

2 is the longest in the play, the subservient content she delivers could be interpreted as her succumbing to the extensive emotional abuse from Petruchio and accepting him as the dominant part in their relationship.

As a production, the Taming of the Shrew is structurally designed to deny women any real chance of having as much to say as men: there are only four women throughout the play, with only Katherina and Bianca having major roles. This leads to lots of moments where women are discussed without any being present: for example in the Induction where the Page “enters as a Lady”; in Act 5 Scene 2 when the men bet on “whose wife is the most obedient”, and most notably Petruchio’s soliloquy in Act 4 Scene 1. This soliloquy is essentially reducing Katherina to a wild animal in need of taming; Petruchio’s speech in Act 4 Scene 1 uses a semantic field of wild animal imagery to describe his new wife “My falcon...her keeper’s call...these kites”, the effect of which is to fully dehumanise Katherina and make her entirely un-relatable to an audience. The act of having a man talking about a woman in such a derogatory way would have been played as comedic plot development in the 16th century - Petruchio claiming he will “rail and brawl” to deny Katherina sleep would have been interpreted as humorous whereas a 21st century audience could take issue with the imagery of “kill[ing] a wife with kindness.” Not having any female characters on stage to rebuke this speech proves that Shakespeare intended the character of Petruchio to be far more verbose than his female counterpart. Petruchio is allowed to outlay his entire plans for Katherina yet she is denied to respond; Petruchio is the more dominant one in this relationship as he is allowed to speak his mind, uninterrupted. Shakespeare closes the soliloquy with: “He that knows better how to tame a shrew, now let him speak.” This line delineates Petruchio’s unwillingness to listen to women’s opinions: he will listen to men who also want to “curb [women’s] mad and headstrong humor[s]” but denies real women their voice; even if Shakespeare had written a female character to be on stage with Petruchio she would be denied a voice because of his reductive view of women.

For Shakespearean standards, Petruchio’s portrayal as far more dominant and verbose than Katherina is typical for that era of romantic literature: societal expectations of women restricted their rights heavily so they were merely the property of men, with their fathers and husbands figuratively and literally speaking for them. The lack of many female characters means women are talked about more by men than they get to speak themselves, leading to audiences being coerced into empathising more with the male characters. Shakespeare’s characterisation of Petruchio as an arrogant and domineering individual - both in how he is allowed to speak more often than Katherina and his general attitude towards women - is typical of Shakespearean literature and gender expectations, however by modern standards his behaviour would be considered highly abusive and manipulative.

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