

The Taming of the Shrew is one of the earliest comedies written by sixteenth and seventeenth century English bard, William Shakespeare. Some scholars believe it may have been his first work written for the stage as well as his first comedy (Shakespearean 310). The earliest record of it being performed on stage is in 1593 or 1594. It is thought by many to be one of Shakespeare's most immature plays (Cyclopedia 1106).

In The Taming of the Shrew, Petruchio was the only suitor willing to court Kate, the more undesirable of Baptista's two daughters. Kate was never described as unattractive (Elizabeth Taylor played her role in one film of the production), but was known for her shrewish behavior around all of Padua. Bianca, on the other hand was very sweet and charming and beautiful; for these reasons many suitors wooed her. Kate was presented to be much more intelligent and witty than Bianca, but, ironically, she could not compete with Bianca because of these witty comebacks and caustic remarks she made (Dash 830). All of the men who desired Bianca needed somebody to marry Kate, as it was customary for the older daughter to be married before the young one. Finally, Petruchio came along to court Kate, saying he wanted to marry wealthily in Padua. It appeared, though, as if Petruchio was the kind of man who needed an opposition in life. The shrewish Kate, who was known to have a sharp tongue, very adequately filled his need for another powerful character in a relationship (Kahn 419). When Petruchio began to woo Kate, everybody was rather surprised, but Signior Baptista agreed when Petruchio wanted marry her on Saturday of the week he met her. Clearly, he was not opposed because he wanted to hurry and get Kate married so she would not be in Bianca's way anymore. Petruchio showed up to the wedding late and in strange attire, but nevertheless they were married that Saturday. Petruchio began his famous process of taming his bride. From the beginning, Petruchio wanted to dominate a relationship of two dominating personalities. He sought to tame her in a nonviolent but still somewhat cruel fashion. Petruchio's method of "taming" Kate featured depriving her of the things she had taken for granted and been given all of her life, and he sarcastically acted as if it was in her best interest (Leggatt 410). In the name of love, Petruchio refused to let her eat, under the pretense that she deserved better food than what was being given her (Nevo 262). Similarly, Petruchio did not think that her bed was suitable for her to sleep in, so his servants took turns keeping her awake and denying her the sleep that she so desperately needed. When the tailor brought in what seemed to be a very pretty cap, Petruchio refused to let Kate have it, despite her incessant pleas to keep the cap (Legatt 410). Petruchio took the stance that Kate was his property, as he pointed out in the second scene of act three:

I will be master of what is mine own.

230 She is my goods, my chattels, she is my house.

My household stuff, my field, my barn,

My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything....

Petruchio's words left no doubt as to his belief in the patriarchal marriage system that existed during Shakespeare's time, perhaps presented in somewhat of an exaggerated form (Kahn 414).

As tiredness, hunger, and frustration set in on Kate, her wildcat personality began to weaken noticeably. Because of the helplessness of her situation, she began to show submission to her husband. When Kate mentioned the sun in a conversation, Petruchio absurdly disagreed with her and told her it was the moon. Kate proceeded to agree with him, to which, of course, he changed his mind back. Kate's response was that it changes even as his mind, and this was the first sign of her submission to Petruchio (Evans 32).

Petruchio's actions were very extreme during the play, but as Kate caught on to their role playing their relationship improved (Nevo 262). Many scholars feel that, despite Kate's submissiveness in the closing scene of the play, she would continue to be a strong opposition for Petruchio. Her representation at the end of the play, however, is very docile and submissive. There were several points in the

play during which she demonstrated her new found domesticated personality. Firstly, she showcased it by saying what Petruchio wanted her to, regardless of the absurdity of the statement. In addition to the already mentioned sun-moon incident, Kate referred to the old and decrepit Vincentio as a 'young budding virgin, fair and fresh and sweet' (Evans 32). In effect, Petruchio was demonstrating absurdity by being absurd, and Kate responded to his preposterousness. Another point in the play where Kate displayed her complaisance was when she came at Petruchio's call. When one of the men proposed a wager on whose wife will return first when they are all called, Petruchio responded by raising the bet significantly. He reasoned that he would wager that much on his hound, but his wife merited a much larger bet (Leggatt 413). Petruchio displayed complete trust in Kate in that situation, and she came through for her man. Many critics have pointed out that the wager scene is dominated by reversals: quiet Bianca talked back, while the shrewish Katherina came across as an obedient wife (Kahn 418). Kate enjoyed winning the wager for Petruchio just as Petruchio delighted in making (and raising) it (Leggatt 413). However, Ruth Nevo pointed out that Kate did not only win the wager, but her speech testifies a generosity worth far more than the two hundred crowns of the wager (264). Another point that must be made concerning her speech is that she delighted in reprimanding the other ladies for their unconventional behavior. She especially enjoyed admonishing Bianca for her unseemly behavior (Dash 835). Another instant when Kate obeyed her husband's outlandish demands came as somewhat of a surprise after the wager scene. Kate returned with the hat Petruchio had given her, and he instructed her to take off the hat, which Kate actually liked. She once again complied in front of the surprised crowd. As if all of these symbols of her obedience were not enough, Kate showed one more sign. As she concluded the scene and the play, Kate prepared to put her hand beneath her husband's foot, and Elizabethan symbol of wifely obedience (Kahn 419). Kate truly showed submission, obedience, and respect to her husband in the final scene of the play, earning respect for herself in the process. Many critics have observed and noted that Petruchio and Kate had a need for each other, being the strong personalities that they are. They thrive off of the intellectual games they play throughout *The Taming of the Shrew*. Both have a witty intelligence that made them attracted to each other. Also, each of them had something to prove: Petruchio needed to confirm his manhood, while Kate needed to steer her demeanor toward the ladylike side of things. The whole plot of the play drives toward these goals. It was Kate's submission to Petruchio which makes him a man, finally and indisputably (Kahn 419). Kate earned bountiful respect from the other men in the closing scene, as she proved to fit the mold of the conventional woman better than their wives did (Dash 835). Petruchio did not break Kate's wit and will, as some might perceive; he simply used them to his advantage, as is quite noticeable in the wager scene. This showed how Kate was actually a foil of Petruchio (Nevo 262). The acting done by Kate and Petruchio lived up to the patriarchal ideals of their time, but yet the reader is led to believe that in the future, there will still be opposition in their relationship. Even in the final scene, Kate never showed signs of being a weak character, but rather the ability to be strong in any way she needs to be. In a sense, Kate and Petruchio had what one might call a symbiotic relationship; that is, they both had a strong need for each other, which is somewhat paradoxical, as both of them were fiercely independent characters.

The customs and standards of marriages during the Elizabethan Age that Shakespeare wrote *The Taming of the Shrew* in are represented very accurately throughout the text of the play. There are hints that the marriage of Petruchio and Kate may not have exactly met these standards, but for acceptance they attempted to make it look that way. In fact, neither of them were really accepted until they did that. The marriages of the time were very male dominated. This is why Petruchio's form of violence was accepted; because he was the master of his property and could do what he wanted with it. Kate was not the conventional shrew, because most "shrews" were women that were already married and dominated their husbands in their relationship. Kate's violence was very unacceptable in their society, because women just did not

do that at that time. Kate committed four physically violent acts on stage: she broke the lute over the Hortensio's head, tied and beat Bianca, and hit Petruchio and Grumio (Kahn 415). Petruchio, however, never once committed an act of physical violence, but he did, in the name of love, deprive Kate of her needs until she bent to his will. Because Petruchio was a male, though, his violence was more accepted by society than was Kate's (Kahn 414). Petruchio's therapy for Kate has been compared to holding up a mirror and letting the shrew see herself. Whenever Kate would throw her tantrums, Petruchio would throw them right back, in perhaps even more exaggerated form. These provided the comical aspect of the play, as well as giving Kate a chance to look at her own image (Nevo 262). This exchange of roles, which landed Kate on the receiving end of all of those hideous tantrums, took her out of herself. This remedy appealed to the intelligent aspect of Kate's complex personality, and they brought about a change in her. This appeal to her intelligence is why Kate's will was not broken, but rather changed to meet Petruchio's mold to some extent (Nevo 263). The patriarchal styles that the marriages took on during the Elizabethan age are very well represented in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*.