

Secrecy of Marriage as a Confounding Factor In *The Taming of the Shrew*

Natia Tatrishvili

Candidate for the Master's degree in Anglistics
Gori State University
Chavchavadze Street #53, Gori, 1400, Georgia
+995 598 48 01 35

tatrishvilinatia04@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7590-1338>

Abstract In today's society, the 21st-century generation marries the people they love, observes each other before marriage, and then decides how much they match and how deeply they feel. We cannot say that in Shakespeare's era, and in his works, marriage becomes a confusing subject for the reader because it raises the question of what is marriage and what or for whom it is intended. We should look for the answer to these questions in Shakespeare's comedy *The Taming of the Shrew*, where love and marriage have become a subject that involves many secrets. This research aimed to determine the reasons that led to the secrecy of marriage. However, secrecy not only means the customary definition, something hidden but also the changes in behavior that marriage demands of a woman to conform to the society she lives in.

Keywords: Personal changes, the secrecy of marriage, *The Taming of the Shrew*

Introduction

When comparing modern and Shakespearean times, the main topic of discussion is often the wedding, but whether the wedding is created by a couple in love or for money remains to be seen. There are different understandings of love, but in general, a family created with love implies understanding, respect, and loyalty. However, families can also fall apart when certain problems arise, especially financial ones. We see this problem in Shakespeare's play *The Taming of the Shrew*, which focuses on the relationships between men and women, but they develop from the initial interest in marriage.

The Taming of the Shrew is considered a comedy, but behind it lies the issue of taming women and making them obedient to men. Here, the issue of gender and discrimination between men and women is an important one, as women are treated as commodities to raise the status of men and enhance their economic and social level (Mutlak, 2022). Where the choice of the husband is based on his economic and social status instead of relying on the

feelings of the lovers, this affects not only their lives but also their family's lives. This relationship between the prospective husband and the father of the bride becomes a financial transaction involving the transfer of money and gifts (Brown, 1957, p. 57-58; 94-99).

The Research Question

This research aimed to determine the main reason for women's transformation. It will address the following questions: What does it mean that Bianca, the "ideal" woman, at the end of the play has become unpleasant and bad-tempered, now that she is married? How should we respond to the process by which Petruchio "tames" Kate? (The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1992)

Marriage

A cage, a trap, a snare

For the unwary:

The dusty path, stale drinking hole,

The iron bars, a zoo.

The tigers loll and pace and pace.

Two oxen in a trace
Yoked forever, me and you.
The knot is wound, we're spliced,
Joined, tied and bound to the same
Name, plates, windows, towels,
Bath and bed,
Same lawn, same sandwich meat,
Same bread.

See the shining seaweed,
The glistening stones,
The water's swish, the golden fish,
The coral bones,
The snails that whisper
As they pass.

Stand back.
See the glass.

(Barbara Crooker, in Heriot, et al., 1975)

A group of researchers made explicit what many women already intuitively knew, that society puts women in a "no win," double bind dilemma (Heriot, et al., 1975).

What is marriage?

Consider two competing views:

The Conjugal View: Marriage is the union of a man and a woman who make a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other of the type that is naturally fulfilled by bearing and rearing children together. Marriage is valuable, but its inherent orientation to the bearing and rearing of children contributes to its distinctive structure, including norms of monogamy and fidelity.

The Revisionist View: Marriage is the union of two people, who commit to romantically loving and caring for each other and to sharing the burdens and benefits of domestic life. It is essentially a union of hearts and minds, enhanced by whatever forms of sexual intimacy both partners find agreeable. The state should recognize and regulate marriage

because it has an interest in stable romantic partnerships and in the concrete needs of spouses and any children they may choose to rear. (Girgis, et al, Vol. 34.)

The content similarity of Shakespeare's plays with the Elizabethan era

These definitions of marriage were not the same in the Elizabethan era. In general, a woman's wedding is one of the most important days of her life, and so too it was for Elizabethan women. They were dependent on their male relatives to support them. They were raised to believe that they were inferior to men. Marriages were frequently arranged for the benefit of both families, to increase their prestige or wealth. Many couples would meet for the very first time on their wedding day (Alchin, 2014).

Elizabethan times, the era in which Shakespeare lived, reflected these attitudes about marriage in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Love and marriage are the concerns of Shakespeare's play. Marriage is the primary metaphor that sustains the action of the play and provides the framework within which Shakespeare develops the main characters. Shakespeare portrays the two predominant types of marriage in early modern England: the arranged marriage of Katharina and Petruchio and the companionate marriage of Bianca and Lucentio (Simms, 2016).

The play gives us some strikingly different models of the process of attracting and choosing a mate. Lucentio's marriage to Bianca is prompted by his idealized love for an ideal woman. When she first appears, Bianca is silent and obedient to her father. Her father denies all men the opportunity to openly court Bianca until her older sister, the vicious, ill-tempered Katherine, is married. Lucentio decides to overcome this problem by disguising himself as Bianca's Latin tutor to gain an excuse to be in her company. All that matters to Lucentio is winning Bianca's heart, to marry her even in secret (The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1992).

There is a content similarity in Shakespeare's play with the Elizabethan era, such as the rights of the father; whatever he decided, everyone would agree with him, including his rebellious daughter Katherine. The style of wooing adopted by Petruchio in quest of Katherine is notably free of idealism. He is concerned with money. He takes money from all of Bianca's suitors for wooing Katherine. (The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1992) Therefore, this play was subjected to some criticism because, in the view of some readers, it urges misogyny. Men do not act according to the traditional pattern, but the woman is punished if she deviates from the traditional role, she must be obedient and submissive to her husband (Mutlak, 2022).

As for Petruchio and Katherine's relationship, marriage is just a way to get money and impose his authority on her. After all, he was able to tame her and make her obedient to him such as in this quote "Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, Thy head, thy sovereign." (*The Taming of the Shrew*, p.162-163). At the end of the play, when Lucentio comes to Petruchio and Katherine to celebrate his wedding banquet, this indicates that marriage is a means of uniting families rather than a relationship between a married couple (Mutlak, 2022). The dowry negotiations, courtship, and marriage conform to the traditional model for an early modern English marriage that Shakespeare's contemporary audience would recognize (Simms, 2016).

The main plan

Shakespeare details Petruchio's plan to tame Katharina; he will contradict all her expressions of subjectivity. He will eschew violence and adopt a kinder, gentler mode of domestic discipline. While waiting for Katharina to arrive, Petruchio declares his taming plan (Simms, 2016).

I'll attend her here

And woo her with some spirit when she comes.

Say that she rail, why then I'll tell her plain

She sings as sweetly as a nightingale.

Say that she frown, I'll say she looks as clear
As morning roses newly washed with dew.
Say she be mute and will not speak a word,
Then I'll commend her volubility

And say she uttereth piercing eloquence.
If she do bid me pack, I'll give her thanks,
As though she bid me stay by her a week.
If she deny wedding, I'll crave the day
When I shall ask the bans and when be married.

(*The Taming of the Shrew*, 2.1, pp.164-176)

Petruccio wagers that his wife will prove more obedient than both Lucentio and Hortensio's wives. When the men call for their wives to attend them, only Katherine appears and Petruccio wins the wager. Katherine speaks forcefully to the other women about what is expected of a good wife and about the nature of the relationship between husband and wife. The guests are surprised by Katherine's transformation. Petruchio claims to have the more successful marriage. But is the marriage of Petruchio and Katherine a superior match; have they truly learned to love each other? Or is it based on terror and deception? (The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1992).

In his presentation of the "taming of a shrew," Shakespeare gave voice to a variety of attitudes toward women and marriage that were common in his time.

The reason for the transformation of women

The audience can follow the trajectory of Katherine's transformation from a shrew to a good wife and daughter during the course of the play. However, her taming is uncertain. In her final speech, Katharine appears to submit to her husband's authority and acknowledges her taming. Yet this speech is a performance before an audience in which she establishes a hierarchy of women in which Kate is clearly at the top of the pecking order. It shows that she has been tamed and reinforces the male fantasy of subjugation. However, it contains a

clear description of the duties owed by the wife to the husband and the husband to the wife. Finally, in the last line of the play, Lucentio expresses the audience's uncertainty that Katharina is truly tamed (Simms, 2016).

In Shakespeare's time, weak women were valued more than strong women. So Baptista valued his daughter Bianca more than Katherina, as Bianca is a traditional woman, obedient to her father. Her personality fits the traditions of that society and is more valued for marriage because men want a woman who is submissive to them. She conceals her domineering personality and outwardly she submits and obeys the men in her life.

As for Katherina, she was a rebellious character who did not get along with anyone, but after her marriage, she became the most obedient partner to her husband. It is possible that she disguised herself as a weak and obedient woman to let her husband believe that he could actually tame her: "I am ashamed that women are so simple to offer war where they should kneel for peace." We wonder if Kate has been tamed or if she is pretending to please her husband, or if the two are pretending to satisfy Baptista and the other characters (Mutlak, 2022).

Shakespeare presents us with different concepts of love. There is the relationship between the daughters and the father; there is the conventional relationship in the sense of pure love or the sincere relationship between two people; and there is the relationship that occurs as a result of interests or benefits to the parties for money or status (Mutlak, 2022).

Petruchio and Katherina's relationship is devoid of love, only for the sake of money; Petruchio is drawn to marry Katherina for her wealth, as well as his desire to challenge and tame Kate and dominate her. Their relationship reflects marriage in the sixteenth century, where marriage between families is organized on the basis of mutual benefits between them and without giving women the right to choose and without concern for love or emotions. Perhaps they learn to love after marriage as Katherina apparently did, although we're not sure

if she is really happy or if she pretends to be a good and obedient wife (Mutlak, 2022).

Discussion

The Taming of the Shrew is a comedy that deals with issues of marriage, gender, love, disguise, and social order. The play is open to various interpretations and analyses as it is difficult to determine if the play is misogynistic or whether Shakespeare uses this style to mock misogynists. Or if Kate really does become an obedient wife or just goes along with her husband to conform to the demands of the society in which she lives. Or if Petruchio is really a loving husband trying to find happiness in his marriage or if he is trying to subdue Kate to please himself (Mutlak, 2022).

The scenes of ridicule of love appear in the play frequently. They are linked to money, and we see many scenes of Baptista, Petruchio, and Hortensio that confirm the ironic treatment of love. The only scenes that confirm love are the scenes of Bianca and Lucentio before marriage. But their relationship changes after marriage, especially when she is summoned to him in the last scene as part of the bet with Petruchio and she does not respond. The woman is seen as a bargaining tool. She is the property of her father, and when she reaches the age of marriage, he decides who is the right husband without caring about her opinion. After marriage, she legally becomes the property of her husband (Mutlak, 2022).

The play includes a number of characters who fit the traditional role of women and men, with the idea that the man is the dominant character, and the woman is the submissive or obedient partner. The play revolves around Petruchio's attempt to tame his wife, Katherina, and try to make her obedient to him in order to fit the traditional role of a wife. The main focus of the play is destroying the spirit of a strong woman and making her subservient to her husband. In spite of his declaration to use a gentler method to change her, actually Petruchio uses humiliation, starvation, and deprivation with Katherina to subdue her unacceptable behavior. Marriage obligates a wife to conceal her true feelings in order to conform to the role of a "good

wife.” This is the secrecy of marriage. There are many of these same secretive attitudes about the appropriate behavior of women in traditional Georgian society today. Isn’t it time for a change?

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Author’s Note



Natia Tatrishvili is 23 years old and lives in Akhalsopeli in the Gori Region of Georgia. She graduated from Gori State University with a red diploma in English Philology and has continued her studies there for a Master’s degree in Anglistics. She has also worked as an English language lecturer at the vocational school of Gori State University. She studies in a society where patriarchy is still dominant today. She hopes that the parallels that are part of the research will be thought-provoking for the reader, as a mirror reflects each of these parallels and may be a pointer to transformation.