Katherina Bound; or, Play(K)ating the Strictures of Everyday Life

WHEN KATE delineates a wife’s duties to “her loving lord” within a hierarchical configuration of marriage, Shakespeare’s _Taming of the Shrew_ ends in a “frenzy of the social” (cf. Comolli 121), putting on offer an image of “woman” that the play’s male characters use as a means of speaking to one another about themselves. As one among many texts, nondramatic as well as dramatic, that participate in a conversation about the organization of sexual difference in early modern England,¹ _Shrew_ demonstrates precisely the “fine surge of historical intelligibility” that Roland Barthes attributes to Sade’s writing (Sade/Fourier/Loyola 10). Today, the anxiety over gender roles and attributes that characterized _Shrew_’s original historical moment is once again the focus of intense cultural negotiation. Given the increasing difficulty of standing outside the containments and contradictions of representation and history, _Shrew_’s obsessive attempt to circumscribe woman’s “place” has especially fatal attractions for late-twentieth-century feminist readers and spectators.

What are the conditions of readability for a play in which the “problem” of woman is not her exclusion but her radical inclusion? Reading _Shrew_ against the grain to resist its heavily gendered stereotyping has certain limitations. After all, if this particular play can be reconfigured progressively, why should its seemingly coercive no-choice politics matter?² My interest lies in mapping the trajectory of the grain, in rethinking how _Shrew_ not only manipulates its textual subjects but gets caught up and shaped, at particular historical moments, to secure or contest the sociocultural subjectivities at work in women’s lives. I explore a layered reading of _Shrew_’s continuing cultural renewal as a popular pleasure (see Gledhill 67–68, 87), first, by unpacking several texts that lurk in its margins and, then, by considering a number of film and video performances. By multiplying the texts that adhere to Shakespeare’s play and paying special, though not exclusive, attention to the ending, I want to extend the questions _Shrew_ raises. What figures of “woman’s” position in the order of...
things does it make available? to whom are they addressed? and what purposes do they serve? What I propose is akin to Michel de Certeau’s “poaching,” which Henry Jenkins characterizes as “an impertinent raid on [a canonical] preserve that takes away only those things that seem useful or pleasurable to the reader” (86). Insofar as such plundering is a figure for rape, that metaphor suits the “overreading” with which I wish to begin—the “reading in excess” that goes beyond “acceptable” structures of representation (N. Miller 274; Neely, “Constructing” 15).

A Certain Tendency of The Taming of the Shrew

Noting traces of sadistic violence in Shrew’s taming plot, Shirley Nelson Garner sees the play as a spectacle of dominance mapped out on a (cross-dressed) female body and concluding with a woman’s abject submission to male mastery (107–08). Moreover, the Induction—with its “wanton pictures,” images of hunt-and-chase violence, and erotic Ovidian lures of near rape (Ind. 1.43, 2.45–56)—incorporates what Linda Williams terms the most distinguishable feature of sadomasochistic fantasy: “the education of one person in the sexual fantasy of another through complex role-playing cued to works of art and imagination” (224). Elsewhere, too, Shrew evokes the classic pornographic repertoire. The image of Bianca tied and bound, at the mercy of Kate the torturer (2.1), hints at a mild “sadie-max” lesbian fantasy; and at the “taming school,” which editors often locate in a “country house” reminiscent of remote Sadean territories, Petruchio displaces his sadistic fantasies by humiliating his servants and by verbally (in the theater, literally) dismembering Kate’s dress (4.1, 3). However playfully Shrew suspends sadomasochism in fantasy, it shares affinities with pornographic films in “relentlessly repropo[s]ing] sexuality as the field of knowledge and power [and] woman as scene, rather than subject, of sexuality” (de Lauretis 193–94). Ultimately, however, this exercise in “aesthetic sadomasochism” concerns its characters’ relation to and use of sadomasochistic images to negotiate their shifting sexual identities (Williams 224–25). While the phallus articulates meaning and difference symbolically, Shrew collapses the sexual into the social to keep “verité” sex just beyond representation. But in his 1974 play The Shrew, which alternates selected scenes from Shakespeare with exchanges between a present-day bourgeois woman and her working-class lover, Charles Marowitz lashes sexual and social scenarios together, exploiting the possibility of reading the one through the other.

Following Kate’s acknowledgment that Petruchio’s word has the power to turn sun to moon (transforming nature “naturalizes” Kate [4.5]), Marowitz’s collage ends with a dream sequence based on Shrew’s Induction and finale (177–80). In this Grimms’ fairy tale of sinister archetypes and hopeless victims, Petruchio embraces Kate, kisses her, and, Sly-like, commands, “Madam, undress you and come now to bed.” When Kate gives the excuse Sly’s cross-dressed “madam wife” offers—to pardon her yet for a night or two, at a physician’s charge—the men’s faces turn grim, Baptista exclaims, “O monstrous arrogance!” and

KATE is backed over to the table and thrown down. While the servants and Baptista hold her wrists, PETRUCHIO looms up behind her and whips up her skirts ready to do buggery. As he inserts, an ear-piercing, electronic whistle rises to crescendo pitch: KATE’S mouth is wild and open, and it appears as if the sound issues from her lungs.

Following a blackout, lights reveal a surreal tribunal, with Petruchio as judge. Baptista ushers in Kate, wearing a shapeless institutional garment: “her face is white; her hair drawn back, her eyes wide and blank” (178). She delivers her obedience speech hesitantly—Petruchio must prompt her to say “obey”—as if another speaks for her. At “My mind hath been as big as one of yours, / My heart as great, my reason haply more,” the young couple from the present-day plot, dressed in formal wedding attire, enter; as Kate concludes (“My hand is ready, may it do him ease”), they frame her figure, “incline their heads to one another and smile out to invisible photographers for a wedding picture” before the final blackout (180).

By juxtaposing an image of the “hoked-up, endlessly-spoofed Magic Ritual of marriage” to
Shrew’s uncovered pornographic plot (19), Marowitz’s collage views both gender and class as categories occupied by powerless victims and proposes connections between sadism and male dominance, which, in the sixteenth century as in the twentieth, masquerades as an acceptable social practice, legitimated by ancient ceremony. Intended as a “head-on confrontation with the intellectual substructure of the play” and a challenge to its classical status (24), Marowitz’s Shrew alters the generic reading rules institutionalized in “romantic comedy” or “knockabout farce,” turning the play into a parallel text for Michel Foucault’s Discipline and Punish that threatens to take “Shakespeare” out of “Shakespeare as culture.” At best, by stripping away Shakespeare’s mantle, Marowitz unsettles the value systems authorized by “high art” and so interrupts dominant interpretations (cf. Holderness 94); at worst, by emphasizing brainwashing and concentration-camp brutality he deprives sexual relations of any humanity or intersubjectivity and thus questions, if not erases, their association with pleasure.

Why Can’t a Woman’s Body Read More like a Man’s?

Just as “woman,” in her mixed functions of activity and passivity, most interests the genre of heterosexual pornography, so does this oscillation between dominance and submission interest the Elizabethan comedy of remarriage called Shrew. In its Elizabethan guise, played out on a stage that “takes boys for women” (Orgel 7), the play can be imagined as particularly multivalent: “pleasing stuff,” says Sly, that “[t]he world slip” (Ind. 2.134, 138). The Induction not only authorizes such slippage within class as well as gender (at the Lord’s will, as a joke on Sly) but teaches that there is no such thing as a discrete sexed or classed identity. Such identifications, Shrew’s frame insists, are themselves constructed in fluid relation to fictional “others” (Williams 279; see also Freedman). In the taming plot, gender codes move with equal ease across the boy actor’s androgynous presence and the adult player’s male body. On at least three occasions, the space of “woman-shrew” is doubly occupied, doubly gendered: when Petruchio outdresses Kate at her wedding and turns ceremony to carnival (3.2) and when he assumes a shrewish guise, first, on the journey to his house (“By this reckoning he is more shrew than she,” remarks Curtis [4.1.63]), and, later, with his servants and with the haberdasher and tailor (4.1; 4.3). Yet however bizarre his behavior, Petruchio, like the boy actor who plays Kate’s role, can move between masculine and feminine positions because his own subjectivity is never at risk. On the one hand, such cross-coding disperses “shrewness” and the attendant social anxieties onto the male body; on the other, it hollows out the category “woman” and suggests that no unified model of female subjectivity exists, while contradictorily affirming shrewness as the ground of feminine representation. For by the play’s “law,” shrewness must be seen and spoken as feminine: only when Kate slips out from under the sign of the shrew and moves toward that of the phallus can “she” be admired as a spectacle (“a wonder,” according to Lucentio [5.2.189]) and given a serious hearing.

I want to pause at this spectacle because, like the Induction, it calls particular attention to the boy actor. Here, claiming to be female is equivalent to claiming from the female. Part homily, part marriage rite, part confession, this curiously acrobatic speech, authored by a man for a boy to speak in order to sustain the illusion of femininity, recuperates male subjectivity by mapping the prerogatives of “good husbandry” onto the body of a newly obedient wife. Since this is not soliloquy, the boy actor playing Kate is already set off, “her” difference (and that of the other “wives”) clearly distinguished by the presence of adult male actors (see Helms 198). Why, then, does the speech insistently rehearse women’s attributes and include such special pleading—“bodies soft, and weak, and smooth”; “soft conditions and our hearts” (5.2.165, 167)—on behalf of the female body’s “truth”? Such excess betrays an intense anxiety to mark the speaker’s body as feminine, and to do so, it pulls out all the culture’s—and the theater’s—available capital. Toward the end of the speech, however, the illusion of femininity teeters on its head, threatening to tip “woman” into the androgynous identity of the boy actor.
But now I see our lances are but straws,
Our strength as weak, our weakness past
compare,
That seeming to be most which we indeed least
are.  
(5.2.173–75)

Throughout, extraordinary syntactic clarity and balance characterize Kate’s speech. Why, now, introduce a couplet requiring considerable sense-making effort? “That seeming” elides the “we” one assumes to be its subject; subject and object risk conflation; “most” transforms to “least”; comparisons fail altogether. Is it just accident that “least are,” together with other lines mentioning women’s negative attributes, falls outside the iambic-pentameter beat and so would be called, in the Elizabethan age and (until fairly recently) in our own, “feminine rhymes”? Spoken by the boy actor, these lines say that he is indeed the thing he is not, and they say it twice. He is the thing without a working phallus as well as the thing with nothing—that is, a woman.

The difficulty of taming these phrases analogizes the difficulty central to both play and culture: the improbability of constructing a female subject (even a Queen?) except across a male identification and as a realization of male desire. Framing the shrew-taming spectacle as a “kind of history” staged, at the Lord’s direction, for Christopher Sly’s benefit (Ind. 2.136), the play seems specifically directed toward a male subject’s “visual pleasure.” Although it also conceptualizes, in Kate (and the wives she addresses), a female spectator, Kate is curiously silent and watchful, only occasionally protesting her assigned place in its victimizing economy. But, whether for the figure of “woman” that Shrew constructs or for the real women who attended the theater (Gurr 57–58; Howard 440), pleasure remains a somewhat muted term. Pleasure, Shrew teaches, is not owned by “woman” but is arrived at secondhand: it depends on relative differentiations, not on absolute difference. Whether male or female, Shrew’s spectators remain conscious not just of power’s unavoidable role in sex, gender, and representation but also of how oscillating gender identities may, on occasion, unfix that power and jostle it loose.

Spending Elizabethan Cultural Capital

It is one thing to reconstruct past acts of comprehension with imaginary bodies and theorized spectators; it is quite another when Shrew is played out by and on the bodies of real women and observed by historically situated spectators of either gender. The difference lies in what Paul Smith calls “discerning” the patriarchal symbol of “woman” from the historical sociocultural experience of women. For twentieth-century representation, the ambi-valent syntax that threatens to expose the gender-bent conventions of the Elizabethan stage marks a possible point of subversion. Like the shrew herself, the contention that we seem “to be most [strong,] which we indeed least are” could turn to accommodate its opposite: we seem “to be most [weak,] which we indeed least are.” However tempting, such momentary resistance seems only thinkable, not playable—an attempt to own property in a speech that, although it purports to negotiate an identity for “woman,” finally finds that identity non-negotiable, fixed rather than fluid. Indeed, Kate’s speech resembles Stanley Fish’s “self-consuming artifact.” While in the Elizabethan theater it appears to be an instance of speaking herself in his body, present-day representation reverses those terms. The address to froward wives reads like recipe discourse for a patriarchal dish to be swallowed whole, like a TV dinner; once Kate ventriloquizes the voice of Shakespeare’s culture and lets it colonize her body, she never speaks again. Looking for a Kate other than this apparently conformable one is like scanning the “before” and “after” images in ads for weight-loss programs. Both are inescapably there: a viewer searches for the one in the other, wonders (like Lucentio) whether they do represent the same person, and attempts to merge the two images into a single, recognizably discrete entity.

Observing a similar phenomenon, Carol Neely cites the tendency of recent feminist readers to tame Kate’s taming in order to fracture the play’s patriarchal panopticism. Although, Neely writes, “feminists cannot . . . fail to rejoice at the spirit, wit and joy with which Kate accommodates herself to her wifely role,” neither can they “fail to note the radical asymmetry and inequality of the
comic reconciliation and wish for Kate, as for [themselves], that choices were less limited, roles less rigid and unequal, accommodations more mutual and less coerced” (Broken Nuptials 218–19). Caught between a resistant desire for social equality and the conformist demands of comic form, Neely anticipates what Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, borrowing W. E. B. Du Bois’s term, calls a “lived twoness,” the dialectic of sundered identity, the doubled consciousness of individuals who simultaneously identify with the dominant culture and with the marginal community or group to which they belong or to which that culture assigns them (139–41). It is a curious place in which to live and from which to view Shrew’s finale—a spectacle (always) already endowed with enough accumulated cultural capital to enable women readers or spectators, stranded between incommensurable identities, to buy into its normative gender economy.

By crystallizing images of dominance and submission in marriage, Shrew’s logic teaches that a shrew-wife has neither use- nor exchange-value and traces an especially canny broker’s success in rolling over his initial investment. To find pleasure in this ending, a woman spectator must discover that Shrew inextricably weaves voyeurism, fantasy, and consumerism together to produce a dazzling constellation of viewing positions. If she takes the direct route that the play offers male spectators (through Sly), desiring herself as a fetish, she acknowledges not only the masculinity that conceptualizes her access to activity and agency but the twists and turns in a woman’s often circuitous route to pleasure (Rose 183). Shrew can also entice a woman spectator to regress imaginatively, responding as many do to Gone with the Wind or as a particular reading community does to Harlequin romances (see Radway). By either gliding over the signs of the father in Kate’s speech (accepting them as “natural”) or assuming that Kate is merely performing and does not believe what she says, readers can produce a scene similar to the happy rape, the fully authorized scene for female sexuality—authorized precisely because it is mastered and controlled. In such scenarios, Kate does not so much defeat the power of the phallus as take over its power in drag to play the “good girl” and so get the “bad girl’s” pleasure; moreover, since she achieves pleasure as if against her will, she remains a good girl. Theoretically, Shrew’s aesthetic sadomasochism turns into a more acceptable social masochism through which one may negotiate pleasure from a position of relative powerlessness. In one way or another, each of these options is a self-consuming fantasy: as Lynne Joyrich observes of all present-day representation, perhaps the consumer’s viewing role is the only one that remains stable (Spectatrix 193).

But the trouble is not that, by taking such pleasures in Shrew’s ending, one disavows critique and becomes the culture’s dupe rather than its analyst. Instead, the danger is that such ethnographies of reading buy Shrew for a shared feminine mystique through which women may even further mystify their cultural positioning (or fate) as a trap, however tender. Thus women neutralize, in pleasant dreams or in nightmare fantasies that lie beyond the play’s representational limits, whatever legitimate grievances they perceive, not only in Shrew’s Elizabethan patriarchy but in late-twentieth-century conditions of lived twoness. In 1594, when Shrew was first entered in the Stationers’ Register, it was called “a pleasant Conceyted historie,” and its long performance history, through many alternative guises, suggests that it gives good conceits as well as good pleasure. It can also claim, like Othello, to have given the state some service. In the twentieth century as in the sixteenth, the public spectacle of a woman behaving properly stamps her with the culture’s prerogatives, and being looked at, whether by male or female spectators, reconfirms her meaning.

How Shrew’s cultural capital has been reproduced, repackaged, and spent as a twentieth-century commodity is my concern in the rest of this essay. Because the models of “looking” the play presupposes—voyeurism, fantasy, and consumerism—are all metaphors for film and television viewing, and because the viewing regimes of these media resonate with social and psychic codes of sexual difference, it is appropriate to consider how modern representations remarket and sanction Shrew’s social contract. After all, however carefully academic gender studies may construct or deconstruct images of women, in this more public
territory *Shrew* continues to enfold “woman,” as well as “women,” within representation to make and remake new patriarchies and new cultural myths with which to negotiate her use.

**Double Your Pleasure, Double Your Fun**

Famous as the first sound film of a Shakespearean play, Columbia Pictures’ *Taming of the Shrew* (1929), starring the legendary Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, is perhaps even more infamous for its credit line, “by William Shakespeare with additional dialogue by Samuel Taylor,” the director. (A contemporary cartoon shows a bust of Shakespeare at the Library of Congress being replaced by one of Taylor [Windeler 160–61].) Intriguingly, in the distribution of verbal property, Shakespeare’s poetry goes to Fairbanks while Taylor’s additions—except for a version of Kate’s author-ized obedience speech—fall to Pickford, who complained that Fairbanks (once a Shakespearean actor) took advantage of her. According to Pickford’s autobiography (and to her sympathetic biographers), Fairbanks tamed the “shrew” in real life as well as dominated her before the cameras: he not only played jokes, delayed shooting schedules, and failed to learn his lines, wildly increasing production costs, but relegated his costarring wife (also his coproducer and co-financer) to a lower place in the production hierarchy. Writes Pickford, “The making of that film was my finish. My confidence was completely shattered, and I was never again at ease before the camera or microphone” (312). Yet the film opens up contradictions in this confessional portrait of a woman at the mercy of both her husband and the camera apparatus. When the performer known for her golden curls and for a whole bag of coy “Pickford tricks” first confronts Fairbanks’s Robin Hood–Black Pirate Petruchio, a frieze depicting Herod’s slaughter of the innocents frames her figure, perfectly troping her image as a grown woman pretending to be a little girl as well as her self-characterized victimization. But her costume—a black skirted riding habit, boots, and a sweepingly feathered picture hat—draws on an equally familiar published identity, that of the androgynous tomboy (*Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* [1917]), according her the power associated with male masquerade; she, not Petruchio, cracks a mean whip. However much the image of Fairbanks—clad in rags, a jackboot on his head, slouching against a column, and crunching an apple during the wedding—codes Petruchio’s bravado, glossing his shrewish display with his already commodified identity, the film also mocks the alien, romantic manliness associated with his previous roles. After escorting Kate to her bridal chamber, Fairbanks’s Petruchio returns to the dining table and attacks the food and drink he had previously rejected. Meanwhile, following a dissolve that transforms Pickford’s dirtily dressed Kate into a bride wearing a virginal peignoir, she appears on a balcony overlooking the great hall, where she sees Petruchio sharing his taming strategy with a dog that has replaced her at the table; smiling mysteriously, she disappears before Petruchio asks, “Dost thou know better how to tame a shrew?” and the dog barks in reply. Later, on

![Kate confronting Petruchio. Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Columbia, 1929. Photograph from the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.](image)
finding Kate asleep, Petruchio slams the bedroom door, scatters the bedclothes, and bellows at Kate, who applauds his performance; then, after each opens a window, the couple argue over whether they’re looking at the moon or the sun and quarrel over who gets the best bed pillow. If this Noel Coward–like bridal night offers audiences a voyeuristic glimpse of “the most popular couple the world has ever known” (Herndon), its finale also restages the gender codes of Shakespeare’s *Shrew*: after bashing Petruchio’s head with a stool, Kate coos, “O Petruchio, beloved”; pats his face to revive him; and, cradling him in her arms, throws her whip into the fire and murmurs a soothing “There, there” as he lays his head on her bosom. Gazing up at her with a puzzled look, Petruchio asks, “The sun is shining bright?” and, reassuringly, Pickford’s motherly Kate replies, “Aye, the blessed sun.”

In the final wedding-banquet sequence, Petruchio, his head bound with a raffish bandage and looking immensely self-satisfied, sits with one leg hooked over his chair while Kate, standing beside him, swears to love, honor, and obey. As she finishes her vow, a cut to mid-close-up isolates her broad wink, which Bianca, in an ensuing mid-shot, acknowledges. Just as Petruchio is a son playacting the role of husband, Kate is a mother who plays a wife. By turning men into braggart boys with knowing mothers, Taylor’s *Shrew* gives the oedipal scenario a curious gender spin: while the son may get his mother, articulating that resolution from a woman’s point of view turns the familiar plot into a variant of the Freudian joke, with women, not men, having the last laugh. Yet, although the wife’s seizing the comic advantage and the mythic power of a heavily coded subject position skews the film’s final deshrewing, it only momentarily dismantles the call of Shakespeare’s patriarchal culture. In playing out what appear to be competing instructions for marital pleasure, Taylor’s *Shrew* simply gives the emperor’s text new (and newly contradictory) robes, cut from the cloth of a regressive fantasy about occupying—and performing—infantile roles. If Pickford’s wink clears any space for real women spectators within *Shrew*’s ending, that space, like the entire film, is already traversed with questions of ownership, whether of Fairbanks’s exotically masculine image or of Pickford’s identity as “America’s Sweetheart.”

Possessing either, however fleetingly, would effectively (and conventionally) mask whatever cultural tensions remained concerning those who, only a short ten years before, had been enfranchised. But any anxiety the film prompts about Kate’s momentary “triumph” is allayed when Petruchio pulls Kate across his lap for a final kiss, Baptista begins a song in which all join, and the camera pulls back, revealing the entire wedding party, to conclude on the sight—and sound—of full social harmony.

A rather different doubleness—or, more appropriately, a “lived twoness” within what Richard Dyer calls “star discourse”—informs Franco Zeffirelli’s 1966 *Shrew*, a vehicle for the equally legendary couple Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Like other *Shrews*, Zeffirelli’s circulates around the use- and exchange-value of a shrew-wife. But locating this image of “woman” in

Kate delivering her last speech. Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Columbia, 1929. Photograph from the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.
Taylor’s body—itself a site (or text) of sexual spectacle and spectatorly desire—lends particular resonance to this Shrew’s hyperactive narrative. As “the most expensive, most beautiful, most married and divorced being in the world,” Taylor both stands for the type “star” and calls into question the ontological distinctions separating stars from “ordinary people.” Her star category not only ignores how her offscreen experience models the late-twentieth-century crisis within heterosexually monogamy but fails to account for either her “commonness” or her frequent successes in “bitch” roles. Nevertheless, the star system, and Taylor within it, figures “the decadence, sexual license and extravagance” that characterize 1950s and 1960s American culture and anticipate Foucault’s designation of sexuality as the area of human experience where we can learn the truth about ourselves (Dyer, Stars 49–50; see also Morin; Walker). As a fathomless icon of femininity, with stories in her eyes, her body carries meanings that may supersede, or fuse with, stardom’s ability to embody social categories, especially to promote the idea (and ideal) of individual agency within culture by suggesting that a private self resides behind the role and that “truth” lies just beyond the image (Dyer, Heavenly Bodies 11, 18).

Shrew and the Taylor-Burton team are ideally suited to mapping this contradictory web of discourses and its equally contradictory pleasures. Most intriguingly, Zeffirelli’s film grounds its particular negotiation between textual and social subjects, not just in Shakespeare’s play but in reverberations of two other productions starring the couple: Cleopatra (1963; dir. Mankiewicz), whose filming embraced what Burton called le scandale that broke up both stars’ previous marriages (Sheppard 299), and Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1966; dir. Nichols). Certainly the teaser for Virginia Woolf—“You are cordially invited to George and Martha’s for an evening of fun and games”—applies equally to Shrew. For the game in Zeffirelli’s film is to exchange “Hump the Hostess” for “Get the Guests” and, by treading the edge of the madonna-whore dichotomy, to transform not just the unruary Kate but Taylor herself from a published “scarlet woman” to a legitimate wife.

Appropriately, the film’s first image of “woman” is that of a blowsy whore, who replaces the figure of Lent in the opening spectacle of Paduan Carnival, which replaces Shakespeare’s Sly Induction and thematizes the licensed inversions of Shrew’s narrative. Aptly characterizing Shakespeare’s Shrew as “a play not for a sober Monday morning but for a drunken Saturday night,” Jack Jorgens calls Zeffirelli’s film a version of Saturnalian Revel, with Burton and Taylor reigning as the Lord and Lady of Misrule (67, 73, 78). Not only is Burton’s smashed Welsh Petruchio (a parody of Charles Laughton’s portrayal of Henry VIII in Alexander Korda’s 1933 film) seldom without a wine goblet in his hand, but he throws away Shakespeare’s lines with a panache that overpowers Taylor’s more hesitant delivery. As with the Pickford-Fairbanks Shrew, the male star’s ownership of Shakespeare’s language reifies the text’s linguistic logic; whereas Petruchio owns the words, silence codes his wife’s presence until the play’s end, when Kate talks and talks and talks. Here, however, Taylor’s body language overmatches Burton’s facility with Shakespeare: the film not only eroticizes her Spectacular body but capitalizes on her attraction for Burton. Following the wooing scene, an extended romp that ends with the pair falling into a pile of feathers, a close-up sequence not only privileges Kate’s point of view but, by including an extreme close-up of one of Taylor’s famous violet eyes, turns her gaze into a spectacle in which viewers can meet their own voyeurism. Her look keys a high-angle full shot of Burton’s Petruchio bragging to the other men that he has won her; then, drawing back from the window’s “eye,” Kate sinks into a thoughtful pose; and a smile crosses her face as the soundtrack’s soft, romantic music expresses her private pleasure, inviting spectators of either gender to share and, perhaps, extend her fantasy.

That fantasy culminates at Bianca’s wedding banquet, where, following an exchange of sidelong glances between Kate and Petruchio, Kate’s point of view keys a shot of several children playing; after a cut-in mid-shot of Kate, they reappear, this time with a large dog. She smiles fondly at them, then gazes tenderly at a bored, wine-drinking Petruchio and, with expressively downcast eyes, raises her own cup to her lips. Moments
later, she disdainfully leads the women away from the men’s locker-room talk about the Widow. In her eyes, marriage should breed increase, not bawdy puns: this Kate would “keep / By children’s eyes, her husband’s shape in mind” (Shakespeare’s sonnet 9). Indeed, this spectacle of fortunate issue seems to motivate her later obedience speech and so bends Shrew’s ending toward familial myth—and this particular Shrew’s intertextual connections.

For both Kate’s mothering instinct and her refusal to listen to dirty jokes flood outward, encompassing Virginia Woolf’s loud-mouthed Martha and George and their imaginary child as well as Taylor’s own history. After three cesarean sections, Taylor had decided, on the advice of her doctors, not to have another child, and during Cleopatra’s early filming, she arranged to adopt a severely crippled infant girl (Sheppard 299–300). Then, as her dangerous liaison with Burton became worldwide news, an open letter in the Vatican City weekly, L’osservatore della domenica (implicitly if not officially speaking with a papal voice), accused her of being “an erotic vagrant and an unfit mother” (Sheppard 309–10). Three years later, Shrew’s ending seemed specifically Taylor-ed to address those slurs and to prove her moral worth. When Taylor’s Kate reappears at Petruchio’s command, tugging Bianca, the Widow, and a train of (presumably) marginal wives, her spectacle of obedience becomes a serious pledge of wifely duty, complete with a cut-in mid-shot of a weeping peasant woman. As Kate kneels before Petruchio, joyful applause breaks out; after Petruchio raises her, the film cuts to a close-up kiss and then to a full shot of the entire assembly, smiling and applauding this conventional romantic-comedy ending. In close-up, Petruchio addresses his final lines to the less fortunate husbands and to the camera, but when he turns, expecting Kate to be at his side, she has disappeared, and he is trapped in a crowd of other wives. Kate-Taylor’s desire for Petruchio-Burton, and for children, has apparently transferred to all women; and Burton’s newly eroticized body must fight through this unruly mob to make his exit, much as Burton and Taylor were plagued by intrusive Roman paparazzi wherever they went. Finally, Grumio holds up his hands, as though to say “that’s all” and to stop the camera as well as the women from invading an imaginary offscreen bedroom. But it is not all, for outtakes from the hectically paced wooing scene provide a coda that not only restores farcical gaiety but shows what the filmed sequence does not: a pair of jolly, thriving wooers, a model star marriage that appropriates Shakespeare to authenticate a beautiful woman’s transgressive body as that of a faithful wife and to confirm the jet-setting couple’s Italian, if not international, respectability. “All is [indeed] done in reverend care of her” (4.1.175): within this Shrew’s doubled carnivalesque, that ideology prevails precisely because it awards pleasure to both textual and spectatorly subjects.
Consuming Pleasures

However much its box-office success capitalized on viewers’ voyeuristic fascination with its stars, Zeffirelli’s *Shrew* falls within a high-art tradition of filmed Shakespeare. But more popular representations of *Shrew*—by distancing, dispersing, or redirecting Shakespeare’s cultural authority—can more easily accommodate the possibility of containment as well as of resistance: the “double movement” of popular culture (Hall 228). Although *Shrew* is (always) already popular culture, George Sidney’s 1953 film of Cole Porter’s *Kiss Me, Kate* (1948) moves “Shakespeare” even more definitively toward its popular origins. Adapted to show how Lilli and Fred, a divorced star couple, come together (again), this *Shrew* quite literally swings to another tune. Like most musicals about making a musical, this one equates a couple’s ability to perform together onstage with their successful offstage sexual performance, a convention well suited to address the decade’s preoccupation with sexuality (1953 marked Playboy’s inaugural issue and Kinsey’s report on American women’s sexual behavior) and to tinsel the pleasures and dangers of sex with a discourse of “pure” entertainment.

Ultimately, *Kate* is less interested in shrewing around than in placating, through song and dance, the cultural tensions of screwing around: wiving it wealthily in Padua takes second place to floating desire, affecting unruly women (“I will take...any Harry, Tom or Dick,” sings Bianca-Lois) and ex-husbands alike (marriage is fine by day, “But oh what a bore at night,” mourns Petruchio-Fred). Although Kate-Lilli’s “I Hate Men” deconstructs macho stereotypes—Jack the Ripper; the athlete “with his manner bold and brassy, / [Who] may have hair upon his chest but, sister, so has Lassie”; the traveling salesman “who’ll have the fun and thee the baby”; the executive whose “bus’ness is with his pretty secretary”—she finally accepts the contradictory “twoness” of lived experience: “from the mind, all womankind should rout ’em, / But ladies... what would we do without ’em?” Taking any Dick is not for Kate-Lilli, whose love-hate for Petruchio-Fred’s philandering phallus makes her seem willingly complicit in repeated humiliations, including a public spanking (“So taunt me and hurt me, / Deceive me, desert me, / I’m yours ’til I die”). However playfully *Kate* extends *Shrew*’s brief to express women’s and men’s grievances against monogamy’s material circumstances, it not only rigorously polices excessive desires but tolerates no ruptures within male dominance. A well-stuffed codpiece, a whip, and a banana code Petruchio-Fred’s high visibility; and the film’s original 3-D version heightens his subjectivity (never Kate-Lilli’s), as well as his self-reflexive performance, through the emergence effect, which makes him seem about to break from the screen to become one with the viewers’ reality. Whereas Marowitz turns *Shrew*’s discipline-and-punish regime to pornographic excess, *Kate* reworks Shakespeare as sadistic bard through two Sly-surrogate hoodlums, whose advice—“Brush up your Shakespeare, and they’ll all kow-tow”—brushes in the tangled links between Shakespeare’s titular erotics and mid-twentieth-century misogyny to recirculate *Shrew*’s discourse of phallic potency:

If she says she won’t buy it or tike it,  
Make her tike it, what’s more, “As You Like It,”

If she says your behavior is heinous,  
Kick her right in the “Coriolanus”

Just recite an occasional sonnet,  
And your lap’ll have “Honey” upon it,  
When your baby is pleading for pleasure,  
Let her sample your “Measure for Measure.”

Somewhat predictably, Lilli “kow-tows,” canceling her proposed elopement with the travestied Texan cowboy whose limousine sports giant cattle horns and using Shakespeare’s obedience speech (set to Porter’s music) to tell Fred she loves him. When she waves Fred’s little black book in his face, he laughs (“A pox on the life that late I led”) and, as Lilli tosses away his record of past conquests, segues into the finale’s “Kiss Me, Kate,” further confirming the myth of heterosexual monogamy and cheerfully accepting its strictures as structure. Superimposed over their playground-stage, the figures of Lilli and Fred, once again through the emergence effect, project into the “eternal present” of both the film’s
phantom and its live spectators,17 joining two cultural spaces in a wedded bliss that has been mediated by, but finally suppresses, a dominant-submissive undertext. All are included guests at this celebratory marriage between the playwright Hollywood calls “Billy Big Boy” and the big-hit, stage-to-screen musical.

If Kate vents sadomasochistic fantasies in soft-shoe routines to teach that fighting phallic power can be fun, it also suggests that managing monogamy’s double-toil-and-trouble standards is strictly women’s business. Similarly, in the televised Shrew that Paul Nickell directed for Westinghouse Studio One (1950), Lisa Kirk’s Kate, wearing a fashionably boat-necked, off-the-shoulder Bianca-like dress (“the look is definitely 1950,” claims the video’s jacket blurb), borrows Pickford’s wink as she ends her obedience speech—articulated here in close-up, played directly at viewers who have just seen Charlton Heston’s rugged matinee-idol Petruchio turn away. Her behind-the-back gesture (“We women own the real power, but let’s keep it secret,” says her look) functions both as a compensatory fantasy and as a classically authorized reply to sociology’s then current scientific dissection of marriage. Some twenty-five years later, Kate’s wink would ground Maribel Morgan’s Total Woman strategies for covert domination of husbands, aimed at keeping them in their place—that is, in their wives’ beds—as well as Phyllis Schlafly’s Power of the Positive Woman, which uses the rhetoric of disenfranchisement to mobilize suburban housewives into an effective political force against the perceived onslaught of radical feminism (see Kipnis 164). But however circuitously it represents Kate’s route to pleasure, Studio One’s attempt to market its high-culture image generates additional pleasure through representing electricity’s transformative powers in yet another form of commodified discourse that reveals Shrew as a limitless text; no boundary separates Shakespeare’s fictional product and its born-to-shop heroine (Boose, “Taming”) from its sponsor’s commercial products.

Attached to Shrew’s narrative through television’s seamless flow of discourse, the show’s commercial spots not only aim Westinghouse’s up-market Shakespeare at variously aged and gendered viewers but endeavor to construct a family, with Betty Furness as its arbiter (see Williamson; Haralovich). The first, positioned just after Petruchio takes Kate away from her wedding reception on his bike, hawks a Westinghouse portable three-way radio with an AC/DC long-life battery; the second, which follows the scenes at Petruchio’s “taming school,” begins with Furness saying, “Do you live in a hothouse? You don’t have to, you know.” The solution: a Westinghouse Mobile Air Fan with “deep-pitched Mycarta blades, explosive air rings and an exhaust fan that adjusts to any window.” If these address, respectively, American Bandstand’s teenage

Kate’s vow to Petruchio. Kathryn Grayson and Howard Keel in Kiss Me, Kate, MGM, 1953. Photograph from the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.
fans and “good huswifery,” the last commercial, placed after Kate’s obedience speech and the romantic embrace that follows, obviously assumes a male spectator, his interest piqued by updated Shakespeare. Here, a man watching night baseball on a (Westinghouse) TV introduces scenes in which Westinghouse magic lights an entire world: highways, a filling station, a backyard barbecue—all the (male) amenities of postwar suburban landed leisure, where a man’s home may indeed be his castle and where Westinghouse products contribute to enclosing his wife within it. Clearly, Shrew had found its ideal venue: the home.

Even more strikingly, the first commercial spot for Moonlighting’s 1986 radically rewritten Shrew (dir. Caron) displaces the propertied gender relations of Shakespeare’s original onto potential consumers, further erasing any barriers between the fictional text and commercial social reality. Primarily, though not exclusively, addressed to women, each of the four segments invites surrogate Kates to create (or re-create) themselves from multiple products and gendered subject positions. The first opens with a male voice-over (“Satisfying your family is what General Foods is all about”) and shows a man teaching a woman that Grape Nuts contains health, “natural” taste, and sex: “That’s a big crunch for such a little thing,” she concludes, savoring a bite. In the second, an ad for designer coffees, a mother and daughter look at keepsakes, and the daughter asks, “What was my first word?” “Daddy,” replies the mother. “Well, my second must have been ‘Mom,’” the daughter says, laughing; “No,” her mother says, “I think it was chocolate.” But if this captured moment invites viewers to remember patriarchal primacy (with the absent father’s position filled by the product), the third segment, for Kentucky Fried Chicken, tells a more radical story, in which a cartoon hen bops the narrating rooster’s head and takes him off, captive to her desires, in a wheelbarrow. The final commercial, the teaser for an upcoming show about TV stars and their mothers, concludes, “Mothers always have the last word.” Curiously and uncannily, this commodified gender map functions much like foreshadowing (as if some “guide to quality drama”) to presage what is to come.

As part of the “merry war” between Maddie Hayes (Kybil Shepherd) and David Addison (Bruce Willis), Moonlighting’s Shrew recirculates the relations between body and voice, between parodic gender display and subterranean pornographic connections, that characterize Shakespeare’s original, weaving them into a late-twentieth-century kaleidoscope of popular gender fantasies. In her first appearance, Shepherd’s Kate polishes off Padua’s entire male population with a long staff, sending five into a fountain and causing a line of others to fall, like dominoes, simply by puffing at them. Wearing sunglasses, Willis’s Petruchio rides a white horse and, like any macho Western hero, inhales a roast pig, guzzles a wine keg, fights two swordsmen, and, finally, eliminates four Kung Fu masters. “If you’re a man, you’re gonna love the sixteenth century,” he tells viewers, just before he breaks down Katherina’s door with an ax, pokes his head through the opening, à la Jack Nicholson in Stanley Kubrick’s Shining, and announces with a leer, “Here’s Petruchio!” At the wedding ceremony, where a bound and gagged Katherina kneels at the altar, Petruchio rides into church (here, the horse also wears sunglasses), comments, “How well doth she look in bondage,” and puts on a spectacular show. Backed up by a rock combo, he sings, “I’ve got the fever, you’ve got the cure,” complete with a Mick Jagger strut and harmonica solo, before throwing Kate over his shoulder and storming out. Refusing to sleep with him, Kate claims, “I havest a headache”; later, however, after a male voice-over narrates her change from house afire to housewife, she promises, if he “respects her and holds her in high esteem as a wife and partner,” to share his bed. Following the conventional PG-13 pan over rumpled sheets and intertwined legs, the pair confess their love. “In spite of your boorishness and bluster,” says Kate, “you’re a good man, Petruchio”; and he returns the compliment: “In spite of your shrewishness and shrewishness, you’re a rather remarkable woman.”

As in Shakespeare’s Shrew, Moonlighting’s finale, entitled “The Big Finish,” documents a crisis in subjectivity, but exactly whose subjectivity is at stake is not altogether clear. Interrupting Petruchio’s prenuptial counseling of Lucentio,
Baptista mentions hearing a rumor that Kate just pretends to be tamed and claims, “Marriage is fifty-fifty.” Looking worried, Petruchio summons Kate, and when she comes, he preaches to her before the assembled company, “Thy husband is thy Lord, thy life, thy keeper,” and asks her, by way of a test, to agree that the moon is shining bright. Following an intercut exchange of pregnant looks, Kate crosses past him, gazes at the sky, and says, “You are mistaken, husband; it is the sun that shines so bright.” “The sun, you say?” replies Petruchio. “Then I have but one choice—to look again.” After admitting, “I was wrong, and I have learned it from a woman,” he renounces his “deal” with Baptista and claims as his only reward “thy company, as long as we both shall live. For Kate didn’t need to be tamed—just to be loved” (for similar moves, see Thompson’s comments in Shakespeare 20; Levine 15). At this, Kate responds, “Kiss me, Petruchio,” and pulls him into a 1940s dip as the camera booms up to a high-angle shot of Padua’s newly franchised marital community.

Initially, this ending seems willingly responsive to, even productive of, currents of social change. Renegotiating the gendered exchange of visual pleasure in Shakespeare’s Shrew, it takes Kate and Petruchio’s privately agreed-on bedroom contract into public space and so redefines that space, apparently in other than performative terms. By giving up his “deal,” Petruchio rejects owning Kate as property, thus according with Joan Kelly’s utopian move toward reconstructing gender relations as personal relations among freely associating individuals (15). But a number of contradictions play through this seductive discourse. Intriguingly, while Moonlighting’s finale returns the patriarchal text to its foundational male body, acknowledging that source also renews to Petruchio the power to name obedience, secure his dominance, and turn Kate into a smiling spectator, whose downcast eyes show her submission to his will or, perhaps more accurately, to Will Shakespeare’s masquerading in Willis. Although projecting Kate’s voice into Petruchio’s body means rewriting the marriage vows to her tune, the newly gendered lyric buys into another myth of male subjectivity: that a woman’s love is all a man needs and vice versa. More troublingly, these regendered relations between body and voice position Kate where, in Josette Feral’s words, “she says Nothing because she has Nothing to say and because there is Nothing to say about whatever she may say, since it means Nothing” (551–52). If, as Joel Fineman writes, Shakespeare’s Shrew portrays “woman” as porous, capable of admitting male discourse and speaking it as her own (138–59), then what is Shepherd’s “Kiss me, Petruchio,” with its accompanying sweeping gesture, but a readmission of that? And though Moonlighting also veers toward suggesting that only Kate can make Petruchio a man (Kahn 117–18) or, in this case, a “liberated” man, a male narrator has the last words. Retitling the play “Petruchio and Kate,” his voice-over reaffirms the primacy of the gendered male subject, erases the contradictions the videotext has produced, and brings voice and image together to mute woman’s “unruly member” (see Boose, “Scolding Bridles”).

Nevertheless, Moonlighting’s gestures toward sociosexual equality do clear a space, even though that space cannot be fully occupied without re-mystifying the terms of the social contract on a woman’s body. While this Shrew sends up Marowitz’s pornographic morphology, it also exploits and eroticizes another border realm where gender roles remain questionable or unstable. Moonlighting’s frame, however, reinvents the trope of dominant-submissive gender relations at Shrew’s center and repositions the plot’s arbitrary gender politics. That frame begins with a ten-year-old boy’s desire to watch “that show about men and women,” at which his mother warns, “Watching TV won’t help you on the Shakespeare test; you’ve got a lot of reading to do.” Just as Shakespeare’s Shrew pretends to address Christopher Sly, Moonlighting’s Shrew sells itself as the boy’s imagined version of “Atomic Shakespeare” (by William “Budd” Shakespeare). Yet it has no explosive effect on the boy; rather, since it substitutes for a “real” (even more desirable?) Moonlighting episode, it demonstrates his competency in reading, not Shakespeare, but other Moonlighting episodes, where Maddie Hayes invariably “wins.” Rushing downstairs after shutting his rewritten Shrew text, the boy—whose face, like his mother’s, viewers never
see—asks, “Is Moonlighting still on?” And his mother, ignorant of the reading he has produced, replies, “It’s just over.” Rising from the couch to turn off the TV, she adds (referring to the absent Moonlighting text), “It wasn’t very good, anyway.”

Somewhat anxiously, and in keeping with television’s domestic contract of containment, this frame not only encloses Moonlighting’s Shrew but offers another representation of “woman” to viewers who may have enjoyed the episode’s potentially subversive pleasures. Finally, in an America ruled (at least on TV) by moms in highly authoritative high heels and by absent dads, everything is in place in late-twentieth-century structures of cultural authority. As this last riff on bodies and voices suggests, it all depends on whether you like your patriarchy visible or, as in this case, invisible—spoken by a froward mom, not a former shrew. At its close, Moonlighting’s Shrew teaches just how thoroughly Shakespeare’s Shrew ties Kate up. Whether in its Elizabethan guise as a tale of “good husbandry” or in this recent thrust at historicized counterdiscourse, the play always represents Katherina bound—even in a (mis)reading that seems to invite its spectators, of whatever gender, to reappropriate another screen idol’s most famous line, “Here’s looking at you, kid.”

Notes

1 For documents and analysis, see Henderson and McManus. On Shrew; see Kahn 104–18; Jardine 59–61; Woodbridge 206–10; Neely, Broken Nuptials 28–31; Boose, “Scolding” and “Taming”; and Newman 33–50.

2 On reading against the grain, see Barthes, “From Work to Text”; see also the responses from Byars, Fischer, Mellencamp, and Morris in Spectatrix 117, 150-51, 235, and 245.

3 The now famous phrase is Mulvey’s. Since her influential essay appeared, her formulation of gendered spectatorship has been criticized for not acknowledging a wider range of cross-gendered and marginalized spectator positions: see Spectatrix.

4 I agree with Berger about the privileging of imaginary bodies over real ones, though I would not claim, as he does, that the theater entirely limits the play of (critical) representation (“Bodies,” “Text,” Imaginary Audition); see also Peterson, “Straw Lances”; Yachnin.

5 For example, none of these Shrews reconstructs Bianca as shrew-wife; by reserving that identity for Kate, each assumes that her conversion resolves a “universal” problem.


7 On masquerade, see Riviere; Heath. Williamson discusses important contradictions within gendered masquerade, noting that present-day fashion images privilege women’s “boyish” figures (“It’s Different for Girls”).

8 Especially in The Mark of Zorro, The Three Musketeers, Robin Hood (all, 1921), The Thief of Baghdad (1923), and The Black Pirate (1926).

9 My formulation applies only to heterosexual viewers. For the theoretical debate on gendered spectatorship, see Spectatrix.

10 The BBC-TV Shrew, directed by Jonathan Miller, closes with an image of ideal Puritan marriage: part books appear, and all sing Psalm 128, which connects fear of the Lord with a peaceful family life. For the social contexts of song production, see Horner. On Miller’s TV and stage Shrews, see Holderness 95–120. On the BBC series as a cultural product, see Collick 52–57. See also Bulman and Coursen, esp. 80–81, 188–89, and 266–68.

11 In Rutter’s first chapter, “Interpreting the Silence,” several recent Royal Shakespeare Company Kates discuss this topic (1–26).

12 The film bowdlerizes some of Porter’s lyrics in the staged version of Kiss Me, Kate, where the original line is “His bus’ness is the bus’ness which he gives his secretary.”

13 Peterson’s “Boys Will Be Boys” further explores Kate’s sadism.

14 Appropriately, the short-lived 3-D technology derived from an interlock mechanism devised for military missile-tracking systems (see Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 245, 251, 359–60, and 474–75).

15 Memorialized in the perennial joke: wet (A Midsummer Night’s Dream); dry (Twelfth Night); miscarriage (Love’s Labour’s Lost); 3 inches (Much Ado about Nothing); 6 inches (As You Like It); 12 inches (The Taming of the Shrew).

16 See Feuer 81, 84–85. Paul connects the emergence effect to Weimann’s locus and platea stage positions (73–85, 215–46).

17 See also Joyrich; Oruch.

18 Versions of this essay were presented at Dartmouth College, the Shakespeare Association of America, and the Society for Cinema Studies. My thanks to those audiences for helpful comments.

Works Cited


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