remedy in the course of explaining my argument for this dissertation.

In this part of my study on *The Taming of the Shrew*, I have attempted to provide a clear cross-section of popular critical opinion (as well as not-so-popular critical opinion) with some comments on issues of sexuality and the politics of male-female relationships in the play. I have also clarified standpoints, made observations or vouchsafed opinions on many of the views raised as well as arrived at certain conclusions that have a direct bearing upon the overall direction of this dissertation.

The Shrew Upon the Stage

Keeping in mind that Shakespeare wrote his plays to be witnessed as live performances on stage as opposed to being laboriously perused in dingy student hovels, the interpretation of the play by the stage-director and lead actors is crucial to the message delivered to the audience. Consequently, the performance history of *The Taming of the Shrew* reflects the ambivalence it has engendered in those who have in one way or another tried to make sense of it. Shakespeare's original play was popular during his lifetime, but subsequently only much-altered versions were successful throughout the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries.

According to Bevington, whose account of the play's performance history is both brief and comprehensive, 'these transformations were probably a response to the play's uncanny ability to make audiences of any era uncomfortable with its presentation of the war of the sexes' (1988:xxvii). Since the transformations, such as they were, were mainly effected by men who at that time monopolized the conception and production of plays, the performance of the actors and the concurrent message received by the audience was largely due to their individual opinions about the acceptability of the subject matter. And, generally, it was deemed that Shakespeare's original was either too shocking or did not seem likely to be accepted by the general public.

Indeed, the shock-factor effect of *The Taming of the Shrew* upon audiences may be considered its trademark. In fact, Shakespeare's play provoked an answer during his own lifetime, written by Fletcher somewhere between 1604 and 1617, entitled *The Woman's Prize; or The Tamer Tamed*, in which Petruchio

is given a dose of his own taming medicine by his second wife and subsequently becomes a docile husband (Morris 1981:88), which in itself shows that even Elizabethan audiences were not insensible to the offensive potential of the play and thus would likely relish a little 'tit for tat'.

Without going into unnecessary and exhaustive detail, a summary of the variety of changes made to Shakespeare's original, which was itself based on a crass folk-tale - and performed as variations on the theme between the 16th century till the present day - displays the lengths to which directors would go to replace so-called unsuitable elements with apparently acceptable ones; a verbally-abusive woman is subjected to brutal physical abuse by her husband (reminiscent of a popular English poem which was one of many precursors to the play¹), as well as various other versions in which the husband displays extreme misogyny in addition to unwonted sadism and the wife is terrified into submission, thence to lead a life of cowering humiliation; as well as adaptations which allow Petruchio his outward victory but hint at either rebellion and fulminating fury in the erstwhile shrew's breast after her model-wife speech or a manipulative mockery in her capitulation. It has also been presented as a totally unreal comedic farce, robbing the taming and surrender of Katharina of any potential offence by calling it a jest. In many cases, these elements are combined in different interpretations of the play.

Such frantic attempts at restructuring a play written in the 16th century by a much-acclaimed playwright illustrate just how much of a puzzle it really was (and still is) and how much potential it had to offend. Even comparatively recent productions, with some notable exceptions, have adapted the original to some

¹ A ballad called *A Merry Jest of a Shrewd and Curst Wife Lapped in Morel's Skin* (printed c.1550) where the shrew's husband flogs her bloody and wraps her in the salted skin of a dead horse. See Bevington (Bantam introduction, 1988:xxiv) for further details.

degree with additions of speech and gesture in order to make it more acceptable to modern audiences with modern conceptions of sexual political correctness.

It has been argued that Shakespeare's original play may also have had overtures of different interpretation via the delivery of certain lines by the lead role-players while not overtly stating these as stage directions in the written version. For instance, the play could be performed with Katharina's final speech delivered in a slight tone of mockery, or with a hint towards a secret pact between her husband and herself, or with a barely-suppressed anger for being forced into such a patently trumped-up speech in public, or alternatively, it could be delivered with perfect and startling sincerity.

Each of these approaches have been employed in various productions in an attempt to make sense of what is, in effect, 'something of a problem play' (Bevington 1988:xxx), since it is not conclusively known what options, if any, Shakespeare himself employed for the stage management of the lead roles of Petruchio and Katharina. It stands to reason, however, that the play itself was most probably acted out exactly according to the original text during Shakespeare's time since the apparent confusion regarding the sincerity of the sudden surrender of the shrew, in light of such shabby treatment by her husband, was possibly due to the fact that nobody could make sense of the whys and wherefores of the whole thing, ergo the spasmodic birth of the various adaptations and interpretations of the play discussed previously.

What was Shakespeare's original intention? Can this be ascertained from clues in the text, or will any attempt to rationalize the implications of such findings be doomed to be instantly pegged as pure conjecture? If the original intention is seen at first glance to be unacceptable in today's modern world, can

it be explained and clarified in such a manner as to remove all doubts concerning the timeless relevance of the play and restore our faith in Shakespeare as an uncannily accurate judge of human nature as he has plainly shown himself to be in all his other plays? To ascertain these things, it is necessary to examine and assimilate the patterns of male and female reaction to the stormy courtship of the shrew and her self-appointed tamer in a reasonable and logical way so that they convey a meaningful tale.

The Shrew as a Target of Misogynistic Farce

One important issue to be dealt with is the question of misogyny. On the surface, it seems unlikely that the play is anything more than an exercise in affirming a patriarchal system that is suddenly threatened by a woman's voice. By eliminating that voice by conventional means – that is, by marriage to a man who thwarts female rebellion in the name of righteousness – this threat is removed, hence resulting in the reinforcement of masculine superiority and feminine inferiority. Penny Gay remarks that the play 'enacts the defeat of the threat of the woman's revolt', but does it in a comic form with apparent good humour, thus offering 'the audience the chance to revel in and reinforce their misogyny while at the same time feeling good' (1994:86). Concurrently, she says, the play argues that cruel treatment is necessary for the shrew's own good in order to mould her into becoming a compliant victim of patriarchal society. Gay feels that the play is merely a medieval treatise on the woman's place in the Elizabethan world, and that it is 'worth questioning if [it] would still be in the

dramatic repertoire if it did not have the magic name "Shakespeare" attached to it' (1994:86).

This is exactly the kind of simplistic viewpoint accredited to some feminists that is so blinded by surface appearance that it precludes insight into the very valid values of the play. Of course, it is easy to see why so many critics have labelled the play as medieval chauvinism. Petruchio announces his intention to marry for money, marries a woman whose father would pay good money to get her off his hands, shows up late for the wedding wearing a clown-like ensemble, hits the priest as he marries them, denies his wife her wedding reception, allows her to be mud-trampled on the way home, starves her and stops her from sleeping, dangles pretty clothes before her and buys her none, and forces her to agree to every word he says despite the fact that he speaks nonsense, thereby turning her in the end into a model wife.

If this ridiculous tale sounds completely unlikely for a playwright of Shakespeare's calibre to produce without hoping to be laughed off stage, that is because it is. It cannot be denied that this play is hilariously funny. It is also, however, offering a lot more than mere amusement, and if we assume that the surface humour of the play is tantamount to its substance, we are denying ourselves the opportunity of truly understanding it. In much the same way, we cannot tag the play as anti-women just because it appears to oppress Kate in the name of social order.

To opine that Shakespeare is a misogynist because of *The Taming of the Shrew* is to ignore the scintillating wit of Portia, the intelligence of Rosalind, the maturity of Juliet, the melancholy of Ophelia and, in short, to deny every beautifully crafted female character ever brought to life by his pen. Indeed, if the

play has been interpreted as a boorish exercise in brainwashing an unconventional woman so that she panders to her lord and master forevermore after having been psychologically and physically forced into it, it is only because of shortsightedness on the part of the critic and none on the part of the playwright. If the quality of the women characters in his other plays do not validate Shakespeare and hint at a far deeper meaning below the surface frivolity of the play, nothing does. The *apparently* misogynistic elements of the play can only be construed as such by misogynist directors and critics, who read into Petruchio's actions what they themselves would like to believe.

Nevertheless, it goes without saying that the outwardly harsh-appearing taming of a beautiful, spirited woman by an arrogantly cocky man, who subjects her to deprivation in order to train her like an animal to be the kind of trophy-wife that society demands, rightly goes against the grain. Or is Kate every bit an unpleasant as she seems? Champion's opinion on what he identifies as one-dimensional characters is uncompromising: 'Petruchio is the same pompous and egocentric ass at the end of the play as he gloats over his wife's obedience.....Nor has Kate changed one tittle! To be sure, she no longer flouts her shrewishness before Petruchio. But, far from conquering it, she has merely redirected it for greater effect' (1970:40). How accurate is this overgeneralism? It must be remembered that character development within his plays has always characterized Shakespeare's work, so why should this play be any different?

In order to justify Petruchio's behaviour and Katharina's final docility, *The Taming of the Shrew* has been classed as a comedic farce. Citing the play-within-a-play motif, Sly's unreal situation in the Induction is said to foreshadow the unreality of the shrew taming, thus freeing the audience to enjoy the

ridiculously funny aspects of slapstick humour employed at various intervals throughout the play. If Petruchio and Katharina are unreal characters, the violence and humiliation of the taming can be downplayed to the point of fantasy, as can the offensive aspects of the shrew's submission to male authority. These aspects of male fantasy have strong links towards pornography, in which female sex objects are devoid of personality and function only as sexual receptacles of male lust. Pornography may be seen as a realm of representation rather than literal reality which allows violence against women 'precisely because men feel anxious and defensive about their own sexualities' (Bristow 1997:161). *Interpreted this way, the play then carries no real significance except as an outlet for hen-pecked husbands to relieve their feelings in an all-male enjoyment of female discomfiture.* As Thompson remarks, 'if we classify *The Shrew* as a farce we can stop apologizing for it' since its essential procedure is to deal with people as if they have no normality of feeling, which basically is the line of argument used to justify sadistic pornography (1984:26).

Seen in this light, adapters of the play could exaggerate the portrayal of aggression between the sexes to sadistic degrees in comparative safety, since the play itself appears completely farcical – which is indeed what many directors have done in the hope of lending credence to it. As Bevington notes, in subsequent adaptations, 'Shakespeare's portrayal of sexual warfare is pushed both toward further brutalizing the misogynistic elements and toward giving the woman a chance to get back at her male tormentor' (1988:xxviii). Hence the production of a number of horribly sadistic versions where the male triumphs in brutality and the defeated woman champs vainly at the bit to be revenged, thus satisfying the male fantasy of sexual domination and control. The threatened

rebellion of the 'tamed' woman only heightens the sexual enjoyment for the man, rather in the fashion of rape as a form of sexual pleasure in which the victim struggles vainly against her assailant.

Some note-worthy examples of such perversions of Shakespeare's play are John Lacy's *Sauny the Scot* and James Worsdale's *A Cure for a Scold*, in both of which Petruchio threatens to whip Kate, pull out her teeth, and actually ties her up until she unwillingly submits to him despite simultaneously swearing to retaliate if given the chance. In David Garrick's popular *Catherine and Petruchio*, the male protagonist has a whip and the encounters between the lovers are savagely violent, provoking Gervinus into commenting that the acting reflected a coarse and clumsy extravagance and that Garrick had debased the story of Petruchio and his shrew into a 'concluding farce, with all the disgusting overloadings of vulgar buffoonery, even after the genuine play...was received with applause' (Gervinus 1850 in Halliday 1963:147). The 'genuine play' referred to was one of the rare faithful productions of Shakespeare's original by Benjamin Webster in 1844, which reflected a remarkable degree of sincerity in its presentation. This interesting fact seems to strengthen the probability that Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* was not originally meant as a misogynistic or farcical joke. The shrew and her tamer were probably crafted as completely sincere characters in a genuine environment merely *disguised* as farce or which employed farce as a vehicle to convey a purpose, which the audience was meant to eventually realize.

However, the idea of the comic farce excuses so much of the objectionable behaviour of its male protagonist that many critics have accepted, if not completely then to some degree, the unreality of the treatment of Katharina

as either a relic of a bygone age in which women were traded as commodities and treated as chattels or as a misogynistic joke in less-than-pristine taste. Heilman, for instance, although acknowledging that the characters of Petruchio and Kate seem to be imaginatively and wittily drawn, insists that the play is a straightforward farce regarding the taming of a shrewish woman and nothing more than that (1966:147-161). According to Donovan, 'the shrew is a stock-figure of jest-book and fable, and Petruchio's cure for Katharina reflects all the crudeness of the age in its outlook on women and their position' (1962:xx). This seems to be a categorical denial of the authenticity of the two main characters as genuine reflections of man and woman, let alone as individual personalities. It also assumes without much proof that Elizabethan audiences would have taken shrew taming as a matter of course, which I sincerely doubt in light of the aforementioned Fletcher's prompt sequel. Donovan also makes it very clear that he feels a certain non-serious mind-set is necessary to enjoy the play as it stands.

'Indeed the humour and the virtue of this play depend so much on its typical attitude to women, on its bygone manners, and out-worn standards of fun, that if we wish to appreciate it properly we must read it in the spirit and from the point of view in which it was written. Judged by any other estimate the conduct of Katharina and her tamer cannot but offend alike against good sense and good taste and strain even the most willing "suspension of disbelief". ...[We] cannot but admire [Petruchio's] unquenchable high spirits, his high-handedness and brazen effrontery, and the unflagging zest with which he keeps up his joke and pursues it, unrelenting, to the appointed end. ...We must not ask ourselves whether this is how a gentleman ever did, does, or should, treat a lady, for they are, surely, not questions which Shakespeare meant to raise. We must take Petruchio's taming as an amusing and elaborately dramatized "merry geste" based on the ancient antagonism of the sexes, which is a theme for humour of which we shall never hear the end.' (1962:xxii, xxviii)

This, I feel, is a cop-out of the first water. It conveniently tags the play as an enjoyable joke that seems to be an uncharacteristic aberration of Shakespeare's usual quality of work, and precludes any possibility of deeper

meaning in the play due to its farcical appearance. Any hint of sound judgement, development of character, sexually significant behaviour or even common humanity on the part of the shrew and her husband are dismissed out of hand. While Donovan admits that the wronged Katharina deserves sympathy, he thinks that she is drawn to Petruchio because her 'usual savage bluntness' has little effect on him and because he saves her 'from being what she dreads most to be - a laughingstock' by finally arriving for the wedding. He avers that her 'shrewishness was not in grain', 'her independence and power of resistance give way' when faced with 'the mingled bludgeonings and pinpricks' of the tamer's 'cure', plus the fact that she has fallen in love with him (1962:xxvi). Is this really the case?

One wonders why Kate should be so remarkably grateful to be saved from being a laughingstock when it was Petruchio himself who put her in the situation in the first place. It also seems strange that Kate the shrew should be so concerned about appearances when she is already the laughingstock of Padua for her very shrewishness. In a rare moment of insight, Donovan accurately describes her as a 'woman of a forceful personality and quick intellect who knows her own worth and is embittered to see herself undervalued', whose 'nature is soured by a long course of suppression and misunderstanding' (1962:xxv-xxvi). Considering this, it seems most unlikely that such a woman would be emotionally weak enough to succumb to a mere few days of physical discomfort to such an extent that she would sacrifice all the principles behind the adoption of her shrewishness to suddenly become an ideal wife. The taming itself was neither long enough nor hard enough, nor the woman weak enough, to account for this.

Additionally, if she resented him, the shrew described would be far more likely to bide her time until she could retaliate in kind to Petruchio's taming, and she would certainly have taken her chance to utterly humiliate him in the final scene. Falling in love is a poor excuse for the excusing of the taming. The clever Katharina would surely scorn to be so manipulated by her feelings for a man who does not merit them. In any case, she certainly could not fall in love with an unworthy man, far less an unworthy one who treats her badly. Donovan presents an inaccurate picture of a shrew who is tired of shrewishness and longs to settle down, this making her receptive to subsequent taming. This view undermines Kate's whole life and her very real reasons for being a shrew. He affords general reasons for her shrewishness, but does not present a resolution to her just anger. In my opinion, this is an inadequate assessment of the play. People do not simply stop being angry about something that they are perfectly right to be angry about without a very, very good reason.

Pettet echoes an almost identical opinion to Donovan, but adds that domestic violence was probably common in the days of the 16th century and should be, thus, accepted as par for the course. According to him, 'we can regard the shrew-taming as a crude breath of social reality blowing for a moment into the fanciful and idealistic world of Shakespeare's comedy', since in Elizabethan times wife-beating was prevalent. He adds that 'these problems need not engage us deeply here' because 'the farcical and unsentimental episode of shrew-taming is as essentially classical in spirit as it is foreign to the temper of the main body of Shakespeare's comedy' (1949:74). Again, there seems to be no apparent seriousness to the shrew taming, and character development is precluded without

a doubt. Farce is equated with meaninglessness. The play, then, is again labelled as nothing more than a very funny joke in the taste of the era.

Nevertheless, should the possibility of total farce and a completely superficial play be rejected, there are limited options to viewing *The Taming of the Shrew*. If one takes the play even semi-seriously, there then must be an excellent reason behind Kate's capitulation. This issue may be approached from a variety of angles, the most common of which is to work upon the assumption that Kate does not mean a word of the final speech but has a hidden agenda to its delivery. As to what precisely this hidden agenda is, again becomes a matter for argument.

The Shrew That Mocked

Some directors have interpreted Kate's final speech to be an intelligent and subtle piece of mockery. As Bevington comments, as early as in 1908 and 1914, Kate's famous obedience speech was delivered 'with a mocking suggestion of a private understanding between her and her husband' (1988:xxix). More recently, actresses like Meryl Streep and Vanessa Redgrave have injected irony into their tone, giving rise to common speculations that Katharina chooses to obey Petruchio because she loves him, rather than acknowledging his mastery over her. Her speech is thus made tongue-in-cheek, either as part of a game or to mischievously present an ideal vision of a perfectly submissive wife to her interested audience. Since games playing features strongly in the play, this is a reasonably likely explanation for it, and one commonly accepted. Not

surprisingly, rather bizarre interpretations of Kate's elegy on wifehood have also been made, such as the opinion that making such a 'grovelling and submissive speech can actually give her a special new sensual kick' (quoted in Thompson 1984:24). This is far-fetched, to say the least, although there are indeed various sexual implications to Kate's final speech.

Some productions have altered or added to Petruchio's behaviour – usually demonstrating that Kate's submission is appreciated but not required, and sometimes hilariously reacting with raised eyebrows to the extolling of his apparent manly virtues during the ex-shrew's speech – to add to its credibility with a modern audience. While these efforts highlight the romantic interpretations of the play by focusing upon mutual love as the motivating factor, they hint that the taming of the shrew was successful only because the shrew pretends to be tame in public, but promises to be as wild as ever in private. Whether Petruchio is sublimely unaware of this since he is completely hoodwinked by his shrewd wife, or whether he is well aware of her duplicity and secretly happy about it, is also another issue which is much played about with on the stage.

Some productions downplay the offensiveness of the taming by making it abundantly clear that the two protagonists fall in love with each other early on in the play. Thus, when Kate is insincere in her final speech, it merely seems that she loves him and therefore is willing to humour his ego although matters are less oriented around the superior male-subordinate female concept and are more focused on equal love and respect than they appear to be. This, then, justifies her good-humoured deceit in professing total subjection to him, since the condition of the marriage is 'ideal' at that point. Also, this situation has great potential for

humour (from a stage-production point of view) and is more in keeping with modern sensibilities since the woman has not been blindsided and browbeaten into obedience but has fallen in love instead, and thus looks after the health of the relationship by wisely feigning submission while maintaining power in the relationship.

In the 1929 film version of the play, Mary Pickford set the precedent for ambiguous or ironic performances by contradicting Kate's famous advice to wives with an expressive wink (*Daily News*:15 November 1929), which hints that the speech is made to please Petruchio and satisfy his male ego in front of his friends. Kate herself demonstrates her mastery of the situation by pretending to profess servitude and submission to her man while simultaneously showcasing her adept handling of him to the women. According to Thompson, Margaret Webster argued thirteen years after Pickford's Kate that 'Katherina's delivery of this speech should be essentially ironic', finding a supporter in H.C. Goddard who saw the play as an example of how a woman could dominate her husband as long as she tricked him into believing that he was dominating her (cited in Thompson 1984:38). Without the irony, they maintain that the play is totally unacceptable. Bloom also subscribes to this opinion, claiming that the final speech must be acted skillfully to project the delicious irony of Kate's undersong, 'for she is advising women how to rule absolutely while feigning obedience' (1998:33). This take on the climactic final scene prompts one to wonder, however, if such a course of action is morally superior to outward rebellion.

This idea of the insincere final speech is rather popular among some feminists who see some measure of Kate's self-respect – robbed through the

indignity of the taming – returned to her via this shift in power at the climax of the play. Various degrees of insincerity were of course employed during different productions of the play, ranging from the good-natured tongue-in-cheek performance by Sian Phillips in 1960 to the sarcastic Joan Plowright in 1972 to the bitter resentment of Paola Dionisotti's 1978 Bogdanov-directed performance. In fact, according to Dionisotti herself, the bitter submission of her Kate shocked and dismayed Petruchio in that production, bereaving him of any triumph because he realized too late that this was not the kind of victory he really wanted, leaving them both 'two very lonely people' (in Gay 1994:110).

Kahn, however, has a slightly different take on this theme, believing that the play is a satire on the male urge to dominate and the female craft of controlling these would-be controllers. Male supremacy is portrayed as absurd, illustrated especially when Petruchio insists that the sun is the moon and the old man a virgin girl, compelling Kate – in self-defence – to mock him with her total and utter agreement since he surely knows that she does not and cannot truly agree with nonsense. (Happiness, however, seems unlikely if such idiocy is the basis of the relationship.) Kahn preempts any such conclusions concerning the emptiness of such a farcical marriage by opining that Petruchio's maleness actually desires outward obedience and inner rebellion.

'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 remains *untamed*, even in her subjection' (Kahn 1981:117).

Along the same lines, Kahn concludes that Petruchio knows Kate's duplicity, even encourages it, and enjoys being married to her. Both play false roles in the marriage – at least to the public eye – he fakes being a complacent lord and master and she fakes being an adoring submissive wife. This hints that

their marriage is far more effervescent and interesting, not to mention erotically stimulating, than they want the stereotypical world to guess at, thus they both hide behind a mask of social ideals.

Novel as this idea may be, and interesting as an assumption, it is rather unlikely that two intelligent people – as Shakespeare has clearly shown his protagonists to be despite the pervasive farcical atmosphere of the play – should thus kowtow to a system which both secretly deplore simply to keep up social appearances. One's respect for the integrity of both Petruchio and Kate takes a severe dip at such a fear to acknowledge the right of the matter, if such it is. Also, Kahn's interpretation of the commonly-acknowledged game-playing between the tamer and the shrew seems to be rather far-fetched for something so basically simple. It is far likelier that Kate realizes that Petruchio is playing a game and bends her mind to ascertaining the rules governing it, after which she joins in with gusto! Another valid point is that Kate, untamed, is profoundly unhappy. Does this state remain within her open-secret feigned submission, bearing in mind that she is setting the precedent for the rest of her married life?

The Sincere Shrew

'Kate's long speech of feminine submission is not primarily ironic – a morally obnoxious notion that would forbid us to admire domination based on honest force while sanctioning manipulation based on guile.'

(West 1974:71)

On the other hand, if acknowledging that Katharina was in fact completely sincere in her acknowledgement of Petruchio's mastery, one may

completely spurn the play as an exercise in male chauvinism and a Neanderthal-like abuse of physical power. As George Bernard Shaw famously declared, it then seems to be only praiseworthy because of its realistic portrayal of an admittedly arrogant but good-humoured man, but otherwise 'altogether disgusting to the modern sensibility', and an experience through which 'no man with any decency of feeling can [sit out] in the company of a woman without being extremely ashamed of the lord-of-creation moral implied' (1961:188). Oddly enough, Shaw found the actual taming process 'quite bearable, because the selfishness of the man is healthily goodhumoured and untainted by wanton cruelty, and it is good for the shrew to encounter a man like that and be brought to her senses' (1961:197), but was appalled by the submission speech.

Similarly, in 1978, *The Guardian* reviewer Michael Billington called it a 'barbaric and disgusting' play which should be either censored or jettisoned, but praised director Michael Bogdanov's emphasis on its 'moral and physical ugliness' by making Kate deliver her final speech in barely-veiled resentment as the men listened in smug complacency, therefore highlighting that the content of that speech is completely insincere and said merely to conform to an otherwise intolerable situation (Bevington 1988:xxx, Thompson 1984:17). Kate therefore is wisely adapting to such a situation to further her own interests and not because she is truly concurring with anything she is saying. Charles Marowitz's adaptation of the play called *The Shrew* was a chillingly prophetic interpretation taken along the same lines and carried further, in which Katharina is brainwashed, raped and driven mad by Petruchio, after which she mechanically recites her speech on submission as if by rote (Bevington 1988:xxx, Thompson 1984:24).

Freedman holds that the play is completely misogynistic in that it casts a rightly rebellious woman as the cause of the ills of an oppressive patriarchal system instead of recognizing her anger as a symptom against a seriously defective hierarchy.

‘Like the misogynistic farces upon which it is modeled, *The Taming of the Shrew* blames and punishes woman. It merely offers new tactics of punishment and domination, replacing physical violence with double-binding mind-games, deprivation of food and sleep, and emotional hypnosis. ... As disturbing as Kate’s taming is the way in which she is portrayed as happily tamed and actively spreading the practice of her indoctrination. The play renders woman into an apologist for the phallogentric system that oppresses her’ (1991:134).

According to Freedman, the play compounds its crime by making Kate exchange one yoke for another – ‘she hates not men but less ‘masculine’ men than Petruchio; hates not women but less ‘feminine’ women than herself; hates not rules but those that contradict Petruchio’s. She is still the naïve opponent of hypocrisy, the unwitting pawn in a much larger game, the scapegoat for a failing social order’ (1991:134). Freedman’s opinion of Kate seems to be that she is very naïve, easily indoctrinated, and completely taken in with the male-superiority doctrine behind the taming although there is nothing in it for herself except a false sense of superiority over other women. This, however, does not seem to be an accurate picture of the sharply intelligent young woman who has single-handedly defied such a society all her life. Is she really so gullible to the tamer’s high-handed tactics that she thoroughly converts in a few days?

Alternatively, we may assume that Kate’s speech is sincere because Shakespeare intends to enforce the concept of male superiority as a Christian doctrine to which, willy-nilly, every woman must subscribe to regardless of whether she is personally convinced of it. Consider G.I. Duthie’s unbelievably

pompous and totally unsubstantiated 1951 declaration of Shakespeare's moral intention of the play:

'Everything rules one thing and is ruled by another. As regards the domestic milieu, the husband rules the wife and the wife's duty is to obey the husband implicitly. This may be foreign to our modern idea of marriage: but we must, in order to interpret the play properly, try to see things as Shakespeare saw them. In refusing to accord her husband implicit obedience, Katharine is offending against the divinely established order of things – her conduct is unnatural. And when she does at last stand forth as the obedient wife *par excellence*, we are witnessing the triumph of enlightenment – the triumph of right over error – the establishment of the most desirable state of affairs. Katharine's last speech in the play ...states the 'moral' of the play, and it is not stated in a cowed tone but surely with fervent conviction. Katharine has learned the truth. ... The sin of Satan was that he rebelled against God: a rebellious wife is acting correspondingly to that...' (Duthie quoted in Halliday 1963:148).

In the face of Katharina's so-called enlightenment concerning the mighty and godlike male, which if Duthie is to be believed, seems to have descended upon her with all the suddenness and clarity of the Buddha's similar state, it is interesting to note that nowhere in any other play does Shakespeare overtly proclaim male autocracy. As Van Doren remarks, the play is 'curious' because it does seem to lean on this particular doctrine – that of male superiority - 'which Shakespeare must have adopted in cold blood, for on the evidence of the other plays it was not his own', yet goes on to accurately observe that despite this apparent discrepancy the play is 'strangely and permanently interesting' (1939:48-49). This is perfectly true, and thus merits a close scrutiny to ascertain which aspects of the controversial issue of male dominance and female submission are responsible for affording the play such fascination as well as a closer examination of mainstream Christian doctrine and guidelines on the matter.

Other critics who admit the sincerity of the final speech often attempt to justify, excuse or even apologize for Shakespeare when considering other apparently distressing components of the play. While Shaw resented the final doctrine of Kate's submission as completely chauvinistic, John Bean defended it as 'the expression of a non-tyrannical hierarchy in which partners have distinctive but cooperative roles' (Bevington 1988:129) and as a manifestation of the romantic nature of the play, reflecting a humanist idea of marriage as opposed to medieval male autocracy. He points out also that Kate finds 'her inward self through her discovery first of play and then of love' (Bean 1980:71). Nevertheless - and in direct contrast to Shaw - he found the actual taming itself offensive, by which Kate is induced to respond to Petruchio's erroneous statements with the aplomb of 'a trained bear' (1980:74). It is interesting to note that these observations spur Bean on to immediately justify Shakespeare in two ways - first, by tagging the play as a 'depersonalizing farce unassimilated from the play's fabliau sources' (1980:66) and second, by not only supposing the doctrine of taming shrews historically excusable but, by supposing that Shakespeare was confused as to intention when incorporating this into the vital fabric of the play.

Thus, again, the question of farce is brought into the picture, mainly now to justify the taming of Kate and her verbal surrender. Heilman, as mentioned before, firmly avers that the play is a farce, dealing with each character as a limited personality that responds in a mechanical way and moves towards a perfect end unlikely in real life, not capable of scruples or hurt feelings since 'they lack, largely or totally, the physical, emotional, intellectual and moral sensitivity' of a normal person - in short, 'a selective anaesthetizing of the whole

person' (1966:152-154). This ties in with the concurrent acceptance of the taming and the possible link with sadism I have mentioned earlier, and proceeds to nullify the admitted genuineness of Kate's final speech by refusing to acknowledge or accredit her as a serious and fully operational human being. Not surprisingly, Bean feels, like a few other feminist critics (notably Coppelia Kahn), that the farcical nature of the play robs Katharina of credibility or gravity and dehumanizes her. H.J. Oliver takes things further by condemning Shakespeare's apparent attempt to mingle two apparently incompatible genres – i.e. characterization and farce (1982:52).

Saccio, however, attacks Heilman's description of farce by calling it negative and worthy of the scorn of Bean, Kahn, and others of that ilk. He deplores the bad press that farce has received and strongly states that 'the play is definitely – though not exclusively – farcical', citing the prominence of trickery and disguise, physical roughhousing, hilariously witty wisecracks and mutual games playing as evidence. While the literal humour of the play is undeniable and indeed very enjoyable, Saccio nevertheless emphasizes that farce, despite Heilman's damaging description of it, need not be rigid or resort to dehumanizing characters in order to be viable. He states that the farce within *The Taming of the Shrew* 'arises within a relatively realistic situation', and exemplifies the humanity of the characters by pointing out the clever resourcefulness and determined energy displayed by Petruchio as he tames an interestingly proud and attractively witty modern woman. Notably, he also points out that the farcical nature of the play does not undermine the serious purpose behind each step of the taming (Saccio 1984:33-40).

This is a very significant point. Indeed, the play is the embodiment of a comic farce, but as I have mentioned at the outset, it is by no means only that. It is neither completely a farce nor completely comedy but a studious mixture of both, with a hidden core of serious gender issues addressed almost subliminally. Perhaps it would be prudent to say that reality and very real issues are cleverly masked by a comic-farcical appearance. Interestingly enough, the development of the parallel but cleverly interlinked double genre of farce and reality seems to mirror the double plot of Katharina and her sister Bianca.

Also, if Kate's final speech is genuine – this does not preclude elements of irony, but maintains that the speech itself is not predominantly or insincerely so – there is a possibility, however remote or unlikely it seems at first, that she did so because she truly has been transformed from shrew to loving wife.

Indeed, as Thompson has pointed out, 'Katherina's final speech is simply too long and too serious to be buried under a welter of comic stage business' and to present it as a jolly farce is to throw it into uncomfortable relief (1984:21). This happened in Edith Evans' portrayal of Kate in 1937 as well as in the 1960 production starring Peggy Ashcroft. However, to present the play sincerely and seriously was to bring on a wave of either pro or anti-feminist commentary which seemed to have little or no real bearing on the protagonists as individual characters or as representations of man and woman, but was instead used as a vehicle to uphold or criticize the society of the day, especially during the women's liberation movement in the early 1900's and again in the 1970's and 80's. Opinion was divided as to whether the play was a timely reminder of the traditional gentleness and domestic submission of the female during the bra-burning era of suffragettes and women's rights, or an embodiment of all the

oppression under the patriarchal system that women were desperately trying to break out of.

It seems essential, therefore, that if Katharina's final speech is to be taken seriously as a sincere expression of a truly-held belief – with a tangy admixture of self-deprecatory irony as well as evidence of a newly-acquired sense of humour directed at both herself and her new husband (which in turn is completely free of deceit and in no way detracts from the actuality of what she is upholding) – that this complete about-face be given the attention and analysis that it deserves. Kate's final speech is the key to the meaning of the play. If it is indeed sincere, the implications are enormous. The shrew's honest capitulation marks the display of a new mind-set and a new loyalty – the only thing left to find out is how Petruchio has accomplished this and why Kate has chosen to accept it.