THE TAMING OF THE SHREW: DEPROBLEMATISING A PROBLEM PLAY

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From Juliet's "*What's in a name?*" to Bottom's "*Methought I was – there is no man can tell what"*, Shakespeare is preoccupied with identity and its endless permutations. One product of this preoccupation is The Taming of the Shrew which emphatically engages in questions of who one is, who one choses or is forced to be; questions of how one is capable of putting on/taking off an identity as if it "*were essentially a suit of clothes*"[1]. Dealing with these questions – especially ones presented in conjunction with the misogynic "taming plot" – proved to be difficult for 20th century critics. As Stevie Davies writes in her appropriately titled chapter "Shakespeare Can't Have Meant It (Can He?)", the criticism of the play was "*dominated by feelings of unease and embarrasment, accompanied by the desire to prove that Shakespeare cannot have meant what he seems to be saying; and that therefore he cannot really be saying it*"[2]. This desire for a proof led some critics to assign the play an undercurrent that moves counter to its apparent misogyny. Others saw in it elements of Brechtian alienation; still others read it as a historical representation of gender politics[3]. The focal point of these various approaches was Shakespeare's "intention" and it was a risky point to move from. There is, of course, no way of knowing Shakespeare's intention. More significantly perhaps, as Marjorie Garber reminds us, we do not even have a single point of view in a play, and Shakespeare is particularly gifted in "*provid[ing], in almost every case, a credible contrary argument, on stage, to what might seem to be a prevailing view point*"[4].

Be that as it may, the criticism clustering around Shakespeare's intention in writing

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[1] Porter, Roy. **Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present**. London,1997, p. 12.

[2] Davies, Stevie. **Penguin Critical Studies: The Taming of the Shrew**. London, 1995, p. 43.

[3] *İbid*. , p.43.

[4] Garber, Marjorie. **Shakespeare After All**. New York, 2004, p. 71.

The Taming of the Shrew resulted in an interesting situation: The long standing farcical comedy was transformed into a "problem play". This term was used in 1896 by the English scholar Frederick Samuel Boas in his Shakspere and his Predecessors.[5] Boas singles out four plays: All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida and Hamlet declaring that "*dramas so singular in theme and temper cannot be strictly called comedies or tragedies*"[6]. He says that

> *[. . .] throughout these plays we move along dim untrodden paths, and at the close our feeling is neither of simple joy nor pain; we are excited, fascinated, perplexed, for the issues raised preclude a completely satisfactory outcome, even when [. . .] the complications are outwardly adjusted in the fifth act.*[7]

Boas did not include The Taming of the Shrew in his list of problem plays and his contemporaries agreed. However, in the following 90 years critical opinion moved towards the opposite direction. In their analyses, Shakespeare critics brought the play closer and closer to Boas's description of a problem play quoted above. The issues of identity (especially in relation to gender) became the "the dim untrodden paths"; Kate's final speech in the fifth act "preclud[ed] a completely satisfactory outcome," and what was felt in the end was "neither [. . .] simple joy nor pain". Hence The Taming of the Shrew acquired its problematic state.

We need not dive into interpretive depths to find issues of identity in this particular play; they are embarrassingly obvious. In fact, the play opens with an Induction which immediately introduces the themes of "*impersonation, transformation, and disguise [that] carry through and unify the entire play*" [8]. This Induction – the only one used by Shakespeare – can be read as a map to the play staged for its main character's entertainment, The Taming of the Shrew proper.

After a brief altercation with a publican, the tinker Christopher Sly falls asleep, drunk in front of an alehouse. A lord on his way back from the hunt notices him and decides to play a trick: *"Sirs, I will practise on this drunken man*", (Induction 1.34)[9] he declares, and like a stage director, goes on to give a list of props for his "production". He will use a soft bed,

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[5] Boas uses the spelling "Shakspere".

[6] Boas, Frederick Samuel. **Shakspere and His Predecessors**. London, 1918, p. 345.

[7] *Ibid.,* p. 345.

[8] Garber, Marjorie. **Shakespeare After All**. New York, 2004, p. 58.

[9] All references to the play is from **The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare: The Taming of The Shrew**. London, 2002.

beautiful clothes, jewelry, a delicious banquet and sweet music to alter Sly's physical environment, surrounding him with comfort, beauty, and luxury. The question is, will he "forget himself" – forget who he is and assume the identity of someone who is used to that particular lifestyle? He will have but little choice. However, if the changes applied to his physical environment cannot succeed in procuring a change in his identity, then language will certainly do the trick. Just as he has specified the props, the lord also scripts the dialogue. Sly will be addressed as "your honour" and "your lordship". Language will be used to create a world out of nothing – a world more enchanting and more "real" than any concrete object can create. The attendants surrounding Sly will "ask", "tell", "persuade" and "say that he dreams". Since a person's self-definition is much too entangled in other people's definition of one, it will be almost impossible for Sly not to be caught in this linguistic contraption. As the First Hunter says:

> *My lord, I warrant you we will play our part*
> *As he shall think by our true dilligence*
> *He is no less than <u>what we say he is</u>.*
>
> (Induction 1.67-69 emphasis mine)

The lord's page Bartholomew is ordered to play the role of Christopher Sly's wife. His appearence as "a lady" will also be linguistically supported. He will be called "madam" in front of Sly and the servants will show "her" obedience. Even if Sly has doubts as to the gender of the person presented as his wife, he will have the words of the servants to dispel his doubts. When everybody else calls him "her ladyship", Sly will have to agree, hinting that not only our own identity is indexed to what others say about us, but also our opinions about others share the same dependence.

As soon as Christopher Sly is carried off to the lord's house, a group of players arrive ready to turn the empty stage into a solid world through language and a few props, distinctly echoing what the lord asks of his men in order to fool the tinker. The stage is the place where men are overtly *not* who they appear to be and for a certain period of time the audience willingly goes along with their pretense. None of the actors thinks himself to be the character he is playing. However, in Christopher Sly's case the metaphor of the stage is applicable with a twist: He will be an "actor" in a play designed in such a way that he will think himself actually the character he is playing.

The persuasion of Christopher Sly does not happen immediately. As soon as he wakes up, he wants "*a pot of small ale*," (Induction 2.1). This is what is expected of him since we

know that he has been drinking in an alehouse just before falling asleep. When he is addressed as "his lordship" for the first time, he is not fooled:

> *I am Christophero Sly, call not me 'honour' nor 'lordship'. I ne'er drank sack in my life. And if you give me any conserves, give me conserves of beef.*
> *Ne'er ask me what raiment I'll wear, for I have no more doublets than backs, no more stockings than legs, nor no more shoes than feet – nay, sometime more feet than shoes, or such shoes as my toes look through the overleather.*
>
> (Induction 2.5-12)

He knows what he likes and dislikes; what he is and what he is not. This is before he is mesmerized by the language of the lord and his servants. When the lord says that he is "*infused with a foul spirit*" (Induction 2.16) Sly starts to doubt his identity. Instead of the surefooted "I am Christophero Sly", his sentences take the form of questions: "*What would you make me mad? Am not I Christopher Sly?*" (Induction 2.17). What follows is equally interesting, for his proof of who he is – apart from who he himself says he is, depending on his memory – is another person's knowledge of him: "*Ask Marian Hacket, the fat ale-wife of Wincot, if she know me not*" (Induction 2.21-22). This quasi-doubtful declaration is followed by an intense (42 lines long) bombardment of words through which the lord and his servants build a new identity for Sly. It is interesting to note that Shakespeare sprinkles their speeches with images of Venus and Adonis, of Io and of Daphne and Apollo all from Ovid's Metamorphoses which "*suggest the empowering possibilities of transformation*"[10]. They paint the ideal, luxurious world which once was supposedly Sly's and is now waiting for his return. First they address the issue of his madness: Sly, they say, actually has mental problems, but not because he thinks himself to be a lord; but because he mis-identifies himself as a poor drunk tinker. He needs to get away from his "*strange lunacy*" (Induction 2.30) and "*banish hence these abject lowly dreams*" (Induction 2.33) and he needs to "*call home [his] ancient thoughts from banishment*" (Induction 2.29) which will bring him back to the reality of being a lord. He is surrounded by the props of the performance – a list of these will assure him that he is indeed who people around him say he is: a soft and sweet bed, music, horses, hawks, greyhounds. He is plainly defined: "*Thou art a lord, and nothing but a lord* (Induction 2.62) – what is more, there is someone so intimate with him that she can absolutely verify who he is.

[10] Garber, Marjorie. **Shakespeare After All**. New York, 2004, p. 58.

Sly responds to this mis-en-scène with complete doubt. Three questions follow one another: "*Am I a lord, and have such a lady?/ Or do I dream? Or have I dream'd till now?*" (Induction 2.69-70). For an answer he turns to his senses: He sees, hears, smells, feels; therefore, he must be in the real world. Then, he makes a decision, puts on his new identity and likes it: "*Upon my life, I am a lord indeed,/ And not a tinker nor Christophero Sly*" (Induction 2.73-74). He immediately asks for his wife but he has one more, quite intriguing request: "*Well, bring our lady hither to our sight, / And once again a pot o' th' smallest ale".* (Induction 2.75). *"[A] pot o'th'smallest ale*" pulls us back to the moment of Sly's waking up sure of who he is. Could Shakespeare be pointing to an underlying, unchanging "identity" here signified in "appetite" – an unweavering, insistent physical self? If so, Sly's acceptance of his new identity is thrown into relief as a conscious choice, and his "lord"ness as a performative structure, built *through* Sly' interaction with his new "environment" and built *on* this solid foundation.

The entrance of the page boy dressed as the lady of the house solidifies Sly's new role as lord. "She" presents herself as a "wife in all obedience" bringing to mind both Kate's so called obedience speech at the end of Act 5, and also the fact that the page is "a wife" only in obedience to his employer, the real lord. As an obedient wife the first thing she does is to decline her husband's wish to go to bed with her on the pretext that having sex may cause a relapse of his illness. Sly agrees: "*But I would be loath to fall into my dreams again*" (Induction 2.127) he says. Indeed, these dreams will look nightmarish compared to his new life.

How can Sly refuse to be a nobleman, to lead a life of ease and to have a woman at his disposal? He has nothing to lose and a life of pleasure to gain. At this point the players re-enter the stage to present to "his lordship" "a pleasant comedy". The Induction ends with Sly's "*And let the world slip, we shall ne'er be younger*," (2.142) adding a melancholy strain to what we have been and will be seeing on the stage. This is a small detail spilling over from Christopher Sly's now supposedly forgotten past. At the beginning of the Induction he says, "Let the world slide" to the hostess of the alehouse. The same phrase comes back just as he is about to watch the play. Is this again a trace of his own self, inadvertently showing behind his new mask? Is it telling us that despite the apparent change somethings decidedly stay the same?

After this point, the action turns to Sly only once more. At the end of Act 1 Scene 1, Sly, page and a servant make a brief appearance, drawing the audience's attention to the frame story for one last time. The stage direction at the end of this brief scene reads "They sit

and mark" which clearly indicates that they sit on the stage and watch the play intended for Sly's amusement; however, they are given no further speeches and the frame story is abandoned.

The spectrum of metamorphoses in the play that follows ranges from the simple/superficial to the complex/fundamental. Lucentio, a young student from Pisa, falls in love with "sweet" Bianca and disguises himself as the tutor Cambio (which means "the changed one") in order to woo her. Somebody is needed to take his place and who better than his servant Tranio? The change that takes place is voluntary; both the master and the servant think that since they both have newly arrived at Padua and nobody can recognize them, they can easily assume new identities. In a place where nobody knows a person , his/her social identity becomes a blank, which that person can fill in any way s/he likes: You can reinvent yourself. The first part of the change is achieved through clothes. Tranio takes Lucentio's "colour'd hat and cloak" and puts them on along with his master's identity. Shakespeare chooses this particular moment of material change to go back to the frame story (as mentioned above) and to remind us of the presence of "Lord Sly" as the audience. The parallels between the two situations are thus accentuated.

Tranio, the actor of the play Lucentio and himself stage, not only dresses like his master, but also takes on a gentleman's language. It is impossible to guess that he is actually a servant. A gentleman's appearence, demeanor, and language are showcased in this man. How can he be distinguished from the "real" gentleman? The Lucentio/Tranio plot looks at the performative structuring of identity from the audience's point of view. Is there an intrinsic quality at the backdrop of these elements that may help *the onlooker* in such a distinction? If the illusion is created in a social vacuum, that is, if no one with the knowledge of the "actor's" prior identity is present to give testimony, the answer is "No." Society's requirements in order to acknowledge a certain social identity are so superficial that they can easily be mimicked.

The role of props in creating a new reality is taken a step further in Tranio's finding an appropriate man to "play" Lucentio's father, Vincentio. He stops a Pedant on the street and tells him that his native Mantua is at war with Padua. Scared, and believing that the only way to escape death is to assume a false identity, the Pedant agrees to act as Vincentio whom he somewhat resembles. He is a stranger to Padua just like Vincentio and Tranio. He too cannot be recognized. The required empty shell for a new identity is thus conveniently found: the Pedant assumes the identity of a respected gentleman.

The issues of identity involving the female characters in The Taming of the Shrew are more complex than those involving the male characters. The matrimonial politics, the restrictive gender norms and the strongly felt "ideal woman" image in early modern Europe make this complexity inevitable. Any choice/change/play in the social identity of a woman can mean the difference between acceptance and rejection, belonging and isolaton, happiness and misery. For Shakespeare's women, even simple dressing up can never have a single, straightforward, merely playful denotation. It always carries deeper implications and the threat of possible dire consequences.

Bianca and Katherina, the daughters of Signor Baptista, are introduced in the same scene. They are presented to us under the appraising gaze of no less then five men: a father, three actual and one "mock"suitors. They embody the simplistic, monochromatic, white versus black categorization of women in farce. For the men, Bianca represents the ideal eligible young woman: tall, blond, silent, and obedient. At first, she is only seen and not heard. Bianca's silence is very telling for Lucentio. When he sees her standing silently in sharp contrast to her "wonderful froward" (1.1.69) sister, he says: "*But in the other's silence do I see / Maid's mild behaviour and sobriety.*" (1.1.70) When she finally speaks, it is – to the delight and approval of all men on the stage – an expression of obedience:

> *Sister, content you in my discontent.*
> *Sir, to your pleasure humbly I subscribe.*
> *My books and my instruments shall be my company,*
> *On them to look and practise by myself.*
>
> (1.1.81-84)

However, what forms Bianca's identity in the audience's mind is not these four lines, which are all that belongs to her in this 253 line scene, but rather, it is her silence, and how others project their own opinions of her on that silence. We are told that she is the desirable woman, the suitable mate, the mild, virtuous, beautiful and compliant daughter. By the help of these words along with the silent figure on the stage, we believe what others tell us to believe. Yet Shakespeare does not let us forget the conscious and the performative aspects of social identity mapped out in the Induction. In private, during her lessons, we see that Bianca is neither silent nor very shy; in fact, she plots to run away and get married. Later, the persona she displays during the wedding banquet in the final Act is of a shrewish woman[11]. She manipulates and controls her social environment as the social circumstances dictate: When a

[11] It is interesting to note that Shakespeare uses the name Bianca only one other time, for a courtesan in Othello, "whose external 'whiteness' or purity, is at variance with her profession" (Garber p. 70).

woman is looking for a husband she has to behave in a way that will be attractive to potential suitors; but once she is married, she can assume her new social role and display an accordingly adjusted social self.

Katherina, the elder daughter of Signor Baptista emerges as anything but silent. This is quite interesting because she actually has 11 lines in the scene – only seven more than her "silent" sister. Once again, we are strongly reminded that what clenches her image in the minds of the audience is not what and how much she says but what others say about her.The same five men who pass judgement on Bianca also gaze upon Katherina and outline her identity. She is set against Bianca's image and described in a string of negatives. She is *not* mild, *not* quiet, *not* obedient, and therefore unappreciated as a daughter and undesirable as a marriage partner. Her father does not protect her against insults and all the suitors are there for Bianca. Katherina is only an obstacle in their way – an annoying "shrew" nobody wants. *"[. . .] No mates for you / Unless you were of gentler, milder mould*" (1.1.59-60) declares Hortensio, one of Bianca's suitors.

In Katherina, we find a woman who chooses a more complex way of responding to her environment. Instead of complying with norms imposed upon her, she carves out a place by pitting herself against them. Thus constant opposition, rejection, and threat constitute the terms in which she structures herself, her familial and other social relations, and her language. The fact that she is verbally and physically abusive strengthens the image of "wildness" which the so called "taming plot" necessitates. This plot is initiated by the arrival of Petruchio, a man from Verona, who *"[comes] to wive it wealthily in Padua*" (1.2.74). With him the "violence" in the play becomes symmetrical. Petruchio and his servant Grumio's play on the word "knock" and the subsequent slap-stick in his first scene on the stage immediately point to that. Grumio shouts, "*Help, masters, help! My master is mad*." (1.2.18), balancing out Tranio's declaration about Katherina in Act 1 that "*The wench is stark mad [. . .]*" (69). After all, the wild animal must find her match in the "tamer".

As soon as Petruchio decides to marry Katherina, he devises a plan at the basis of which is the idea of formidable forces coming head to head:

> *I am as peremptory as she proud-minded;*
> *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.*
> *And so I to her, and so she yields to me,*

For I am rough and woo not like a babe.

(2.1.131-137)

This speech hinting at the strong sexual charge that will ensue (at least in the better productions), sets the tone for the taming process. At the onset, Petruchio's strategy is language bound unmistakably to evoking the strategy used by the lord on Christopher Sly.

Say that she rail, why then I'll tell her plain
She sings as sweetly as a nightingale.
Say that she frowns, I'll say she looks as clear
As morning roses newly wash'd with dew.
Say she be mute and will not speak a word,
I'll commend her volubility,
And say she uttereth piercing eloquence.

(2.1. 170-176)

He first attacks the defining label "shrew" on a personal level. When Petruchio and Katherina meet for the first time they are alone on the stage. Petruchio greets her with the familiar "Kate", which only her father uses. Affronted, she immediately corrects him: "*They call me Katherine that do talk of me*" (2.1.184). This is followed by a speech which Katherina probably has never heard before. It strips her of all the adjectives constructing a "shrewish" identity and replaces it with the image of a Petrarchan "donna angelicata" – angelic woman. In Pertuchio's words she becomes "bonny Kate", "super-dainty Kate"; she becomes another Bianca. Consequently, she becomes desirable as a mate:

Hearing thy mildness prais'd in every town,
Thy virtues spoke of, and thy beauty sounded,
Yet not so deeply as to thee belongs,
Myself am mov'd to woo thee for my wife.

(2.1.191-194)

It is not enough to make Katherina hear a different, an alternative version of herself, though it is a necessary first step. The words spoken only in her presence must also be heard by others: Since language shapes thought, new words about Kate will open up a new way of thinking about Kate. To this end, Petruchio takes two further steps. First, as a cautionary measure, he closes her way of ever behaving like a "credible" shrew in front others. He says,

Be patient, gentlemen, I choose her for myself.
If she and I be pleas'd, what's that to you?
'Tis bargain'd' twixt us twain, being alone,

That she shall still be curst in company.

(2.1.295-298)

'Tis a world to see

How tame, when men and women are alone,

A meacock wretch can make the curstest shrew.

(2.1.304-306)

If she continues to act like a shrew in front of others it will be only that, an act. Second, Petruchio becomes "madder" than Katherina. He outdoes her so well in "shrewishness"[12] that, when compared with Petruchio, she does come out as "*a lamb, a dove, a fool*" (3.2.155). When she is humiliated on her wedding day by the groom's late and quite extraordinary arrival, and his reported antics during the ceremony, everyone starts to pity her. She is publicly called "*good Katherine*" by Tranio (3.2.21) and she is even seen crying. So the label "shrew" does not match the gazers' perception of Katherina any more. If she is not acknowledged as "a shrew", what is she left with? An empty shell ready to be filled with a new identity?

Most critics who discuss this play draw our attention to the metaphor of the falcon and the falconer for what follows Petruchio and Kate's wedding. Just as the falconer tames his bird and forces the wild creature to bond with him, Petruchio tames his Kate – a name with an obvious similarity to "kite" meaning falcon. The method he uses *is* actually the same as the falconer's method: She shall be left hungry and sleepless until she is too exhausted to resist. All this is done under the overt declaration of "caring" for her comfort. While doing so he continues to mirror her "shrewisness" and magnify the image he receives to the exteme. The physical and psychological warfare of "*kill[ing] a wife with kindness*" (4.1.195) is overwhelming, and Kate finally yields. She "*sits as one new risen from a dream*" (4.1.173) calling once again the image of Sly to our mind's eye. When she emerges in Act 5 *"[. . .]she is chang'd, as she had never been*" (5.2.116) and her new identity is that of an obedient wife.

In her interaction with her father, her sister, or the suitors; and in her stichomythic dialogue with Petruchio, Kate's wit, intelligence, energy, and independent spirit come through. The "breaking" of that spirit proves to be the most challenging aspect of the play for the critics. Especially after feminist criticism opened our eyes and sharpened our ears, how can we refrain from responding to Kate's lines such as these?

[12] Oxford English Dictionary tells us that the word "shrew" was not gender specific when it was first used; but started to be used exclusively for women much later. Shakespeare himself uses the word in The Comedy of Errors for a male. This, of course, gives the title, The Taming of the Shrew, a new edge.

Why, sir, I trust I may have leave to speak,
And speak I will. I am no child, no babe.
Your betters have endur'd me say my mind,
And if you cannot, best you stop your ears.
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.

(4.3.73-80)

And how can we reconcile ourselves with her 44 lines long, sustained monologue at the end of Act 5, which is often referred to as the obedience speech? Carrying echoes of Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, this speech in which Kate advises the other two wives to act in full obedience to their husbands, and symbolically "to place their hands below their husband's foot", is conservative and quite straightforward. To some critics, it signals the completion of the taming process of a shrew. When the lines from Act 4 Scene 3 quoted above, and the obedience speech are put side by side, we may see a woman who is forced to give up the freedom she found in words and gives in to the expectations and demands of society. Inevitably, her heart is broken.

However, for some critics the speech can be interpreted differently in the context of the last scene. For Brian Morris, the editor of the Arden edition of the play, the speech signifies a deeper understanding between the couple:

> *Now she has learned the pointlessness of such selfish stubbornness, and the gesture of the throwing down of her cap when told to do so has a deeper, private meaning for the two participants, the shared secret bringing them closer together. [. . .] She does not have anything to say about her relationship with her own husband. She is permitted and encouraged to take refuge in the most bland and incontrovertible generalities – 'What duty we owe'. [. . .] She is grateful for the delicate way in which [Petruchio] has handled the situation. And she expresses her gratitute in the full and expansive exposition she gives not only of the duty of the Widow to Hortensio, but the duty of all wives to their husbands. [. . .] Petruchio responds to this unsolicited act of love and generosity with one of the most moving and perfect lines in the play, almost as if he is lost for words, taking refuge in action: 'Why, there's a wench! Come on, and kiss me, Kate."*[13]

For Germaine Greer in her The Female Eunuch ,

> *Petruchio tames [Kate] as he might a hawk or a high-mettled horse, and she rewards him with strong sexual love and fierce loyalty. [. . .] The submission of a woman like Kate is genuine and exciting because she has something to lay down,*

[13] Morris, Brian. Introduction. **The Taming of the Shrew.** London, 2002. pp. 148-149

her virgin pride and individuality: Bianca is the soul of duplicity, married without earnestness or good will. Kate's speech at the close of the play is the greatest defence of Christian monogamy ever written. It rests upon the role of a husband as protector and friend, and it is valid because Kate has a man who is capable of being both, for Petruchio is both gentle and strong (it is a vile distortion of the play to have him strike her ever).[14] *The message is probably twofold: only Kates make good wives, and only to Petruchios; for the rest, their cake is dough*[15].

Alexander Leggatt, on the other hand, underlines the performative nature of the play in general, and of this speech in particular:

The sheer length of her speech, the care she lavishes on its rhetoric, tell us that [Katherina enjoys winning the wager]. Here, as with the taming itself, we must not be too quick to adjust the play to our own assumptions about love and marriage. The fact that Katherina relishes her speech as a performance does not necessarily mean she is ironic or insincere. She is simply enjoying herself.
[. . .] In the Taming of the Shrew Petruchio, Katherina, and the Lord have a special vision, an awareness of life as a play or a game, that gives them a power to control not only their own lives but other people's.[16]

There are critics who accept the sexism in the play, and there are those who analyze it away; however, it is obvious that both sides find it disturbing. Linda Bamber, in Sexism and the Battle of the Sexes states,

Although the play presents Kate's capitulation as a gesture without consequence to her soul, it cannot seem so to a feminist reader. The battle of the sexes as a theme for comedy is inherently sexist. The battle is only funny to those who assume that the status quo is the natural order of things and likely to prevail. To the rest of us, Kate's compromise is distressing.[17]

At this point, we may turn back to Boas's definition of a problem play, and see more clearly why The Taming of the Shrew was treated as one by subsequent criticism. The fact that the obedience speech "precludes a completely satisfactory outcome" is also strengthened by the last two lines of the play. The winners of "the wager", Petruchio and Kate, leave the stage. The losers Hortensio and Lucentio are left behind.

Hor. Now go thy ways, thou hast tam'd a curst shrew.

Luc. 'Tis a wonder, by your leave, she will be tam'd so.

(5.2.189-190)

The play does not end on a note of certainty and closure, but on doubt which leaves us, as

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[14] Greer is quite right in pointing that Petruchio never strikes Kate in the play, although he strikes others. Kate does most of the striking. She strikes her sister, she strikes Petruchio, she strikes his servant, she beats Grumio and she breaks a lute on Hortensio's head resulting in the amusing stage direction in Act 2 Scene 1 "Enter Hortensio with his head broke".

[15] Greer, Germaine. **The Female Eunuch**. New York, 1971, pp. 205-206

[16] Leggatt, Alexander. **Shakespeare's Comedy of Love**. London, 1974, pp. 61-62.

[17] Bamber, Linda. "**Sexism and the Battle of Sexes in *The Taming of the Shrew***" as printed in Shakespeare, William. **The Taming of the Shrew**. New York, 1998, p. 167.

Boas specifies, in feelings of "neither [. . .] simple joy nor pain". Despite all this, Boas himself does not categorize The Taming of the Shrew as a problem play. Here is his final verdict:

> *[. . .] the student will value the play, and the original,*[18] *upon which it is based, less as a brochure upon matrimonial duties, than as a unique and highly instructive combination of four different elements – the refined southern comedy of intrigue, the old English rough-and-tumble farce, the Marlowesque style in strangely perverted shape, and the Shakespearean dramatic method in its vigorous infancy.*[19]

As 21st century readers, we should agree with Boas that The Taming of the Shrew is *not* a problem play, not because we look at the play only as a historical dramatic specimen as he does, but because, different from 20th century critics, we are ready to declare that no Shakespeare play can be a problem play for us.

From the early 1980s onwards an interesting body of critical work started to grow alongside the mainstream criticism of the plays. These look at the history and ideology behind Shakespeare criticism.[20] In their different ways, they show how "*Shakespeare's image has been endlessly refashioned and his works tirelessly redefined to reflect the illusions underpinning the status quo*"[21]. Shakespeare has been again and again dubbed the poet of the so-called universal human condition. One of the more recent examples of such an approach is, of course, Harold Bloom's Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human. In its opening chapter "Shakespeare's Universalism" he calls some contemporary critics of Shakespeare's work "*gender-and-power freaks*"[22], and invites us to see *"[t]hat the ultimate use of Shakespeare is to let him teach you to think too well, to whatever truth you can sustain without perishing"*[23].

Yet, if Shakespere were to be understood only through "universals" or through "sustainable truths" which cut across all ages and never change, we would have long exhausted his works. The "essential Shakespeare" behind each play would have been established by the bard-like-critical-minds, and that would have been that. But it simply is not so.

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[18] He is referring to George Gasciogne's **Supposes** (1566) which was Shakespeare's source for **The Taming of The Shrew.**

[19] Boas, Frederick Samuel. **Shakspere and His Predecessors**. London, 1918, p. 181.

[20] Such as **Alternative Shakespeares** (1985); **Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Renaissance to the Present** (1990); **Appropriation of Shakespeare: Post Renaissance Reconstruction of the Works and the Myth** (1991), **Shakespeare and Appropriation** (1999).

[21] Ryan, Kiernan. **Shakespeare.** London, 2002, p. 2

[22] Bloom, Harold. **Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human**. New York, 1998, p. 10.

[23] *Ibid.,* p. 10.

Just as "universalism" is a dead end for fresh critical thought, so is the approach best expressed by Terence Hawks which tells us that the text can only generate meaning about itself, as he comments on "*the congregation of words dubbed King Lear*"[24]:

> *[. . .] we can have no immediate or objective access to the works of an 'essential' Shakespeare, to the 'plays themselves', or to what they 'really' mean. Nor could Shakespeare.*[25]

There has to be a middle ground. Until recently, this middle ground was covered by the "gender-and-power freaks" who were actually quite successful in bringing out the different ways in which a play such as "The Taming of the Shrew" could "mean differently"[26] for us. But still, they have been trying too hard to dispense with ambiguities, contradictions, and anxieties as might be noticed in the previously quoted, almost nervous efforts to give a sense of completeness to the critical readings of The Taming of the Shrew. Surely, by now, both literature and literary criticism must have prepared us to be more comfortable with all this ambiguity, contradiction, and anxiety.

The first step towards a new direction might be to acknowledge all the "rough edges" or perhaps the "bitter tastes" of a Shakespearean text and try to discover how they can make us work our way through literary or historical past, present, and future. Among the Shakespeare critics writing in this first decade of the new century, Kiernan Ryan seems to be especially worth listening to:

> *What I am suggesting is that Shakespeare could be read and taught in ways that bring the dimensions of past constraint and modern viewpoint – the moment of production and the moment of reception – into dynamic reciprocity. The idea is to generate accounts of his plays which are plainly provisional, because they must be open to revision and displacement by more relevant and competent readings; but which are also objective in so far as they can be textually verified and historically legitimized within the adopted framework of critical understanding.*[27]

He is suggesting that we stand at the crossroads of vigorous close reading and historical grounding. We know that reading for Shakespeare's intention no longer satisfies us; purely historical approaches leave us cold[28] (we should remind ourselves that although Ben Johnson called Shakespeare "Soul of the age!", he also called him "for all time"). What would such a composite approach bring to a text like The Taming of the Shrew? We could first

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[24] Ryan, Kiernan. **Shakespeare.** London, 2002, p. 10

[25] Hawkes, Terence. **Meaning by Shakespeare**. New York, 1992, p. 147.

[26] Garber, Marjorie. **Shakespeare After All**. New York, 2004, p. 72 .

[27] Ryan, Kiernan. **Shakespeare.** London, 2002, pp. 15-16.

[28] Bloom talks about an edition of The Taming of the Shrew which contains "extracts from English Renaissance manuals on wife beating" (p. 33). I could not track down this particular edition, but I believe this is an excellent example of trying to force the text into a "historical" context without paying attention to the text in which not a single instance of "wife beating" occurs.

acknowledge the inevitable colouring of historical time and place on Shakespeare's imagination at the time he wrote the play, and move to see what he had done with the material. As Kiernan Ryan says in his Shakespeare:

> *The utopian closure of Shakespearean comedy and romance is qualified by the intrusion of these harsher, unredeemed realities and disquieting intimations which it cannot repress, and which stress the fragile fictionality and incompleteness of its state of concord. By casting their comedic resolutions of the tragedy of history in contemporary terms, these plays reveal the text of the future stored inside the narrative present. Obstructive actualities are made to serve as the symbolic guarantee of their own ultimate transformation. Through their infiltration and subversion of conventional plots and conclusions the comedies and romances dramatize the utopian within the historical. They excite our hope that these dreams of release from the coercions of history might one day be realized, by giving us provisional images, lodged in recognizable and thus more persuasive forms, of what such a realization might look and feel like.*[29]

If we rethink The Taming of the Shrew in this light, we no longer need to dwell on the author's intention; we do not need to explain away the misogyny or to dwell on Renaissance documents of wife beating just to appear "historical"[30]. As soon as we acknowledge "the harsher, unredeemed realities and disquieting intimations" there emerges a text which is a playground for our language-conscious times. It shows us first and foremost the myriads of ways language imprisons identity, framed by culture, gender, social interaction, and performance. And perhaps more importantly, how there may come a time in the future when we will be free from this imprisonment because of the awareness we gained through a Shakespearean text.[31] Such an approach may give this and other Shakespeare plays their cultural and moral power which I believe they all possess. Consequently, none of the plays need to be set aside as problem plays, since what was regarded as problematic by previous approaches are now to be considered as clues to new meanings which we will either be able to grasp or will have to leave to coming generations to do so.

And this more than anything – more than universalism, more than historicism – will prove to us anew that this particular dramatist can still imagine the past, reimagine the present and dream about the future for us, *the actors*. Maybe that is why the sign the Lord Chamberlain's Men displayed outside the Globe Theatre read "Totus mundus agit histrionem" – "We are all players", or better yet "All the world plays the actor".

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[29] Ryan, Kiernan. **Shakespeare.** London, 2002, pp. 121 .
[30] See footnote 28.
[31] Attributing such cultural and political power to a Shakespeare text is nothing new; it has long been accepted that Shakespeare texts, especially the plays, have become "one of the places where ideology is made, a site of cultural struggle and change". (Alan Sinfield quoted in Ryan p. 2)

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HIRÇIN KIZ:
BİR SORUNSAL OYUNU YENİDEN OKUMAK

Shakspere [sic] and his Predecessors (Shakspere ve Selefleri) adlı kitabında Frederick Samuel Boas dört Shakespeare oyununu diğerlerinden ayırır: Yeter ki Sonu İyi Bitsin, Kısasa Kısas, Troilos ve Kressida ve Hamlet . Bu oyunların "tam anlamıyla komedi ya da trajedi denemeyecek kadar kendilerine özgü tema ve tabiatları" olduğunu söyler (345). Bunlara

sorunsal oyunlar adını verir. İlginçdir ki, bir başka oyun, Hırçın Kız, bu kısa listede yer almamasına rağmen, eleştirmenler tarafından bir sorunsal oyunmuş gibi ele alınagelmiştir. Bu makale, eleştirmenlerin böyle bir yaklaşım seçmelerindeki sebepleri ve hem Hırçın Kız'a hem de diğer Shakespeare oyunlarına 21.yüzyıl okuru için daha ilgi çekici bir şekilde nasıl bakılabileceğini araştırıyor.