

William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* as a Farce – Filmic and Textual Interpretations.

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Introduction

“Perhaps one of the fascinations of
The Shrew is the very difficulty of enjoying
it while also feeling uncomfortable with it.”

(Pearson 230)

When I first read *The Taming of The Shrew*, I wrote an essay about how I would have liked Katherine to bring Petruchio’s life to an end. Since then, I have put more thoughts, and way more research into finding out the incredible layers of the play and making amends with the tamer of the play.

One aspect I have borne in mind is Ann Blake’s characterization of *The Shrew* as a farce (238), the definition of which is, according to the *Cambridge Dictionary* “a humorous play or film where the characters become involved in unlikely situations” (“Farce”).

Originally, when we think about farce, we imagine “mostly visual—there’s slipping and falling, there’s hiding and tumbling and fleeing, there’s the tug of war and the chase” (Howe 5). Shakespeare’s play uses less physical comedy of this kind since neither Katherine nor Petruchio is seen to fall on a banana peel. Therefore, *The Shrew* is not a usual farce; it is missing the most common features of it, but some still could be found hidden in the plot.

However, the absence of most common farcical elements might exactly be the reason why so many people regard this play as a wife-bashing play, that “should be put back firmly and squarely on the shelf” (qtd. in Thompson 17). Furthermore, this is why directors often feel compelled to stress these physical elements, e.g. when Petruchio walks on stage with a whip in his hand (Blake 239n5). This does not happen in the play, Petruchio never lays a hand on Katherine, and no one gets whipped or seriously injured, although other elements of physical violence do occur in the play.

One of the best examples of showcasing that the play has a farce element to it is the Induction, where Sly gets into a dispute with his Hostess, which “serves as an invitation to enjoy a good fight” (Blake 239).

SLY I'll feeze you, in faith.

HOSTESS A pair of stocks, you rogue!

SLY Y’are a baggage, the Slys are no rogues. Look in the Chronicles;

we came in with Richard Conqueror.

(Induction I. 1-4)¹

The play needs this introduction of Sly and the Hostess with their ‘banter,’ so the audience could get familiar or used to the play’s physical violence that later will come with the main acts. It is essential to mention that the violence is not to cause serious harm, but rather to discipline a servant or a sister, who does not act the way the one or the older daughter would prefer it.

Blake emphasises that “[b]oth Petruchio and Kate, like Antipholus of Ephesus in *Errors*, are volatile figures, likely to fly into rages, to abuse and strike people,” (239) she continues pointing out that the audience will enjoy, even laugh at those scenes when these characters strike one another, such as the occasion when Katherine strikes Bianca and even ties her hands together.

Such other scene is when Petruchio is striking Grumio when they are in front of Baptista’s front door.

PETRUCHIO Will it not be?

Faith, sirrah, and you'll not knock, I'll ring it.

I'll try how you can *sol-fa*, andsing it.

He wrings him by the ears.

GRUMIO Help, mistress, help! My master is mad.

PETRUCHIO Now knock when I bid you, sirrah villain.

(Act 1.2.15-19)

His aim when smacking Grumio is not to cause bruises or because he wants his servants to suffer, it is disciplinary and it fits into the context of a farce play, where being physical is almost a requirement. No audience would make this beating too seriously, especially after seeing the induction scene.

Another scene where the audience will probably laugh is when Hortensio returns with a broken lute, which was used to hit him on the head. He even walks to the stage, while having the lute wrapped around his neck, for context and to make the audience laugh, when they see how ridiculous he looks, with something around his neck that is not usually there. All these and other occasions that include other characters, such as Grumio and Vincentio, are harmless and their only purpose is to entertain as a farce. (239)

¹ All quotations from the play are from this source: Shakespeare, William. *The Taming of The Shrew: The New Cambridge Shakespeare*. Edited by Ann Thompson, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

The subplot of Bianca and her suitors also showcases elements of farce, with the disguises and the mistaken identities (Blake 237). These identity changes are comical, since all the gentlemen give up their status, to act as a teacher, to be closer to Bianca, while in other cases the lover would aim to match the social status of the one whom love they wish to win. In this play Lucentio makes it impossible for himself to marry Bianca in the right way, as in through the father's blessing, thus they end up eloping. Luckily for them Baptista is not one who holds a grudge, and he is happily celebrating his daughter marriage in the last scene.

Marrying off two daughters is not so challenging for Baptista, as suitors are lined up for Bianca, and due to his mastermind move, Katherine soon finds herself engaged. Even though, she voices her discomfort with the engagement, she never goes against the marriage, and luckily for her she found love in the end.

Free choice only comes into the story, when it is being adopted into the 21st century. With the waves of feminism, women gained many things among those is the power to choose what or who they want in their life. In the adaptation that I compared to the play, free choice is not guarded by any father, since both girls are grownups, leading their own successful lives. As we will see, the women are not required to act in one certain way, (as a housewife), rather they have the choice to be as colourful as they want to, and they are inspired to dream on for a better, successful life for themselves. For which they do not need a man only themselves and their belief. As it is well shown in the BBC's version with Bianca and Kate who both lead successful careers.

In this essay I aim to show that keeping the farcical element in mind is the key to enjoying the play and laughing at the scenarios that a contemporary mindset would not hold up. Furthermore, I will explore the effect of feminism in the movie, and how Katherine and her relationships are changing throughout the adaptation.

Chapter 1 The “Original” Shrew

Introduction

First, I will take a closer look at the play, *The Taming of The Shrew* by Shakespeare. The play was written around 1590-94, its first publication was in the First Folio (Bevington).

As many Shakesperean plays, *The Shrew* also enjoys popularity that lasts for centuries, nonetheless critics usually are not fond of this comedy play due to its farcical elements (Blake 237). As I have mentioned, I was among those who found the play disturbing and misogynistic, and I begged Katherine not to fall for Petruchio, and yet years later I am not mad at all that she found somebody who loves her and taught her about important life lessons.

1.1 The Silence of a Father

Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew* is, at its core a story of a family in which a single father, Baptista wishes to wed his two daughters, Katherine, the older and Bianca, the younger. His problems start when it turns out that while Bianca has suitors a plenty, no one wishes to marry Katherine, the older daughter, who has the reputation of being a shrew.

Velvet Pearson claims that Baptista, being a good businessman, knows that the unrequired product will never get off the shelves unless he finds a way to trap a customer. (232) Thus, to wed Katherine, he thinks of the best plan available for him: he will not let Bianca marry until Katherine has a husband for herself. Katherine is a, as Germaine Greer refers to her in her novel called *The Female Eunuch*, “decoy to be bid for against her sister’s higher market value” (234). The new rule only makes Katherine an object that is the door that hides the more required woman, Bianca. Katherine too recognises this when she draws this question to her father:

KATHERINA [To Baptista] I pray you, sir, is it your will
To make a stale of me amongst these mates?

(Act 1.1. 57-58)

His father, however, ignores her, and the conversation continues without considering Katherine’s feelings.

There is only one small occasion when Baptista showcases some good fatherly behaviour when dealing with Katherine, this is when Petruchio arrives to ask for her hand in marriage and describes his wealth and property as a suitable suitor for the daughter. Baptista is pleased by his wealth but has one more condition of what Petruchio must have, ‘Ay, when the

special thing is well obtained / That is, her love, for that is all in all' (Act 2.1. 124-25). Traditionally suitors would have been vetted by the daughter's mother and her female relations. Since Katherine's family has no female member, it is down to Baptista to perform this role, and although he tries, he cuts the examination rather short. Later in the act, he fails to ask his daughter if she feels the way her suitor claims her to feel, and only listens to the man about their 'mutual' love, giving all the credit to the male in a situation, and ignoring how Katherine feels, when she voices it. "Call you me 'daughter'?" (Act 2. 1. 274)

Their relationship is shown to be cold when instead of calming Kate down before the wedding, he says this to the leaving Katherine:

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

(Act 3. 2. 27-29)

Blake also argues that her father feels some sort of empathy towards Kate, but he fails to voice it and it becomes a joke on Kate's behalf (248). The absence of a mother figure here becomes painfully clear. There is no one to prepare the girls for marriage, to guide them through it and to sympathise with them when they are humiliated by others.

Baptista also fails to protect her daughter from embarrassment, when after hearing how Petruchio is coming to the wedding his only comment is "Who comes with him?" (Act 3. 2. 57). Even Tranio shares some of his concerns with the soon to be husband's attire, but Baptista again is only glad and does not care how Petruchio arrives to the wedding, he just wants him to be there.

Nevertheless, when Baptista is confronted with Petruchio's grotesque apparel, he too starts to protest, saying "Fie, doff this habit, shame to your estate, / An eye-sore to our solemn festival" (Act 3.2. 90-1). Petruchio declines to change his attire, he believes that Kate is not marrying his clothes and his attire symbolises that Katherine will ruin parts of him which cannot be exchanged so easily as his clothes.

Yet Kate is not the kind of woman who would not play the 'joke' back on her father, to make him feel humiliated at once for his lack of love and respect for her. Later in this scene, Petruchio expresses his desire to leave, without celebrating with the others, however, Kate wishes to stay for the celebration. First, she asks him nicely, "Now, if you love me, stay," (Act 3.2. 193) which is unusual for Kate. Even so, her kindness does not win over Petruchio, who still insists on leaving. This failure brings Kate's true personality to the surface.

PETRUCHIO O Kate, content thee; prithee be not angry.

KATHERINA I will be angry. What hast thou to do?

- Father, be quiet. He shall stay my leisure.

(Act 3.2. 204-06)

Baptista is 'quiet', but when on stage the actor may choose to act like he is about to say something, but Blake insists that "no actor would choose to play the line like that, and miss the laugh at Katherine's lashing out, yet again, at a *silent* father" (249).

1.2 Two sides of the same coin

The two sisters are the complete opposite of each other and yet their names mean almost the same thing in different languages; Bianca means white and fair in Italian, and Katherine means white and pure in Greek. So similar and yet so far away from each other. Irine Dash reminds us that there was a belief in the Renaissance that a fair and beautiful blonde woman was considered the epitome of perfection, because "outer beauty was believed to reflect inner beauty." On the other end was the dark-skinned, sharp-tongued, less attractive woman who was often considered to be the shrew. Even though Katherine receives these characteristics from Shakespeare, he "reveals her worth, forcing the audience to question the Renaissance formula of worth being equivalent to beauty" (41-43).

The side story, that is about how Bianca finds love is set to be the complete opposite for how Kate is finding her lover. At first it seems that Bianca is choosing for herself a lover, and Kate was denied, thus Bianca is having her happily ever after while Kate has to endure her 'violent' husband. But if it read more carefully, with the view that it is a farce and romance story, then the relationships are gaining another explanation.

Bianca as the counterpart of her sister, is kind and loveable, but her sudden change of personality overwrites her previous angelic behaviour. She is the perfect bride that everyone wants to have, and she gives a lot to make people believe this. She is obedient and submissive towards her father, whatever her father may wish upon her. Even if she is upset about it, she will not fight against him.

BIANCA Sister, content you in my discontent.

Sir, to your pleasure humbly I subscribe.

My books and instruments shall be my company,

On them to look and practise by myself.

(Act 1.1. 80-4)

Even when she has her hands tied, and there are no potential future suitors around her, she is still the same petite, humble girl, who does not wish any harm on her sister, even when she is the one keeping her hostage. She says, “So well I know my duty to my elders” (Act 2.1. 7) saying that she will always respect the ones who came before her. Kate being violent towards her in this scene, could be her attempt to make Bianca show her real face, to let her personality shine through, instead of constantly pretending to be the perfect daughter. Kate attempt fails, and Bianca’s is set to break the rules and cause a scandal when she chooses to marry Lucentio in secret.

The other marriage proposals that she, or more precisely her father got, are a competition between Grumio and Tranio, Baptista only cares about what they can provide for her daughter in material wealth but not of what they offer in the emotional department. While considering Petruchio for Katherine, one of his conditions are that they have to be in love, but when it comes to the handing down of the next daughter, his only concern is which one of the two suitors has the deeper pockets.

BAPTISTA Content you, gentlemen; I will compound this strife.
'Tis deeds must win the prize, and he of both
That can assure my daughter greatest dower
Shall have my Bianca's love.

(Act 2. 1. 330-34)

Ann Thompson mentions that at least Kathrine’s unusual conduct has granted her the privilege to marry for love (93n125), but as I have mentioned, her actual opinion was dismissed. Perhaps her father’s love was more pronounced toward Bianca because she was a highly valued girl, not because he liked Bianca more, since he did not care about whether Bianca would marry for love or not. Her elopement makes more sense in light of this, as she takes matters into her own hand and marries for love rather than wealth. Unfortunately, this is not for long. Her character becomes the real shrew by the end of the play, while Katherine becomes the perfect wife.

In the past, whenever her father called on her, Bianca would come, but once she was married, and called upon by her husband, Lucentio, she refused to obey him. These two types of marriages describe two different endings. Dash observes that Shakespeare throws both of these ideas out to the audience: Baptista auctions off his younger daughter to the highest bidder and marries off his elder daughter to an unknown, seemingly wild bridegroom. But the younger daughter, Bianca, by tricking her father marries the man of her choice, thus entering into a marriage based on the “good consent of both” partners. Kate and Petruchio, despite the terms

of the marriage, seem to achieve “spiritual intimacy” (35). Bianca and Lucentio enter into their marriage believing that the other loves and respects them, but as Bianca is hiding her true self, their marriage is based on a lie, thus cannot blossom like Kate and Petruchio’s who both know about the other’s worst versions and accept it. They learn about each other and teach each other how to love.

1.3 Romance in Fury

The process of getting Kathrine to change her behaviour is unusual and to some “totally offensive” (qtd. in Thompson 17) but for others who look at it through the glass of farce it becomes an entertaining tale of a marriage that is not like the typical Romeo and Juliet type of love. The taming process is compared to falcon training as Thompson draws our attention to it in Petruchio’s speech when he tells the audience what is going to happen (36).

PETRUCHIO My falcon now is sharp and passing empty,
And till she stoop she must not be full-gorged,
For then she never looks upon her lure.
Another way I have to man my haggard...

Thompson questions that Petruchio’s taming of Katherine is cruel when she writes “Petruchio is indeed a teacher, not only in respect of his role in the taming plot but also in his tendency to deliver moral lessons on more general topics” (34). One of these topics was mentioned briefly when he arrives at his wedding dressed in cheap clothing. Thompson continues to argue that his lesson about Kate marrying the person, not the clothes is a reappearing theme that comes back later. Kate is reluctant to go back to her father’s house in her old clothes, but Petruchio reassures her and teaches her the “lack of any necessary congruity between the clothing and the person underneath it” (34). Whether Kate shows up in her old or new clothing, her personality, her being will not be changed. She is judged by her behaviour rather than her attire, so what she should be changing is the former.

Although the taming seems harsh at first, Blake finds it entertaining, especially the part where Petruchio pretended to be the shrew (249). The newlyweds’ journey to Petruchio’s house is only described by one of the servants.

GRUMIO ...how her horse fell, and she under her horse;
thou shouldst have heard in how miry a place, how she was
bemoiled, how he left her with the horse upon her, how he beat

me because her horse stumbled, how she waded through the dirt
to pluck him off me, how he swore, how she prayed that never
prayed before, how I cried, how the horses ran away, how her bridle
was burst, how I lost my crupper - with many things of worthy
memory which now shall die in oblivion, and thou return unexperienced
to thy grave.

CURTIS By this reckoning he is more shrew than she.

(Act 4.1.54-63)

Blake continues with the observation of the following lines when Petruchio switches “from fury to solicious affection” (249). Her frustration and desperation are comical due to her resilience. Although she went through many mind games, “she is not silenced, nor is her spirit crushed. That would make her situation too painful for laughter” (Blake 249-50). Pearson agrees with Blake when she writes that “[h]is behaviour can easily be portrayed as cruel and tormenting, even as a type of brainwashing, but in such a portrayal the play loses its multiplicity and is no longer an entertaining examination of marriage and society’ (234).

There is an additional example of Katherine maintaining her mentality and not succumbing to Petruchio’s ‘brainwashing’ when they are making fun of Vincentio. He mistakes them for a traveller and his “merry mistress” (Act 4.5. 53), a couple who like to make jokes about the company they come across. If Kate is miserable, she would not participate in the joke, nor would she seem like a “merry mistress” to Vincentio. She is enjoying the game they are playing and thus “the comedy establishes a new role for Kate to play through a shared joke” (Blake 242). She is no longer a shrew, but rather a happy part of a unity of two, no longer a loner.

Another opportunity comes for the couple to showcase their love towards each other. Petruchio asks Katherine to kiss him, this at first shocks Katherine as they are on the street and not in private. Petruchio pushes more and Kate gives in to kiss him. This is not him making Kate do something she does not initially want, rather she is at first surprised that somebody would show their affection toward her in public.

Thus, we arrive to the infamous speech of Katherine that ties to whole play together. In this speech Katherine describes a marriage in which the partners are as equal as they could be in her time, as Shakespeare’s “view of marriage is a purely secular one where the relationship between man and wife is a civil contract. The husband is still superior, of course, but he has obligations to perform” (Thomson 29).

KATHERINE (...)

Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee
And for thy maintenance; commits his body
To painful labour both by sea and land,
To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,
Whilst thou li'st warm at home, secure and safe,
And craves no other tribute at thy hands
But love, fair looks and true obedience -
Too little payment for so great a debt.

(Act 5.2. 146-54)

In other words, the husband is the one who goes to work in order to give his wife security and a house to live in. Kathrine also describes what kind of attributes should fit a wife.

KATHERINE (...)

Such duty as the subject owes the prince,
Even such a woman oweth to her husband.
And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
And not obedient to his honest will,
What is she but a foul contending rebel
And graceless traitor to her loving lord?

(Act 5.2. 155-60)

“The implication here is that, like the subject, she is obliged to obey only as long as her husband's will seems 'honest'” (Thompson 29), as in the marriage is not only something from which one can only take and not give, rather both partner has to show their devotions towards the other. But if we look at this speech considering the comical and farcical elements the speech loses its reliability. She is not succumbing to his will fully, she is not giving away her personality, rather she plays along the lines of Petruchio's game they have been playing. Both now conscious about what the society they live in requires from them, and they act accordingly. As in Kate being the most devoted wife, who does everything her husband wishes, and Petruchio a husband who can control his wife. But when there is only to two of us, the masquerade can end, and they can be their truest selves.

Taking all this into consideration, the play at hand is probably not an attack towards women, who should be always submissive to their husbands, rather than a play that was put on to entertain the audience and to showcase a love affair unlike any other they have probably seen in their lives. As one would first think, as I did, that this is a wife-bashing play which is not worthy to be read, hopefully can realise that it is far from the truth. The play is a farce play, and it is showed in many occasions, such as the absurd wooing process, the unbelievable wedding, the relationship between Kate and Petruchio all irrational and over the top occurrences. Furthermore, the display of comical violence, that is not to hurt the other but rather to make the audience laugh. The younger couple, Bianca and Lucentio is a laughingstock, as their loving relationship turns out to be not so romantic as both portrayed at the beginning. Both disguising themselves and thus unable to find what they desire. In the adaptation the romance story is processed differently, as Katherine and Bianca are adults with successful careers.

Chapter 2 The Shrew as a Politician

Introduction

The ‘Shakespea(Re)-Told’ series was produced in 2005, when BBC took four Shakespeare stories and remade them to fit into the 21st century. One of them was the *Taming of The Shrew* remake, written by Sally Wainwright.² This movie adaptation is an “educational or classroom-friendly approach. This Shakespeare is not meant to be “good for you,” just good entertainment” (Pittman 141).

In the BBC Retold Kate Minola is “a petite, compact, and dour Katherine (Shirley Henderson) [who] is a rising and volatile star of the Tory Party” (Pittman 146). An occupation that would have been unimaginable back in the 16th century for a woman. She is a successful MP, who later on becomes the Prime Minister, which is in itself a great representation of a woman who seeks accomplishments from a career that was previously inhabited only by men. Although some might attest that, Kate with her ‘shrewish’ personality is “inconceivable as Leader of the Conservative Party” (Morse 286), yet we should bear in mind that her whole character is exaggerated due to the farcical element of the movie.

Kate’s sister Bianca is a supermodel, who often travels around the world for work, who is also the female version of a womanizer, as she is shown to have a taste for young boys.

2.1 Reborn farce

The BBC version took the farce element to heart and produced a film that clearly showcases the farcical element of the play, in different ways. These elements are found in Petruchio’s way of acting toward Kate, and in the relationship between Bianca and Lucentio.

The most unusual wedding is held for Kate and Petruchio. The bride arrives at the church in time, while the groom is late, and when he does appear he is intoxicated and dressed as a woman. This is humiliating for a feminist and conservative Kate. She assumes that she is going to marry a gentleman, someone with a title, something that could appeal to her voters. Instead, she is marrying a non-binary husband, who likes to dress in drag from time to time. Understandably, she desires to leave, but Petruchio persists on taking her to the altar and tells Kate that if she were to leave, her voters would be disappointed in her, implying that she should

² The BBC’s website has been archived, but it is still accessible at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/shakespeare/tamingoftheshrew/index.shtml>

adhere to the marriage. The absurdity of this wedding is clear and could awaken sympathy in the viewers making them unable to laugh but that would make the movie fail its genre.

The Bianca and Lucentio pairing “clarifies the transparency of communication” in Kat and Petruchio’s relationship (Wray 191). There is a recognisable language barrier between the first two, since Bianca only speaks English, while Lucentio only speaks Italian, thus their relationship lacks the fundamentals of an intimate relationship, and they only use one another for their own selfish reasons.

When the day of their wedding arrives, Bianca wants Lucentio to sign a prenuptial agreement since she wishes to secure her wealth in case their relationship runs its course. Lucentio declines to sign this paper and that leads them to a fight that neither of them could understand without a translator at present. This need for a third party to apprehend what the other says, “keeps the level of farce present through the more serious discussion of law and love” (Morse 291).

Another farcical element is the relationship between Kate and Tim Agnew, a civil servant. In the first minutes of the play, an extremely furious Kate slaps him across the face in their workplace. This violence is similar to what can be seen in the play, and as I have mentioned, it is also used there as a farcical element, to make the whole play considered as a comedy. Here it also establishes the comedy part of the movie, staging that not everything that is said or done should be taken seriously, which will become important when Kate gives her updated monologue at the end of the movie.

2.2 Kate’s fury and her relationships

In The ShakespeaRe-Told version the characterization of Katherine is changed, yet her relationships are as complicated as they were before, and many aspects of them are there to showcase the farcical element. She is still not an even-tempered person, who makes friends easily, and neither does she look like someone who needs friends. Ramona Wray observes that in the opening scene of Kate walking down political corridors in her small shoes highlights the contrast between gender and power. Furthermore, the use of Jong Williams’ iconic score from the film *Jaws* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1975) underscores her fierce character (187). This defines her character to the viewer as a person who seems delicate, but what is hidden underneath is more like a predator.

There is no apparent reason for Kate’s fury in the play. The adult version of Kate is similar to the original one, her ‘shrewishness’ is not justified by some traumatic event, rather it seems to be a thing she likes about herself. When she is on the phone talking to possibly another

civil servant, she says “Don’t tell me I have to be nice to them in order to get them to vote for me”³. This shows that not even the success of her career could make her behave in a way one would expect from an MP.

In another scene when she is describing Petruchio to her sister and mother, she says “he hits people,” with a huge smile on her face, which is immensely out of character for her. It is also disturbing that she finds this quality charming. Even so, given her relationship to violence, the like attracts like saying is quite true when we look at Petruchio and Kate.

As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, Katherine is always described by others with words that people would not think of saying about their loved ones. In this version “a crook,” “frumpy,” “bonkers,” “mad,” “dyke” and “Hitler” are added to the list. All for the enjoyment of the audience, the movie does not directly compare Kate to Hitler, rather it gives a funny comparison between them, which makes her acting and her character be over-the-top to showcase the farcical element.

As mentioned before, one farce moment is Kate and Petruchio’s wedding which happens on different grounds as in the play. Katherine's only privilege was that her father sought a suitable match for her to fall in love with. However, in the BBC version, the power dynamic shifts, as she takes control of her life. Petruchio has to seek her consent to marry since she easily could decline his offer, as she does many times while they were stuck in the lift.

While Baptista's choice for Bianca’s future husband depended on the suitor's wealth, Kate's decision is settled by Petruchio’s title. It is believed that his title would benefit her campaign, so instead of mutual love, she, as in the play, marries for other reasons. The only difference is that here it is her choice to marry, while in the play she was forced to. But as I have mentioned the forced marriage theme comes back when Petruchio shows up dressed as a woman. Even though his aim was not to humiliate Kate, when he arrived at the church, rather to be as clear as he can about his true self. Before their marriage he is quite honest about his background and reasons he is inclined to marry. Thus, before it is too late, he wants Kate to know his deep secret. Which later on will even benefit Kate as her voters will take delight in the fact that Petruchio is an eccentric aristocrat who likes to wear skirts from time to time.

Marrying for wealth is not a fictional idea, but in a rom-com movie, as this one it is there to bring the comedy to life, and this movie serves it justice. The whole marriage after

³ All quotations from the film are from this source: *The Taming of The Shrew: ShakespeaRe-Told*, Directed by David Richards, performances by Shirley Henderson, Rufus Sewell, BBC, 2005.

seems unromantic at first, but Kate and Petruchio does find each other attractive in their own ways, and it is comical for a viewer, how their relationship starts.

While Kate's support system failed during her wedding, she has a number of people in her life who have been instrumental in her career path. This is something that was missing from the plays. Even if their personal relationships are not good, Tim and John are two men who stand by her, whatever her personality may be, and however she would treat them.

Both Kate and Bianca are adults, and their relationship is shown that of two sisters who are two sides of the same coin. The younger sister living in the lap of luxury, adored by her looks, and spending most her time with shopping and with men, while the other sister has been working hard in the past, and yet still looked down upon because of her looks and manners.

Consequently, as it was shown in the previous chapter, the sisters have their rough patches in this adaptation too. Such as the time when Kate ruins Bianca's party, when she mashes a guitar on Robie Williams' head. But their dispute does not last long, as the next scene when both woman is present, is when Kate tells them about Petruchio.

In the adaptation the father figure is replaced by Mrs Minola, the mother of Kate and Bianca. The girls lack the supervision of a man and masculine power in their lives, which enables Bianca to make up her own rules, rather than those of her father, as it was done in the play. The mother of the girls remarries by the end, representing the old widow from the original play, and she also becomes a representation of a shrew, when she sides with Bianca about the prenuptial agreement, and she also does not agree with Kate's last speech. As mentioned in Chapter 1 the lack of a mother figure was connected to the girls' limited knowledge about marriage, but even in the BBC version "she is in no position to control the lives of, or give useful counsel to, her successful daughters, both of whom have already made a name for themselves in their respective ways, Bianca as a fashion model, and Katherine as a politician in the opposition party" (Földváy 58).

As Baptista shared more kindness toward Bianca, here Mrs Minola has more attention in the youngest sister's life than in the oldest one. The three women were having lunch, when Kate brought up that she was on the news the previous night.

KATE Did you see me on the news last night?

MRS MINOLA Oh no... You should have told me.

KATE I did. I left a message.

MRS MINOLA Oh.

Mrs Minola checks her phone, but the conversation immediately changes when Bianca brings up that she had six proposals that week. During their conversations Mrs Minola seems more excited by what Bianca has to say, than what her other daughter. One reason is that Mrs Minola and Bianca are two of a kind, they share interest and hobbies, while she lacks these with her other daughter.

As it is shown when Mrs Minola visits Kate in her workplace but only to drag her to Bianca's party. She tries to persuade her first by saying that she and Bianca are worried about her. When this technique does not work, she attacks Kate's weakest point: her career. They both go to the party, where Kate proves that she can indeed lose her temper and make a fool out of herself in under five minutes.

The next time they meet is when Kate tells Bianca and her mother about her recent engagement. Only Bianca is cautious about Petruchio and asks questions like "Do you trust him?" to which their mother answers with "Of course she does." The mother's reaction to the betrothal is superficial, she does not care about what Petruchio is like, and her only interest lies in his title. "I should marry someone with a title," she said. Her attitude is sort of similar to Baptista's since he is also more interested in the wealth of the suitors than what kind of people they are. Nevertheless, at least he exerts himself to wed Kate to someone who loves her.

The personalities of Mrs Minola and Bianca are surface level, they are shallow, and they lack emotional depth. Their characters bring comical scenes to the movie. Bianca's story is there to set contrast to Kate's, so the viewer would be able to see the difference between marriage and marriage. One is built on solid grounds, without lying to the other, while the one matter the other has is unclear communication. All of this are done under farcical elements, such as the mother who seems to only care about one's title, and the sister who is capable to marry someone who she does not even understand.

2.3 The not so sweet Honeymoon

The rush after the wedding is remarkably similar to the play's where Petruchio insists on leaving right after the ceremony. In the BBC's version he said that they had to leave since their plane would be leaving in an hour. Even though Kate was the one who paid for everything, since Petruchio is penniless, this information comes as a surprise to her.

Perhaps no one is shocked when Kate tells Petruchio that she wants a divorce, but that is out of the question for him. His solution to win more time with his wife is to desert Kate in the Italian villa. This prevents her from calling for help or making plans to go back to London. He tells Harry that he is "going to tame the bitch," but his way of taming heavily differs from

the previous taming methods. One of them is almost rape, where a furious Petruchio unbuckles his pants and throws Kate onto the bed while he said that “You have teased me long enough”. As an answer to that, Kate gives in and what seems like her attempt at kissing him, makes Petruchio change his mind and declares that he would not have a sexual relationship with her unless she is nice to him. He leaves the room leaving a disappointed Kate on the bed. This presents the “troubling yet no less familiar spectacle of the unruly woman who secretly desires of a husband social and sexual mastery” (Kidnie 108). This scene is a borderline case for the farcical element, as I was unable to laugh at this scene.

The next scene is when Petruchio and Harry are having dinner, and a messy looking Kate joins them. While Petruchio is away to fetch Kate’s suitcase, she and Harry have a deep conversation about the newlyweds’ relationship. Kate confirms that she married Petruchio for love, and her career is not as important as that.

Later, Petruchio blackmails Kate with throwing her suitcase into the pool, if she will not be nice to him. He starts to count down, but Kate never answers. It may be her attempt to showcase that they are equal parts of this marriage, and she will not answer to such forms of violence. After Petruchio throws her suitcase into the water, she walks up to him and says “I don’t wear knickers, anyway. Not when I’m on holiday.” She voices her wish not only to be looked at as a shrew, who needs to be tamed, but rather as someone whom Petruchio desires in a sexual way.

The last stamp on their marriage is Kate’s speech at the end of the movie, to the question whether a prenuptial agreement is necessary or not. Her speech is very similar to the one from the play in form and in meaning. As I have described their masquerade, here they are doing the same. Kate gives a speech about how a husband is the breadwinner, while the wife is just at home laying on a couch. This speech is one of the most comical scenes of the movie, since everything Kate states is a sort of lie. Kate is the one who sticks to her career, while Petruchio becomes the ‘housewife.’ Even though, both know that going against the societal norms, will not hurt their relationship. And the game of pulling each other’s leg from time to time is a great way to continue their passion for each other, since they are in this marriage for good.

Some other clues for the not so hidden farcical element of the movie can be found in the way the main lovers act and how the camera movements are showing them. The characters are not some people who one could just run in the streets, rather they are special cases. Everybody acts a bit over the top or has some questionable characteristics, but none of them fit into these as much as Kate and Petruchio. Both has an extreme way of acting and showcasing their emotions. Such moments are when Kate is closely shot while she deforms her face as much as

she can to show how angry she is. There are many other scenes, where the camera is positioned in a way it would film the actors viewing down on them or looking up to them. They are not spontaneous acts, they are there to strengthen the farcical element of the play, showcasing the 'weirdness'.

Even if an 'old' play is planted in the 21st century, some of its struggles and romantic notions can live through centuries. Kate showed that she can be a leading lady, and even if she is preoccupied with her career she can still fall in love. As one does not stand in the way of the other, the key is to find a ground that it can work on, as Petruchio and Kate does.

Conclusion

A misunderstood play, written in the 16th century, has more than one way to be interpreted. *The Taming of the Shrew* could be viewed as something that “should be put back firmly and squarely on the shelf” (gtd. in Thompson 17) or “a humorous play or film where the characters become involved in unlikely situations” (“Farce”).

The way to make it an entertaining play is to watch it through the lenses of a farce. All the occasions when somebody is being slapped or hit, are comical parts of the play and the movies, and they are not tragic moments that should make the viewer feel sympathy towards the character rather they should make them laugh. As it can be seen in the taming progress, which is not wife-bashing, and the aim is not to break Katherine into complete submission, rather to showcase her how to manage properly in her society. The relationship between the two is at first out of the ordinary, but in the end, it will blossom into a great marriage.

As it is in the adaptation, in the movie the main lovers have to go through a hard patch to reach their happy ending. In the BBC’s version Kate has to go through the most embarrassment and hardship to reach her happy ending with Petruchio. Untangling their relationship was a challenge for me, since the taming in the BBC’ version is rather dark, and more serious than in the other two.

As adaptation in the 21st century it included one of the biggest changes that occurred previously, which is feminism. It showed women in power and tried to show how different they can be from one another, when they are not pressured into one personality. These women had the freedom to choose their life, the actions they wanted to take on and to wear whatever they wanted. Kate becomes the Prime Minister; Bianca is a supermodel, both leading a successful career on their own.

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