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Matthias Bauer, Angelika Zirker (Eds.)

Drama and Cultural Change

Turning Around Shakespeare

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Matthias Bauer, Angelika Zirker (Eds.). -
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Preface

This collection of essays is concerned with the way in which drama both responds and contributes to cultural change. Not all of the contributions are focused on Shakespeare but most of them address the fact that, as regards the English-speaking world, Shakespeare has formed the pivot of the relationship between drama and culture for several centuries. This will perhaps appear most clearly when we consider the ways in which Shakespeare's plays have been adapted and transformed. It seems possible to read these adaptations as documentary evidence of cultural change, no matter whether the adaptation is meant to be a way of 'saving' Shakespeare for a different cultural climate, whether it is an iconoclastic attempt at showing the need for a thoroughgoing revision of the cultural assumptions on which his plays appear to be based, or whether Shakespeare's words, themes, characters and elements of action are mainly used as a kind of language helping later authors to make their own individual statements known and understood at particular cultural moments. This very process of marking similarity and difference by 'using' Shakespeare, however, shows that drama indicates, considers, enhances or slows down cultural change in complex ways.

Eckhard Auberlen's contribution to this volume, together with Ellen Dengel-Janic's and Johanna Roering's essay, is most immediately concerned with the use of Shakespeare in later dramatic works. In his article on George Granville's adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice*, Auberlen points out that to Granville, Shakespeare's play becomes a means of pursuing an aesthetic and political agenda which responds to the social and economic situation of Granville's own time. One way of doing so is to present *The Merchant of Venice* as the defense of a world in which trade forms a harmonious league with aristocratic ideals of generosity in the face of a more ruthless, profit-oriented form of capitalism. In their discussion of the British-Asian film *Second Generation*, Dengel-Janic and Roering come to a conclusion which evinces parallels to Auberlen's: in this TV production, Shakespeare (in this case *King Lear*) is used to eventually advocate a notion of stability in a multi-ethnic, postmodern, economically instable context. The fact that, in this process, the quintessentially tragic action of Shakespeare's play is turned into a not entirely unsentimental story with a happy ending is perhaps no coincidence when we consider the history of post-Renaissance Shakespeare adaptations. Lars Eckstein's paper on representations of Shakespeare's Caliban in 18th and 19th-century British painting implicitly takes the notion of adaptation onto a different plane, not only because he is concerned with painting rather than the stage or the cinema but also because, by focusing on the exotic imaginary to which the Shakespearean character gave rise, Eckstein reflects on the imaginative potential of a figure that could, in a particular economic and ideological context, become a manifestation of exoticist desire.

Shakespeare, however, can be regarded as the catalyst of cultural change not only when it comes to adaptations and reconfigurations of his plays or certain characters.

from reified norms with the aim of stimulating sympathetic laughter and inducing relief from real-life constraints and anxieties. Relief is further heightened by successful escapes into alternative worlds, into the realms of the marvellous, the magic, the idyllic, the chief characteristic of which is the absence of power structures based on time-honoured moral, political and economic laws. At the same time, the assignment of a privileged point of view to the audience is designed to relieve it from the anxieties felt by the characters in the plays and thus to enable it to lean back and relax.

All these strategies combined mark the distance that separated Shakespeare's early and middle comedies from both the medieval plays written in the "maner of a morall playe" and from the contemporary "Comicall Satyre." His comedies reflected *and* reinforced the processes of pluralisation, modernization, secularization and liberation, which finally were to gather momentum in the teeth of orthodoxy.

Kate Modern?

The Taming of the Shrew and the Trouble with Obedience

Matthias Bauer & Angelika Zirker

I. A Test Case

When it comes to the question as to whether Shakespeare may speak to us today in a manner which will meet with immediate agreement or whether his voice has become estranged from listeners of the 21st century, a general answer is impossible. Too diverse are the linguistic and cultural conditions, the preferences and convictions of his potential audience today. And, for all its coherence, too diverse is the Shakespeare canon itself, ranging as it does from topical satire to tragedy, from lyrical introspection to boisterous stage business. Still, we may hope for some answer when narrowing down the initial question. Can we identify cases in which cultural change makes it difficult or even impossible for a modern audience to appreciate what Shakespeare shows and tells us? For want of further empirical evidence, "audience" will be narrowed down too, and restricted to critical responses.

As regards a change of attitudes it seems obvious to consider the representation of successes and failures in human intercourse. We surmise that it is especially due to the manner in which Shakespeare represents some of the failures (caused, for example, by the inability to trust, as in the case of Othello or Leontes) that we can still hear and read with a sense of immediacy what his characters say and do. The striking quality of such representations may even be enhanced by our knowledge of their temporal distance. They can make us forget about the apparent need for adaptation and transformation or about "Shakespeare" having perhaps mainly become an (unread) cultural icon. Successes are more difficult to appreciate, however. Do we regard Portia's treatment of Shylock, for example, to be quite as compellingly represented as his own stubborn sense of injustice and self-pity? The case is a particularly complex one, which is why we would like to focus on an example more limited in scope and depth.

Chances are that by many of us gender roles and relationships will be considered as the field in which perhaps the most radical cultural change has taken place since the early modern period. At the same time, comedy is the genre in which those roles and relationships have always been a (or the) most prominent subject. This is why we would like to focus on one of the plays in the Shakespeare canon in which this change comes to the fore. Or, strictly speaking, the change comes to the fore when we try to understand the relationship between man and woman in that play. The play is *The Taming of the Shrew*, and our suggestion is that much (or perhaps even most) present-day criticism fails to respond to it on its own terms because our notion and understand-

ing of "obedience" is different from that of Shakespeare's time. But this is a somewhat sweeping statement which needs some explanation.

II. The Final Speech

The Taming of the Shrew has become notorious among critics in recent decades. One of the reasons for this is Kate's change and final submission to her husband. In her famous speech at the end of the play, Kate, at her husband's suggestion, tells the other women "[w]hat duty they do owe their lords and husbands" (5.2.132).¹ In particular, she tells them that they "are bound to serve, love, and obey," and as she does this in a quite energetic manner, using anaphora and pleonastic epitheta,² it is hard to doubt that she feels passionately about what she says. "And when she is forward, 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?" (158-61). She goes all the way to offering, as a symbol of obedience, to place her "hands below [her] husband's foot" (178). This is indeed, or so it seems, the reverse of her former attitude. Before, she had struck Petruchio in order to "try" (2.1.217) whether he is a gentleman (for as a gentleman, he must not strike back, and he does not), and she had said "Go, fool, and whom thou keep'st command" (2.1.251). When one listens to her final speech, "tamed" seems the wrong word for Kate's changed attitude. She is by no means tame in advocating obedience where she first preached and lived rebellion.

Has Kate been successfully brainwashed by Petruchio? Is she being ironical? Or is she to be taken seriously after all?

III. Critical (Mis)Conceptions

Present-day views tend to follow mainly two leads. One group reads Kate as being ironical in her final speech. It is claimed that the "greatest irony of the play [is that it] satirizes not woman herself in the person of the shrew, but male attitudes toward women,"³ that "the contextual irony of Kate's last speech" makes it clear "that her husband is deluded,"⁴ that although Petruchio "has gained her outward compliance in the

1 All quotations follow the Arden Shakespeare edition of *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. Brian Morris (London: Thomson, 2002 [1962]). All further references to Shakespeare follow the most recent Arden editions.

2 Cf. Susenbrotus on the use of *pleonasmos*, cited and translated by Lee A. Sonnino, *A Handbook to Sixteenth-Century Rhetoric* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968) 156: "When we have a superfluity of words which nevertheless gives grace to the speech [...] in the interest of either vehemence or exaggeration."

3 Coppélia Kahn, "The Taming of the Shrew: Shakespeare's Mirror of Marriage," *Modern Language Studies* 5.1 (1975): 88-102, 89.

4 Kahn 98.

form of a public display, [...] her spirit remains mischievously free,"⁵ or they think "How intolerable it would be if she and Shakespeare really meant it [the final speech]."⁶

Others think that, with Kate's final speech, Shakespeare promotes male chauvinist and/or misogynist ideas or, whatever his own views on the subject, he simply bows to the popularity of those ideas. In this view, "The values that underlie the story are obviously those of a patriarchal society, in which the desirability of male dominance is unquestioned. [...] The central joke in *The Taming of the Shrew* is directed against a woman. The play seems written to please a misogynist audience."⁷ Similarly, it is claimed that "the play enacts the defeat of the threat of a woman's revolt: it does so in comic form, and often with apparent good humour – thus it offers the audience the chance to revel in and reinforce their misogyny while at the same time feeling good; [...] this is a story in which one human being starves and brainwashes another, with the full approval of the community"⁸; or that "Kate is less a character within the play than a spokesperson of a very patriarchal rhetoric."⁹ Other critics declare that "[h]er humiliation has a sexually sadistic tinge since there is always the possibility that Petruchio will rape her"¹⁰; accordingly, "*The Shrew* [is] [...] read and performed as a piece of bluff brutality in which a man marries a spirited woman in order to torture and humiliate her,"¹¹ or even as "[a] piece of sadistic pornography."¹² This coincides with the assumption that Shakespeare "saw the most vital of all human relations either as the act of buying an animal or as the act of beating one into submission,"¹³ that "Kate, for [Petruchio], is a thing [as he] has wrenched unquestioning obedience from her, [...]"

5 Kahn 98.

6 Harold C. Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, 2 vols. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1951) 1: 71.

7 Shirley Nelson Garner, "The Taming of the Shrew: Inside or Outside of the Joke?" *'Bad' Shakespeare: Revaluations of the Shakespeare Canon*, ed. Maurice Charney (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1988) 105-19, 106.

8 Penny Gay, "The Taming of the Shrew: Avoiding the Feminist Challenge," *As She Likes It: Shakespeare's Unruly Women* (London: Routledge, 1994) 86-119, 86.

9 Gary Schneider, "The Public, the Private, and the Shaming of the Shrew," *SEL* 42.2 (Spring 2002): 235-58, 251.

10 Garner 114. See also Wayne A. Rebhorn about Petruchio's 'rope tricks': "all the notions [...] make [...] rhetoric a matter of power, control, and coercion, turning the rhetor into a decidedly masculine figure who is represented as a ruler, a civilizer, and also, more disturbingly, a rapist"; "Petruchio's 'Rope Tricks': *The Taming of the Shrew* and the Renaissance Discourse of Rhetoric," *Modern Philology* 92 (1994/1995): 294-327, 295.

11 Ann Thompson, "Introduction," *The Taming of the Shrew*, William Shakespeare, ed. Ann Thompson (Cambridge: CUP, 2003) 1-51, 25.

12 Thompson 26.

13 Irving Ribner, "The Morality of Farce: *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Essays in American and English Literature Presented to Bruce Robert McElderry, Jr.*, ed. Max F. Schulz (Athens: Ohio UP, 1967) 165-76, 171.

she no longer has mind or will of her own,"¹⁴ and that the animal images reflect 'the subhuman status of women in society.'¹⁵ According to these views, Petruchio does not treat Kate like a human being but rather like a thing, which is then being read as an expression of his materialism and culminates in the view that he marries her only for her dowry.¹⁶

So-called defenders of the play qualify these views, arguing that Shakespeare is less chauvinistic than others, and that we have to take into account cultural change: in Shakespeare's time it was still quite customary and indeed the social norm for wives to be obedient to their husbands. At best, critics see the play as a negotiation between contending forces, focussing on the problem of patriarchy being forced to defend itself.¹⁷ In this context, Germaine Greer's statements about *The Taming of the Shrew* come as a surprise. If the play really were only still in the theatre's repertoire because it "reinforces [the audience's] misogyny,"¹⁸ why should one of the major feminists defend it and argue as follows:

Kate is a woman striving for her own existence in a world where she is a *stale*, a decoy to be bid for against her sister's higher market value, so she opts out by becoming unmanageable, a scold. Bianca has found the women's way of guile and feigned gentleness to pay better dividends [...]. Kate [...] has the uncommon good fortune to find Petruchio who is man enough to know what he wants and how to get it. He wants her spirit and her energy because he wants a wife worth keeping. [...] The submission of a woman like Kate is genuine and exciting because she has something to lay down, 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.¹⁹

According to Greer, the marriage of Kate and Petruchio "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)" (234).

That said, although there is indeed no stage direction or any other textual reference to this effect, Petruchio is regularly presented as a violent and cruel bully in stage per-

14 Kahn 94.

15 Cf. Horst Breuer, "Shakespeares Widerspenstige gezähmt?" *Frauen und Frauendarstellung in der englischen und amerikanischen Literatur*, ed. Therese Fischer-Seidel (Tübingen: Narr, 1991) 257-72, 259; Breuer dubs the play as "männerideologisch und frauensatirisch" (270). See also Jochen Petzold: "By equating Katherina with a falcon, Petruchio effectively dehumanizes her"; "Subverting the Master Discourse? The Power of Women's Words in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize, or The Tamer Tamed*," *AAA: Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 31.2 (2006): 157-70, 165.

16 See below, section E.

17 Laurie E. Maguire, "'Household Kates': Chez Petruchio, Percy and Plantagenet," *Gloriana's Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance*, ed. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1992) 129-65, 135.

18 Gay 86.

19 Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006 [1970]) 234.

formances of *The Taming of the Shrew*. The latest production of the RSC in Stratford during the 2008/09 season, directed by Conall Morrison, shows a very brutal Petruchio: "the play is an ugly male fantasy."²⁰ Theatre productions evince the same contradictory attitude towards Shakespeare's comedy that literary critics do. In 2003/04, for example, Gregory Doran directed *Taming* in the light of a "therapy of love," displaying two "dysfunctional individuals" who need each other in order to be saved.²¹ These contrary and contradictory critical responses and stage productions illustrate the complexity of our contemporary understanding of *The Taming of the Shrew* today.²²

IV. Searching for Criteria

Given this critical response, we may ask ourselves whether the play can actually be considered an "image of truth", *imago veritatis*, at all, as the (allegedly Ciceronian) schoolbook definition of comedy had it. Obviously, we cannot even be sure that it is, as the same definition demands, an imitation of life (*imitatio vitae*) and a mirror of social custom (*speculum consuetudinis*).²³

Two main questions present themselves when it comes to understanding the play and, particularly, Kate's final speech. The one is, do we understand the form or kind of discourse? (This is the question that is implied when we wonder whether Kate speaks ironically, for example.) The other question, linked with the first, is: do we understand the idea?

Let us begin with this second question. We suggest, for a change, that "patriarchy" in general is not the main issue of the play. Obedience, as we have seen, is central to Kate's change and to the argument of her final speech but it never appears as the obedience of one class of people (women) to another (men) but as the obedience of an individual woman to an individual man whose love she returns. Even when Kate generalizes, she addresses a particular woman, namely the widow who looks with a "threatening unkind brow" (5.2.137) at her newly-wedded husband Hortensio.

20 Michael Billington, "The Taming of the Shrew," *Guardian* 2 May 2008. 28 May 2009 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2008/may/02/theatre.shakespeare>>.

21 Michael Billington, "The Taming of the Shrew," *Guardian* 16 January 2004. 28 May 2009 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2004/jan/16/theatre1/print>>. – For an overview of stage productions of *The Taming of the Shrew* in the 20th century see Gay.

22 Cf. Randall Martin: "The interpretations produced by [...] re-readings may be stimulating and provocative, but may also tend to belie the complexity and pluralism of the original cultural context"; "Kates for the Table and Kates of the Mind: A Social Metaphor in *The Taming of the Shrew*," *English Studies in Canada* 17.1 (March 1991): 1-20, 2.

23 The definition was to be found in "an essay attributed to Donatus, 'De tragoedia et comoedia,' frequently printed in renaissance editions of Terence"; Madeleine Doran, *Endeavors of Art* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1954) 72 and 407n47.

Her choice is in keeping with a generally positive idea of obedience in the culture of Shakespeare's time.²⁴ As the first words of Milton's *Paradise Lost* remind us, disobedience is still to be identified as the source of all evil. This changes with the early enlightenment (in Milton's very own time); for Thomas Hobbes, obedience is the submission to the will of someone who is in power; it is given in exchange for protection.²⁵ As a consequence, obedience is no longer a virtue in itself but a means to an end and, as such, becomes a rather questionable attitude when the power to which or to whom obedience is given is no longer invested with ethical authority. In contrast to earlier notions of the right to resist a tyrannical ruler,²⁶ obedience in this view is not honoured in the breach but has lost its inherent quality. This is a gradual process, and it is not to be suggested that by the late 17th century negative meanings have entirely overcome positive notions of obedience, but certainly a change has taken place. Characteristically, the first example in the *OED* entry on "obedience," which clearly implies that it may be a bad thing, is from 1874,²⁷ and a title like Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* would hardly have been possible without that shift of emphasis or meaning. In fact, this is not Thoreau's original title and was only attached to the essay in 1866, seventeen years after its first publication.²⁸

By contrast, there is (or was) a long tradition of regarding obedience as a sign of freedom: it is the result of an autonomous decision, based on insight, to relinquish self-

24 As a representative example of this tradition, cf. the notion of obedience in Chaucer's *The Clerk's Tale* which is a very positive one and an expression of love; Bernard S. Levy, "The Meanings of the Clerk's Tale," *Chaucer and the Craft of Fiction*, ed. Leigh A. Arrathoon (Rochester, MI: Solaris P, 1986) 385-409.

25 An example is the obedience owed by a child to its parents: "For it ought to obey him by whom it is preserved; because preservation of life being the end, for which one man becomes subject to another, every man is supposed to promise obedience, to him, in whose power it is to save, or destroy him." Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. G. B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) Pt. II, ch. 20, 254.

26 Even the much-debated *Vindiciae contra tyrannos*, published under the pseudonym of "Junius Brutus" in 1579, does not question the value of obedience but regards the obedience to divine law as superior to the obedience to rulers who trespass against that law. See "The First Question" in the translation published Amsterdam 1660: "For it may be well asked why Christians have endured so many afflictions if it weren't true they were always persuaded that God must be obeyed simply and absolutely, and kings with this exception, that they command not that which is repugnant to the law of God. Otherwise, why should the apostles have answered that God must rather be obeyed than men? (Acts 5:29)"; <<http://www.constitution.org/vct/vindiciae1.htm>> 21 May 2009. – In his essay on *King Lear*, Richard Strier likewise emphasises that, under certain circumstances, disobedience can be a duty; "Faithful Servants: Shakespeare's Praise of Disobedience," *The Historical Renaissance: New Essays on Tudor and Stuart Literature and Culture*, ed. Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988) 104-33.

27 *OED* "obedience" 1.a: "1874 MORLEY *Compromise* (1886) 65 Superstition, blind obedience to custom, and other substitutes for a right and independent use of the mind."

28 See Richard Lenat (ed.), *Civil Disobedience*, <<http://eserver.org/thoreau/civil.html>> 4 May 2009: "It's not known if Thoreau ever used the term 'civil disobedience.'" The original title was *Resistance to Civil Government*.

love and accept the will of another, which is not fuelled by the greed for power but by love.²⁹

The meaning of obedience as an idea becomes clearer when we consider the meaning of obedience as a word. To the listener (or "understander") of Shakespeare's time the original (in this case, Latin) meaning of the word was still a matter of course. Thus in a popular English-Latin dictionary of the time, Simon Pelegromius's *Synonymorum Sylva*, the first Latin equivalent of English "Obedient" is "Audiens," listening. This is based on the etymology of *obedient*, by which *obaudire* is linked with *auris*, ear.³⁰ Accordingly the condition for becoming obedient is being able to listen and comprehend.³¹

But Katherine would rather speak than listen. In act four she explicitly states that she finds freedom in words:

Why, sir, I trust I may have leave to speak,
And speak I will. [...]
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)

It would be quite wrong to say that Katherine is used to others listening patiently to what she may have to say. All she can claim is that even Petruchio's "betters" allowed her to speak her mind.³² Listening is irrelevant to her, as long as she can "tell the anger of [her] heart." In her view, this does not necessarily imply communication; she even tells her husband to "stop [his] ears." Her freedom to speak is thus lead *ad absurdum*. Just as she could not care less whether the others listen to her, she does not mind being unable to listen while she talks. This is why she must learn to listen if her utterances are to become effective and if she is to become obedient. Accordingly, Petruchio chooses the most obvious didactic device and takes her wish seriously that he may stop

29 The mutual dependence of freedom and obedience is central to Pauline theology. See Martin Luther's summary in "Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen" (1520, usually translated as "Concerning Christian Liberty"): "Liebe aber, die ist dienstbar und untertan dem, was sie lieb hat [Love, however, is subservient and subject to what it loves]." *Luther deutsch.*, ed. Kurt Aland, 10 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1991) 2: 251.

30 See Robert Maltby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies* (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1991), s.v. "oboedio(-audio), -ire"; Maltby quotes Isidore's *Etymologiae* 10.196.

31 For the relation between speaking and hearing see Matthias Bauer, "'A Litanie': John Donne and the Speaking Ear," *"The Senses' Festival": Inszenierungen der Sinne und der Sinnlichkeit in der Literatur und Kunst des Barock*, ed. Norbert Lennartz (Trier: WVT, 2005) 111-27.

32 It remains unclear to whom she refers specifically; most probably she means her father who "endur'd" her sharp tongue. The remark, however, is an insult as it implies her lack of respect towards her husband. For the meaning of "betters" see *OED* "better" II.7: "n. with *poss. pron.*: One's superior: a. in some personal quality or attainment; b. in rank or station. In the latter sense, now only in the plural, which was however from 16th to 18th c. often applied to a single person."

his ears. Deliberate misunderstanding is the consequence; as her angry utterance is not being produced in order to be understood, Petruchio takes it to refer to the article of dress he "did bespeak" earlier (4.3.63).

The close connection between freedom and listening (i.e. obedience) pointed up in this scene has been prepared for throughout the play. From the beginning, Katherine has been shown to know how to talk and how to use "unhappy words" (2.1.139). In Act II, for example, she verbally abuses Hortensio, "... she did call me rascal fiddler / And twangling Jack, with twenty such vile terms, / As had she studied to misuse me so." (2.1.158-59). And indeed, she has done exactly that. Her behaviour is contrasted with her sister's in whose "silence" Lucentio sees "Maid's mild behaviour and sobriety" (1.1.70-71). Bianca, with her silence, outwardly fulfils the expectations of an obedient woman. According to Henry Smith's *Preparative to Marriage* from 1591, a woman's major quality ought to be her silence, "for the ornament of a woman is silence; and therefore the Law was given to the man rather than to the woman, to shewe that he should be the teacher and she the hearer" (29-30).³³ It is this very silence that "flouts" Katherine, which is why she takes "revenge" on Bianca by striking her, although Bianca has never crossed her "with a bitter word" (2.1.28).

But Shakespeare does not simply present us with a morality play based on common views such as Smith's. Bianca's silence is by no means held up as a shining example to be contrasted with Kate's noisy declarations of self-will. Bianca's is a conventional silence, yet it is an attitude that she does not really believe in – as is revealed by her behaviour in the final scene, in which she is disobedient and does not follow her husband's command. Katherine, when flouting her, seems to sense her dissimulation. Neither of the sisters, however, has the ability to speak or to hear in the sense of 'to listen to'. This is already made clear during Bianca's music lesson with Hortensio: he wants to teach her to hear but does not succeed; hence, she does not know how to obey.

Whereas silence is merely an external 'ornament' to Bianca (of the kind by which the world is "still deceiv'd"),³⁴ Katherine will eventually learn the kind of silence which is neither mute nor pretended but enables her to become her husband's partner. If there is a moral concept Shakespeare has his characters enact, it is not so much Henry Smith's

33 Henry Smith, *A Preparative to Marriage, The Summe Whereof was Spoken at a Contract, and Inlarged After* (London: R. Field, 1591) 29-30. The biblical basis of this view is 1 Tim 12:1; cf. 1 Tim 2:11. – Suzanne W. Hull provides an overview of marriage guidebooks in Early Modern England that all stress three characteristics of women, namely their being "obedient, chaste, and silent"; *Chaste, Silent, and Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982) 81. Patrick Collinson, in the chapter on "The Protestant Family" of *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988) 60-93, points out how difficult it is to get an idea of the actual relationship between the sexes from sources such as conduct books (70). In "the diaries and autobiographies of the seventeenth century [...] there is more evidence of comfortable sharing than of what Milton called 'absolute rule'" (73).

34 *The Merchant of Venice* 3.2.74.

but the one outlined in 1 Peter 3, where wives are told to "be in subjection" to their husbands not because wives should become their mindless slaves but because they should be able to teach their husbands by their own conversation should their husbands become disobedient to God's law. Accordingly, Petruchio tames Kate by making her hear and not speak, or rather to speak in a different spirit: "To tame a shrew and *charm her chattering tongue*" (4.2.58; our emphasis). Her attitude thus changes from resisting the words of others and insisting on her own knowing better³⁵ – her frame of mind up to 4.3 – to learning what conversation means, as is shown in 4.5.16-17 when Petruchio, insisting on the brightness of moonshine during daytime, says: "I say it is the moon" and her reaction is "I know it is the moon." She not only learns to hear, but also to understand. Of course she is not making a scientific statement. But she has learned that, if there is to be a loving relationship, the point is not to insist on the truth of one's own words but to listen to the words of the loving partner. This results in her obedience which she states in her final speech and which is both the effect and the foundation of her love for Petruchio.

Even before their first meeting Petruchio seems to have fallen in love with Katherine although he has only heard others speak of her. Although he is not presented with a charming picture, he is interested in her because of her shrewdness, especially after learning of her misuse of Hortensio: "I love her ten times more than e'er I did" (2.1.161). In this respect their courtship differs widely from Bianca and Lucentio's: they fall in love at first *sight* (1.1.150-58), whereas Petruchio loves Kate because of what he *hears*. Hence, in their first encounter, *to hear* is the key term:

Pet. Good morrow, Kate, for that's your name, I hear.
Kath. Well have you heard, but something hard of hearing;
 They call me Katherine that do talk of me. (2.1.182-83)

Kate's change can be described as a gradual release from utter loneliness and isolation. She is, at first, as unable to love anyone as she is unloved. Among "mates," she can only imagine to be made a "stale," a laughing-stock (1.1.58).³⁶ All that fills her is the "anger of [her] heart" and the only release she can imagine is giving vent to it. Thus she is not merely "shrewd" or untamed; she lives under a curse, the tyranny of her own apparent autonomy. Hortensio points this out in the second scene of the play:

Her only fault, and that is fault enough
 Is that she is intolerably curst,
 And shrewd, and forward, [...]. (1.2.87-89)

This curse is only overcome when she is liberated by Petruchio. He redeems her by turning her away from her self-will, emphasised by the *leitmotif* of "I please myself" (she insists on this in 3.2.207 and 210)³⁷ and "as I please" (4.3.80), to the consideration

35 Cf. 1.1.102-04, in response to her father's asking her to stay: "What, / Shall I be appointed hours, as though, belike, I knew not what to take and what to leave?"

36 See Morris's note for the other meaning of "stale" and "mate" implied; 174n58.

37 Cf. the parallel to Bianca's "I'll ... learn my lessons as I please myself" (3.1.19-20).

of "what you will" (4.5.21, our emphasis).³⁸ In a playful, exuberant spirit she subsequently addresses old Vincentio as a "Young budding virgin" (4.5.36). She does not do this because she has become the defenceless object of Petruchio's manipulation, but because she is now free to join in his game.³⁹ She has freely chosen to accept the rules offered and in doing so has overcome the loneliness of having only herself to play with. Kate thus reflects and re-enacts, in a comical, secular fashion one of the most serious religious paradoxes informing the culture of her time: she realizes that she becomes liberated in obedience, or, as the Book of Common Prayer has it (in the Collect for Peace of the Morning Prayer, a text ironically appropriate to this loving war): that she opens herself to him "whose service is perfect freedom."⁴⁰ She does not turn Petruchio into God but, by answering his call, accepts him as his human image. In this way she becomes herself, in burlesque fashion, an image of the one who brought and achieved liberty by obedience.

Implicitly, we have thus already addressed our first question about the form and kind of discourse, and whether it is to be taken seriously. We have given the answer when we pointed out the serio-comic nature of Kate's reformation: we have suggested that there is a way in which Katherine's final speech could be taken seriously without ignoring the mockery. This also means that a purely ironical reading does not work. Just imagine what kind of marriage would be the consequence if Kate did *not* mean what she says: let's have a marriage based on the pretence of being "obedient to his honest will"; of course, I will, in fact, only seem to be obedient, just as I know that his will cannot really be honest but is, in fact, merely the desire to subjugate me. The cynicism and, indeed, intolerable squalor of such a yoke could hardly be surpassed.

Granted that we are, in this play, to mind "true things by what their mock'ries be," as Shakespeare has it in *Henry V* (Chorus to Act 4), where does the mockery come in then?

Exaggeration and burlesque are most clearly noticeable. Kate must go all the way to offering the dramatically effective gesture of putting her hand under her husband's foot

38 Cf. Luke 22:42: "[...] not my will, but thine, be done."

39 Cf. Dale G. Priest, "Katherine's Conversion in *The Taming of the Shrew*: A Theological Heuristic," *Renascence* 47.1 (Fall 1994): 31-40, 31. Kate's joining in a verbal game is also emphasised by Irene G. Dash: "Suddenly she understands the verbal game she has been hearing"; "Challenging Patterns: *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Wooing, Wedding, and Power: Women in Shakespeare's Plays* (New York: Columbia UP, 1981) 33-64, 58. Tita French Baumlin likewise reads Act 4,5 as Kate's joining in Petruchio's game and emphasises that the two are "kindred spirits," especially in the context of their language use; "Petruchio the Sophist and Language as Creation in *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 29.2 (Spring 1989): 237-57, 242. – Ribner, on the contrary, interprets this as "the teaching of Kate to question reality and to accept falsehood as truth" (173).

40 Cf. Priest 32. *The Book of Common Prayer* [1605] (Cambridge: CUP, 2006) 13. In the "Solemnization of Matrimony" the Priest says to the woman that she is supposed to "obey, [...], serve [...], love and honour" her husband (*The Book of Common Prayer* 303).

in order to show that she is as radical in her love as she was in her spite. Truth is masked by comic exaggeration. This formal principle of *serio ludere*⁴¹ is further elucidated when we look at...

V. Petruchio's Side

Petruchio's part can perhaps best be described as the performance of a mock quest. We should recollect that *The Taming of the Shrew* was written in the early 1590s,⁴² i.e. between the publication of the first and the second three books of Spenser's famous revitalization of medieval knighthood, the *Faerie Queene*, and only a few years before such parodies and burlesques as Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Most frequently, Petruchio's self-proclaimed desire "to wive it wealthily at Padua" is believed to show that his "motive for converting Kate is mercantile."⁴³ But money hardly seems to be his prime motivation, since we learn that he has crowns in his purse, "and goods at home" (1.2.56). He is convinced that he will "[i]f wealthily, then happily" be married not because he is a fortune-hunter,⁴⁴ but because his partner should be his equal.

His actual quest is rather of a different kind. Its nature is revealed by Petruchio's alluding to a story of knighthood when he claims that he would not be deterred by the fact that his future bride is "as foul as was Florentius' love" (1.2.68). The "Tale of Florent" is to be found in Gower's *Confessio Amantis* of the late 14th century, where it is told as an example of the precept that "Obedience in love availeth,"⁴⁵ and, interestingly, this example focuses on a man's obedience, not a woman's. For Florentius, "A worthi knyght [...] / Chivalrous and amorous" (1408-14), finds himself in trouble; he will lose his life if he cannot answer the question "What alle wommen most desire" (1481). A "lothly wommannysh figure" (1530) in the forest promises to give him the answer provided that he will marry her. He agrees and she answers the question, namely "[t]hat alle wommen lievest wolde / Be sovereign of mannes love" (1608-09). Florentius stays obedient to his promise, and is rewarded, upon marriage, with the transfor-

41 See Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, rev. ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1980) 236-37, referring to Plato's *Republic* 545-47. Cf. also Marc Föcking, "Serio ludere: Epistemologie, Spiel und Dialog in Nicolaus Cusanus' *De Ludo Globi*," *Spielwelten: Performanz und Inszenierung in der Renaissance* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2002) 1-18.

42 "[W]ritten at some time between August 1592 and April 1594"; Brian Morris, "Introduction" 1-149, 51.

43 Priest 32.

44 This has been stressed by Ann Jennalie Cook, "Wooing and Wedding: Shakespeare's Dramatic Distortions of the Customs of His Time," *Proceedings of the Comparative Literature Symposium* 12 (1981): 83-100, 88, who nevertheless claims that "money matters most" (90).

45 *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon, 1901) 1.1401. Cf. Morris's reference to Gower 187n68.

mation of his bride into the most beautiful and amiable girl imaginable. This change will be a lasting one because he has indeed made her his "sovereign" (1834).

Florentius's story provides a parallel to Petruchio's, who releases Kate from her spell by making her the sole object of his aspirations, and by remaining true to the task; he is similarly rewarded for his obedience to his cause by Kate's transformation. Quite economically, she is, in one person, the damsel in distress and the dragon to be overcome⁴⁶; and she is the queen for whom he commits his valiant deeds as he devotes his life to her. The burlesque of course consists in the fact that this lady of his heart is, after all, a "household Kate":

For I am he am born to tame you, Kate,
And bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate
Conformable as other household Kates. (2.1.269-71)⁴⁷

But something else happens in the course of Petruchio's quest: he is liberated himself. The young man, who has got everything, and travels to Padua without anything particular to do but to seek "experience" (1.2.51), comes properly to life only when he dedicates himself to winning Kate's love. When he has heard about Katherina Minola and has instantly decided to woo her, Gremio (one of the old suitors of Katherine's sister Bianca) asks him incredulously, "But will you woo this wildcat?" His immediate answer is: "Will I live?" His life has suddenly got a purpose.

It should be noted that this is not 'just' a Herculean task, the miraculous feat of a prodigy and the attempt to do the impossible,⁴⁸ but also a deed of love. Though he wishes to marry money, the point of his wooing is "Affection's edge" (1.2.72). Petruchio "tames" Kate by loving her, and the words, in this comedy about hearing and right hearing, make us know this when we listen to them as Kate does. "I am he am born to tame you, Kate." When he says "tame," she, hitherto unloved, begins to realize that he actually means "t'aime". *Tame*, in Shakespeare's English, was pronounced [tæ:m].⁴⁹ She is the one for whom he lives.⁵⁰ No matter what the others think, however "curst" she may be "in company" (2.1.298), the main thing is that he can say "I choose her for myself" (2.1.295).

We also see here that obedience is a personal matter, not a matter of establishing or maintaining or doing away with a system, patriarchal or otherwise. And on this per-

46 Cf. Inge Leimberg, "Personales Interpretieren am Beispiel von *The Taming of the Shrew*," forthcoming in the *Festschrift* for Lothar Černý. Leimberg points out that Petruchio's wooing of Katherina is a parodic quest, just as patriarchy (a term echoed by Petruchio's name) is parodied in this play with its abundance of (real and invented) fathers.

47 For the etymology of *cates* see Natasha Korda, "Household Kates: Domesticating Commodities in *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47.2 (1996): 110-31.

48 For Petruchio's self-image as Hercules, cf. 1.2.199: "Have I not in my time heard lions roar?"

49 E. J. Dobson, *English Pronunciation 1500-1700*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1968) 2: § 100.

50 At the same time, "tame" is also an anagram of "mate."

sonal level, unequal as the two lovers appear, a certain equality and similarity appears. For Petruchio applies himself to the cure of Kate, and in doing so takes recourse to the old medical principle (resurfacing in our culture in homoeopathy) of "similis similibus curantur."⁵¹ Tranio incredulously asks: "Curster than she? Why, 'tis impossible" (3.2.152), but being Lucentio's servant, he does not know Petruchio that well. Curtis, Petruchio's own servant, knows better: "he is more shrew than she" (4.1.76). This principle of like being matched with like, and cured by it, also agrees with Petruchio's wishing to wive it wealthy even though he has money enough of his own.

Kate is purged of the "humour" (a frequently repeated word) of choleric; interestingly, her name, in this medical context, evokes *catheretic*, French *catheretique*, which according to Cotgrave's dictionary of 1611 means "Eating or gnawing away superfluous, and over-eminent flesh, or skin";⁵² in Cooper's dictionary of 1578 "Catharticum medicamentum" is defined as "a purgative medicinal."⁵³ "Curst," Kate's prime epithet, and "cure[st]" are anagrams. In Katharina's comical catharsis her true self appears; she becomes that which, according to Petruchio, she has been all the time or what he truly imagines her to be in the first moment they meet: "But Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom, / Kate of Kate Hall, my super-dainty Kate, / For dainties are all Kates" (2.1.187-89).

Petruchio never hides the fact that he finds Kate desirable in every respect but this does not turn him into a potential rapist. If he had just wanted to possess her money and her body, the play would have been over with her father's handing her over to him at some point in Act II. Instead, he mortifies himself and renounces his own pursuit of pleasure in order to win her heart.⁵⁴ The first one to suffer from the trials Kate has to undergo is Petruchio himself. Instead of enjoying the wedding night, he preaches "a sermon of continency to her" (4.1.170).

Petruchio stays obedient to his cause even to the point of making a fool of himself; he is the lunatic and the lover who, like the poet, is "of imagination all compact": only when Kate makes a fool of herself, too (we remember her addressing old Vincentio as

51 Cf. 2.1.132-33: "And where two raging fires meet together, / They do consume the thing that feeds their fury." This principle of "similis similibus curantur" also occurs in Burton: "I would expell *clavum clavo*, comfort one sorrow with another, idleness with idleness [...] make an antidote out of that which was the prime cause of my disease"; *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling and Rhonda Blair; intr. J. B. Bamborough, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) 1: 7.22-25. Angus Gowland stresses this aspect in the introduction to his study *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006) 2. In *King John* this occurs as "and falsehood falsehood uses" (3.1.277).

52 Randle Cotgrave, *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (London, 1611; repr. Amsterdam: Orbis Terrarum, 1971), s.v. "Catheretique."

53 Thomas Cooper, *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae*, (London, 1578; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1975) s.v. "Catharticus."

54 The condition is never a matter of doubt to him from the beginning: "... if I get your daughter's love" (2.1.119).

a fair virgin), are they fully united as lovers. Finally Kate, for Petruchio's sake, is even willing to be called a fool by her sister.⁵⁵

F. The Fellowship of Obedience

Of course, this is a different kind of equality or mutuality between lovers from the one achieved in the later comedies,⁵⁶ e.g. by Orlando and Rosalind. Nevertheless, each one regards the other as his and her sovereign, willing to become a fool in service to the other who is treated as king or queen. In Sidney's *Arcadia*, published in 1590, old Geron as it were puts it in a nutshell when he says that obedience and sovereignty are by no means mutually exclusive. Their co-existence or identity is, rather, the secret (and the ideal) of a happy marriage. "These fiftie winters married haue I been," he says, "And yet find no such faults in womankind"; such faults, that is, as those have been ascribed to it, "Shrewdnes" in particular. "I have a wife worthie to be a Queene, / So well can she command, and yet obey; / [...]."⁵⁷

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, obedience does not mark the rule of one sex over the other but is the mark of the individual man's and woman's being, and being together: "I am he am born" and "bound to serve, love, and obey" are not to be separated from each other. Only later will the full (and tragic) dimension of this concept of obedience be realized by Shakespeare: in another Katherine, in *Henry VIII*, who is in reality a Queen and who says (when love is sacrificed to politics): "I am old, my lords, / And all the fellowship I hold now with him / Is only my obedience" (3.1.120-22). It will be seen, in an even more concentrated formula, in Desdemona: "Whatever you be, I am obedient" (3.3.89). The brevity of her "you be, I am" emphasizes the "be" in "obedient" – and at the same time makes us see and hear the "dien," a word which was by no means outlandish to an English ear, for it has served as the motto of the Prince of Wales since 1346 (cf. OED): "Ich dien."

All this, let us point this out again, in *The Taming of the Shrew* appears only in the garb of burlesque. Nevertheless, Kate's speech at the end of the play shows her to be one who obeys and yet commands. She has now become a teacher and a guide who, epilogue-like, directs her words not only to Bianca and the widow and the others on stage but to the audience as well. Now that she has learned to listen she makes us hear. The individual experience thus becomes a general one, in accordance with the nature of the stage, where the private is shown to be the prototypical: "Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, / Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee, / [...]."

55 "Fie, what a foolish duty call you this?" (5.2.126).

56 Cf. Marianne Novy, "Patriarchy and Play in *The Taming of the Shrew*," *English Literary Renaissance* 9 (1979): 264-80, 280.

57 Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed., intr. and notes Maurice Evans (London: Penguin, 1977) 712.

But, as the grammar of her words makes clear, this is a principle that can only come true (or not) in each individual case, depending on the presence of mutual love.

If this reading of the play appears plausible, our initial suggestion will have to be slightly rephrased. The cultural change which comes to the fore in the critical responses to the interaction between man and woman in *The Taming of the Shrew*, and which is at least partly due to "obedience" having become a questionable notion in the modern world, need not obstruct our perception of the specific points made by the play. When we listen closely to the words of the play, we realize that Shakespeare, by showing obedience to be neither a conventional pattern of behaviour hardly to be taken seriously nor the indispensable tenet of an ideology maintaining the power of men over women, has done much more than to restate established notions of his own time. He has shown that obedience makes sense only if it is an act of individual commitment, and thus distinguished it from obedience as a collectively upheld practice which may in fact be little more than either lip-service or a tool of suppression. By doing so, however, he has given a modern audience the chance to reconsider their own cultural assumptions. Knowing that obedience has become a doubtful virtue, we may thus perceive a way in which it may be given another chance.

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