

## The Sub-Merged Plot and the Taming of Katherina: Gender, Performativity, and Patriarchy in *The Taming of the Shrew*

Hiroyuki Kondo (近藤弘幸)

### Introduction

Because of its overt narrative of masculine domination and feminine subjugation, even the most conservative reader would find it difficult to give unqualified approval to *The Taming of the Shrew*. Early criticism of the play tends to sound apologetic. Ann Thompson thus summarises:

Almost universally, scholars and critics who enter the fray at all assume a necessity to defend the play even though the attack is rarely articulated; it is just taken for granted that *The Shrew* will 'normally' be read and performed as a piece of bluff brutality in which a man marries a spirited woman in order to torture and humiliate her.<sup>(1)</sup>

The most typical defence is to regard the play as belonging to the genre of farce. According to Robert B. Heilman, farce 'deal[s] with people as if they lack, largely or totally, the physical, emotional, intellectual, and moral sensitivity that we think of as "normal"', and 'Kate is conceived of as responding automatically to a certain kind of calculated treatment'.<sup>(2)</sup>

With the advent of feminist criticism, the comic or romantic element of the play has been emphasised more than the farcical side. For John C. Bean, the play stages 'the emergence of a humanized heroine against the background of depersonalizing farce unassimilated from the play's fabliau sources'.<sup>(3)</sup> Other feminist readers identify this dehumanising power with patriarchy itself, rather than seeing it as a generic matter. Katherina is no longer an impersonal cog in a clock-work farce, but an able critic of patriarchy. Petruchio's taming, brutal as it may seem, turns out to be a strategic process to teach

Katherina how to play at patriarchy. There arises a mutual, loving relationship between Katherina and Petruchio as soon as she appreciates his intention. Her last speech is interpreted not as a straightforward validation of patriarchal gender relation, but as full of irony.<sup>(4)</sup>

However, this kind of liberal feminist reading is in fact continuous with those that see the play as farce, in that both try to save the text from attacks on its patriarchal ideology. Richard A. Burt points out the ideological function of the naturalised discourse of romantic love:

Love can never conclusively be separated from coercion because romantic love is not natural; it does not spring spontaneously from natural impulses but is rather the product of a disciplinary practice. If the love between Petruchio and Kate appears to be natural, it is because the play engineers that effect in order to legitimate Petruchio's power;

In short, 'Shakespeare does not stage the subversion of patriarchy but stages a subversive threat to patriarchy... in order to contain it'.<sup>(5)</sup>

While Burt's reading questions the ideological function of comedy, the farcical aspect of the play becomes important again as post-Foucaultian identity politics have come to influence feminist thinking. Barbara Freedman, Karen Newman, and Maureen Quilligan propose their respective readings of the Sly framework and the taming of Katherina.<sup>(6)</sup> However, whether traditional, feminist, or postmodernist, critical writings on *The Taming of the Shrew* have almost exclusively concentrated on its main plot. Though it has often been observed that the Bianca plot is

complementary to the main plot, its importance seems to have been underestimated.<sup>(7)</sup> This essay is intended as an attempt to supply this critical and crucial gap. I hope to show how the misogynist logic in the sub-merged plot is complicit with the foregrounded main plot. The point I want to make is that the sub-plot endorses the taming of Katherina through its evocation/reinforcement of the patriarchal idea that produces/naturalises femininity as inherently treacherous.

### **The Katherina/Bianca Binary Construction: Polarisation of Femininity**

Before we come to the main task, let us begin with an examination of the Katherina plot. A good place to start is perhaps the Induction, because it seems to offer two keys to our reading of the main plot. It illustrates (1)the masculine dependence on femininity which underlies the polarisation of women, and (2)the discursive construction of identity.

Let us start with the first point. In the play's Induction, the Lord, when he finds Sly sleeping in the street, decides to play a practical joke upon him:

if he were convey'd to bed,  
Wrapp'd in sweet clothes, rings put upon his  
fingers,  
A most delicious banquet by his bed,  
And brave attendants near him when he wakes,  
Would not the beggar then forget himself?  
(Ind.i.37-41)<sup>(8)</sup>

Contrary to the Lord's expectation, however, these material luxuries do not really persuade Sly that he is a lord. When the servants offer wine, dainties, and rich clothes, Sly refuses them. What convinces him at last is not these ravishments, but the presence of a wife. At the mention of a wife who is 'inferior to none' (Ind.ii.67), Sly begins to suspect that he may indeed be a lord. The change is linguistically registered by his sudden switch from prose to verse.

This is also the moment when the discourse of class starts to be absorbed in the discourse of gender, with which the play has started.<sup>(9)</sup> Sly's imaginary

upward movement in social class corresponds with his (also imaginary) realisation that his tarnished masculinity is (re-)affirmed by feminine obedience. This seems to imply that the difference between the upper-class Sly and the lower-class Sly is whether his relation with women is 'normal' or not. Sly's recovery of his masculine status by gaining an obedient wife reveals that masculine authority is heavily dependent upon women. It is women who confer masculinity on men.

In a patriarchal/homosocial culture, women differentiate men into two groups: those who can dominate women ('normal', masculine men), and those who allow women to dominate them (inferior, 'effeminate' men, such as infatuated lovers and cuckolded husbands). In the Induction, the Hostess who throws out Sly effeminises him,<sup>(10)</sup> while the page/wife gives Sly a new social status, however unstable and temporary it may be. In theory at least, then, those who fail to dominate women are effeminate. Often in practice, however, those women who refuse the usual measures of masculine domination are stigmatised to save masculine face. While some women are idealised for their obedience, others are called witches, whores,— and shrews. Thus, women's stratification of men is inverted, and women are polarised.

The opening scene of the play proper enacts this patriarchal polarisation of femininity into shrewishness and obedience. Lucentio and Tranio, acting as commentators on Baptista's two daughters, guide the audience. They say that one of the girls is 'wonderful froward', while the other's reticence testifies to her maidenly 'mild behaviour and sobriety' (I.i.69-71). This dichotomy is also associated with another, more familiar polarisation into virgins and whores. When he is asked by Baptista if he will 'court' the shrewish Katherina, Gremio answers, 'To cart her rather' (55).<sup>(11)</sup> Katherina's shrewishness also signals her sexual promiscuity. Bianca, by contrast, represents ideal womanhood. She is submissive to her father, and therefore promises to be sexually obedient to the prospective husband. Her name, 'white', also emphasises her chastity.

Such production of a normative 'Woman', Peter

Stallybrass points out, had real effects. 'The contraries or "inappropriate elements" were concepts applied to actual women, constituting them as sinners and criminals to be purified or exterminated'.<sup>(12)</sup> This may explain Katherina's (seemingly) unnecessary roughness towards her sister in II.i, which often troubles feminist critics of the play. The scene opens with Bianca protesting against Katherina:

Good sister, wrong me not, nor wrong yourself,  
To make a bondmaid and a slave of me — (II.i.1–2)

In this scene, as the speech quoted shows, Katherina literally binds Bianca's hands, and she really 'strikes her' (the stage direction is found in the Folio text). This is the only occurrence of unquestionable physical abuse in the whole play, and critics who are sympathetic to Katherina are more or less baffled with it. Some critics simply and silently ignore it, while others try to find the reason in Baptista's favouritism towards the younger daughter.<sup>(13)</sup> As a psychological reading, this may be convincing, but Katherina's anger can also be read as institutional, rather than a personal grudge against paternal partiality.

As soon as the play starts, the contrast between Katherina and Bianca is thus economically installed in the audience's mind. No sooner has the polarisation been established, however, than Katherina destabilises it with her description of Bianca:

A pretty peat! it is best  
Put finger in the eye, and she knew why. (I.i.78–9)

Bianca may not be what she seems. She may just be pretending to be obedient, forcing false tears when necessary. From the very start, then, Bianca is regarded as the epitome of femininity by all the male characters in the play, while at the same time this view is somewhat qualified with another possibility, voiced by Katherina. But what is 'femininity'? Several efforts have been made by feminist revisionists to retrieve Katherina from her predicament. Such efforts, however, often result in merely inverting the binary divide. For example, Irene Dash uncritically accepts the

polarisation: 'Bianca is vital to our understanding of her sister. The contrast between them exists not merely at the superficial level of external beauty, but in more complicated and varied ways'.<sup>(14)</sup> She then contrasts Katherina and Bianca to praise the former (and/or demean the latter). Such a reading, however, preserves the very binary divide itself, and serves to conceal the cultural assumption that creates it. Our task should be to critique binary classifications. Is Katherina's view of Bianca really different from the masculine view? Are they really opposed? Or is Katherina's version of Bianca merely a part of a patriarchal fantasy of femininity?

### **Performativity of Gender and the Taming of Katherina**

Before trying to answer these questions, let us come to the second point (the discursive construction of identity), and re-examine how the identities of Katherina and Bianca are constructed. We have seen that their identities are established almost the moment the play proper starts. In fact, however, at least at this point of the play, we do not know much about either of them. Katherina's speeches may sound 'shrewish', but in fact she is given only four speeches of total twelve lines. We hear other characters talk about her more than we hear her speak. In this expository scene of about 250 lines, Katherina enters the stage at line 48, speaks first at line 57, and exits at line 104. If we deduct the first 47 lines between Lucentio and Tranio, she is absent from the stage almost three quarters of the scene. This is in marked contrast with her future husband, Petruchio, who remains on stage through the next scene and speaks as many as 78 lines out of 280. It is Hortensio's and Grumio's speeches, rather than her own, that constitute Katherina as a shrew, affirmed and reinforced by Tranio. Bianca's character, on the other hand, is established by Lucentio's prodigal praise of her. This means that their identities are in fact no more grounded than Sly's identity as a lord is. They are only discursively produced. And Katherina's description of Bianca I have quoted above (I.i.78–9) puts her femininity in the same category as male impersonation.

When the Lord gives his servants instructions on how to beguile Sly, he says that if the page who is to play the part of the lady

have not a woman's gift  
To rain a shower of commanded tears,  
An onion will do well for such a shift,

(Ind.i.124-6)

Not only is Bianca's femininity placed on the same level as a boy's impersonation with the help of an onion, but the 'woman's gift' itself is undermined, for it is said to be that of shedding 'commanded' tears. The point is further strengthened by the self-referential evocation here of the Elizabethan stage convention of boy actors playing female roles.

If the identities of Katherina and Bianca are as groundless as that of Sly, it then follows, to put it the other way round, that the identity of Sly, the spectator of the play-within-the-play, is no more grounded than those of the characters in that play. This implies, by extension, that our identities may also be as groundless. The meta-theatrical structure of the play thus points to the fabrication of gender/identity in general. Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble*, advances the Foucaultian claim that there is no such thing as 'true' identity or coherent gender. According to her, gender is performatively constituted through the repetition of acts, and the notion of a subject prior to those acts is an ideologically produced one.

[A]cts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance,... Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. ... In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory framework of reproductive heterosexuality.<sup>(15)</sup>

From this point of view, such readings are rejected as the one that sees Bianca as feigning innocence and later revealing her true character. It is not that the true identities of Katherina and Bianca are exposed at the end of the play, but that they are constantly being constituted performatively (and therefore keep changing) in the course of the play.

For Butler, that gender is performative is the point of departure for gender subversion, since it implies that gender can be constructed otherwise. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, the power to control the performativity of Katherina's gender is in Petruchio's hands, and it rehearses exactly what Butler calls 'the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory framework of reproductive heterosexuality'.<sup>(16)</sup> Katherina's non-conformist attitude towards the imperatives of heterosexuality is evident. She refuses the very idea that women should be desirable heterosexual objects in the scopical economy of the masculine gaze.<sup>(17)</sup>

*Kath.* [To Baptista.] I pray you, sir, is it your will  
To make a stale of me amongst these mates?

*Hor.* Mates, maid, how mean you that? No mates  
for you

Unless you were of gentler, milder mould.

*Kath.* I'faith, sir, you shall never need to fear.

Iwis it is not half way to her heart;

(I.i.57-62)

When she binds Bianca's hands and interrogates her as to whom she likes best of her suitors, Katherina's speeches sound more like repugnance of the notion of heterosexual union itself than mere jealousy of her sister's popularity. Petruchio, on the other hand, simply creates a new Katherina with the performative power of language. He starts his 'taming' by addressing Katherina with a new vocabulary. Though she insists that her name is Katherina and not Kate (incidentally, this is why I call her Katherina throughout this essay, instead of the patronising 'Kate'), he says it is 'plain Kate', and calls her 'bonny Kate', 'the prettiest Kate in Christendom', 'Kate of Kate-Hall', and 'my super-dainty Kate' (II.i.185-8). He is indeed a shaman of performativity, creating whatever he wants — the

sun, the moon, a young woman — with his words.

Petruchio's taming of Katherina, the discursive process that fashions her femininity, culminates in its creation of 'the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core', when Katherina locates her femininity in her body and by doing so naturalises it:

Fie, fie, unknit that threat'ning *unkind* brow,  
 ...  
 Why are *our bodies* soft, and weak, and smooth,  
 Unapt to toil and trouble in the world,  
 But that our soft conditions, and our hearts,  
 Should well agree with *our external parts*?  
 (V.ii.136–68; my italics)

Maureen Quilligan observes that '[t]he language of the natural body, kept so carefully distinct from the authorizing terms throughout the play until this moment, returns with full force'.<sup>(18)</sup> It is no wonder that even some feminist critics wishfully think that there is a genuine, mutual love between Petruchio and Katherina, since Katherina is now the regulated heterosexual gender. Katherina is 'Kated'. By being this gender, she is now the principal focus of the masculine gaze. She delivers the longest speech in the play, holding the attention of the entire stage.

But this gender is by no means static or stable. So long as it is performative, it needs to be constantly renewed. Butler writes:

The rules that govern intelligible identity, i.e., that enable and restrict the intelligible assertion of an "I," rules that are partially structured along matrices of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, operate through *repetition*.<sup>(19)</sup>

And if no one else notices it, Petruchio is fully aware of the instability. Though he says that Katherina's obedience bodes 'peace', 'love', and 'quiet life' (V.ii.110), his next speech gives an ironic light on his victory:

Nay, I will win my wager better yet,  
 And show more sign of her obedience,

Her new-built virtue and obedience. (V.ii.116–8)

His triumph needs to be consolidated by further signs or performative acts. The clumsy recurrence of the word 'obedience' that ends two consecutive lines not only measures the pressure of the compulsion to repeat but also underwrites the anxiety of the failure of repetition. Hence his last speech: 'And being a winner, God give you good night!' (V.ii.187) He is the winner for the moment, but the tables may be turned if he stays. His macho identity as the tamer of subversive femininity is dependent on this very femininity, and the heterosexual relationship between Petruchio and Katherina based on gender hierarchy must be constantly re-staged to assert its authenticity.

### The Bianca Plot: The Collapse of the Katherina/Bianca Dichotomy

If the taming of Katherina stages the creation of patriarchal and heterosexual gender, the sub-plot seems to dramatise what happens if the *repetition* fails. As the play unfolds itself, we come to see a Bianca who is perhaps too wise to the ways of the world. When we see Bianca in III.i, she is quite capable of dealing with her suitors. She tactfully sets one lover against the other, inflaming their jealousy and desire. She first gives Lucentio the chance, holding off Hortensio. Here, Bianca is in perfect control of the situation, and easily thwarts Hortensio's attempt to interrupt them. Then she gives Lucentio a teasingly enigmatic answer: "*Hic ibat Simois,*" I know you not, "*hic est Sigeia tellus,*" I trust you not, "*Hic steterat Priami,*" take heed he hear us not, "*regia,*" presume not, "*celsa senis,*" despair not' (42–5). The effect of this answer is immediate and remarkable. Hortensio tries to interrupt them again, but this time it is Lucentio, who has waited for Bianca's reaction before, that gives an impatient reply. Hortensio notices Lucentio's change, and says: 'How fiery and forward our pedant is!' (48) This realisation stirs up his jealousy, leading in turn to Lucentio's aside that '[o]ur fine musician growth amorous' (63).

It should be noted here that each of the rivals seems more concerned with the other than with Bianca

herself.<sup>(20)</sup> They comment upon each other, and it is only in Hortensio's last speech that either of them says anything about Bianca. The love triangle that involves a woman and two men is, in patriarchal terms, a contest between the two active men. The woman is the passive object of their rivalry, and the judge who decides the winner is not the woman herself but her father. Then the woman is given as a gift from the father to the winner. This is the logic that informs Baptista's decision to auction off his younger daughter to the highest bidder:

Content you, gentlemen, I will compound this strife.

'Tis deeds must win the prize, and he of both  
That can assure my daughter greatest dower  
Shall have my Bianca's love. (II.i.341-4)

It is Baptista, not Bianca, that will 'compound' the rivalry, and Bianca is the 'prize' of the love game played according to the rules made by her father. Another notable example of such logic can be taken from the Athenian law in *A Midsummer Nights Dream*. Here, the rivals are Demetrius and Lysander, and Hermia loves Lysander, while her father chooses Demetrius as her bridegroom. Her father claims:

As she is mine, I may dispose of her;  
Which shall be either to this gentleman  
[i.e. Demetrius],  
Or to her death, according to our law  
Immediately provided in that case.

(*MND*, I.i.42-5)

It is interesting to note that this either-A-or-B law is in fact a third way-out. If Hermia refuses to marry Demetrius, she still has two alternatives: she is '[e]ither to die the death, or to abjure / For ever the society of men' (65-6). In other words, if Hermia is to survive, her choice is either to follow her father's command or to become a nun. We may remember here Hamlet's famous speech to Ophelia (*Ham.*, III.i.120), where the word 'nunnery' carries the undertone of its dichotomous pair. The word can also mean the institution of unchaste women, the brothel.<sup>(21)</sup> Hermia is either to obey her

father or to go to the 'nunnery'.

In a similar way, Hortensio's speech economically establishes the equation of an autonomous woman with a whore:

Yet if thy thoughts, Bianca, be so humble  
To cast thy wand'ring eyes on every stale,  
Seize thee that list. If once I find thee ranging,  
Hortensio will be quit with thee by changing.  
(III.i.89-92)

In the first two lines, Bianca is conceived as a subject that will 'cast' her eyes. At the same time, however, the status of this feminine subject is somewhat conditioned. She is represented as a hawk that will stoop to every lure. Even if Bianca chooses someone, her choice is regarded as indiscriminate. In the next line, even this conditional subjectivity is negated, and Bianca is tacitly transformed into an object that will be seized by anyone who cares to do so. She is now like a prostitute that any man can take. In this misogynist logic, a woman who exercises subjectivity in her choice of love is labelled as promiscuous, and immediately assimilated into a prostitute. Finally, in the last line, Hortensio reinstates himself in the position of the subject, and asserts that it is he who will 'quit', though it is obviously Bianca who has rejected Hortensio.

Through this identification, the speech reflects the fantasy that a virgin may turn out to be a whore. The Katherina/Bianca binary distinction, which is so important to the male characters in the play, completely collapses here. In fact, the play as often represents Katherina and Bianca in terms of each other as it does in opposed terms. They both claim their independence in similar words. Katherina says indignantly to her father: 'What, shall I be appointed hours, as though (belike) I knew not what to take and what to leave' (I.i.103-4), and Bianca asserts her autonomy when she is with her lovers: 'I'll not be tied to hours, nor 'pointed times, / But learn my lessons as I please myself' (III.i.19-20). Hortensio's identification of Bianca with a whore is made in the image of falconry, the recurrent image that describes Katherina.

### Gendered Paradigm: Tragic Masculine Disobedience and Comic Feminine Correction

Before we come to the discussion of what ensues from this breakdown of the binary construction, one more point of the Bianca plot must be clarified. Why do Lucentio and Bianca get married secretly? Their secret marriage seems to anticipate those marriages between hero and heroine in Shakespearean romantic comedy, when couples evade the rule of the older generation to fulfill their love.<sup>22</sup> Grumio summarises the paradigm: 'Here's no knavery! See, to beguile the old folks, how the young folks lay their heads together!' (I.ii.138-9)

In this play, however, the clash between the two generations is in fact mediated from the beginning, since the father and the daughter choose the same man. It matters little that Baptista takes Tranio for Lucentio, since his choice is based on money and not on personality or anything like that. The situation is like that in *The Merchant of Venice*, where Bassanio's choice of the right casket enables Portia to marry the man she loves without crossing her dead father's will. Money and love happily go together. If there is any real obstacle to the marriage, it is whether Vincentio approves of Lucentio's marriage with Bianca and gives assurance of her dowry. The real issue is not between the bride and her father but between the bridegroom and his father.

Nevertheless, the play insists in representing the conflict as that between father and daughter rather than between father and son. When the facts are revealed, Vincentio's anger is not directed at his son's secret marriage, but at Tranio's abuse of him. Lucentio's marrying Bianca without consulting his father is disregarded, while Bianca's father makes a fuss about paternal sanction:

*Luc.* Love wrought these miracles. Bianca's love  
Made me exchange my state with Tranio,  
...  
What Tranio did, myself enforc'd him to;  
Then pardon him, sweet father, for my sake.  
*Vin.* I'll slit the villain's nose, that would have sent  
me to the jail.

*Bap.* But do you hear, sir? Have you married my  
daughter without asking my good will?  
(V.i.124-34)

Baptista says that 'by report [he] know[s] [Vincentio] well' (II.i.104-5), and Vincentio may have heard about Baptista and his daughters, too. At least he has already learned from Petruchio that his son has married a woman 'so qualified as may beseem / The spouse of any noble gentleman' (IV.v.66-7). This might explain why he accepts the marriage as an accomplished fact without blaming his son, but Baptista's disturbance and Vincentio's indifference concerning the parental sanction is still too conspicuous to be dismissed by such an explanation. When the two fathers have left the stage, Lucentio is no longer worried about his father, and his words of comfort, 'Look not pale, Bianca, thy father will not frown' (V.i.137-8), concludes the entire incident as the conflict between father and daughter.

Daughters' disobedience is a theme of comedy, though it can sometimes be tragic, as in *King Lear*. A son's disobedience to his father, on the other hand, is almost always tragic. Barbara Freedman says that traditional Western theatre repeats two kinds of drama: *Oedipus* (tragic) and *The Taming of the Shrew* (comic).

If we compare the complementary narratives of *Oedipus* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, we have the tragedy of the man who discovers his sexuality and the comedy of a woman who learns to disavow her own in submission to a repressive patriarchal law. One scenario identifies civilization with male payment for his own sexuality, the other identifies civilization with male control over disordered female sexuality. Both not only record but promulgate the values of a repressive patriarchal culture.<sup>(23)</sup>

The tragedy of *Oedipus* is tragic because it destroys civilisation/language itself by violating the very taboo that for Lévi-Strauss, Freud, and others is the necessary condition for civilisation to emerge. Female disorder is containable by contrast, so long as it is conceived as Other to civilisation/language. It may turn up from time

to time resisting repression, but ultimately it is to be oppressed again after its temporary subversion.<sup>(24)</sup> Something similar is working behind the (re-)shaping of the conflict between two generations as that between father and daughter. In a heterosexist and/or homosocial patriarchy where men make relationships with each other through the media of objectified women, the contamination of the object (though it is certainly a threat) is less culpable than the contamination of the subject. The son's disobedience is a far greater threat to the patriarchal order than the daughter's. This is why the potential confrontation between Vincentio and Lucentio is displaced by the comedy of mistaken identity, where the father's anger can be safely discharged against a social inferior (Tranio).

### The Ominous Bianca

The deflected conflict between Vincentio and Lucentio is relocated on Baptista and Bianca, and it is then resolved by no one but Vincentio himself. He is indeed the *deus ex machina* in the sub-plot. Not only is patriarchal anxiety removed, but a patriarchal power can show itself through benevolent intervention as in the case of Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. But the play does not end there. Having represented the generational conflict as that between father and daughter, it now plays out the logical inconsistency that follows the triumph of the young lovers. Logically, the triumph of young lovers at the end of a comedy should testify no more, and no less, to their steadfastness: both the hero and the heroine are unfailing in their love. However, the culture of Renaissance England seems to have been obsessed with an opposite fear, a fear that Iago ruthlessly triggers off in *Othello*: If '[s]he did deceive her father, marrying you' (*Oth.*, III.iii.206), how can you say that she will not betray you? A woman's constancy in love ironically gives proof to her *inconstancy*.

Matrimony is where comedy ends and tragedy begins. Shakespearean comedy typically ends with the anticipation of a marriage ceremony, foreclosing the tragic implicature. And yet, it is never free from problematic overtones, as is seen, for instance, in the

ring episode of *The Merchant of Venice*. Still, it is unique to the romantic sub-plot of *The Taming of the Shrew* that it develops this tragic possibility to its logical conclusion. Earlier in the play, Bianca is totally dutiful to her father. Even after her secret marriage with Lucentio, she is so concerned about the consequence of her disobedience that Lucentio has to reassure her. However, once this marriage is socially sanctioned, the woman who has betrayed her father becomes inauspicious. When the banquet of denouement starts at Lucentio's house, Bianca remains strangely quiet though she is supposed to be the hostess. And when she does speak unexpectedly, it is a bawdy jibe at Gremio:

*Gre.* Believe me, sir, they butt together well.

*Bian.* Head and butt! an hasty-witted body

Would say your head and butt were head and  
horn. (V.ii.38-40)

Why Gremio should be chosen as victim of this witticism is not clear, but it may be that Bianca 'is equating Gremio, who has lost her to another, with a wronged husband'.<sup>(25)</sup> As she has rejected Gremio, so she can now make a cuckolded husband if she chooses to. She knows how threatening her own sexuality can be. This speech is an inside-out version of Hortensio's description of Bianca as prostitute. She now uses the bird imagery to her advantage: 'Am I your bird? I mean to shift my bush, / And then pursue me as you draw your bow' (46-7). She is not a passive object waiting to be shot, or rather, as the obscene puns imply, her 'bush' is not just waiting to be penetrated by Petruchio's 'bow'. And finally, the woman who used to 'know [her] duty to [her] elders' (II.i.7), problematises precisely her 'duty' to her husband: 'The more fool you for laying on my duty' (V.ii.129). Her sense of duty is now nothing to be relied upon.

### Conclusion

We can now propose an answer to the question with which we have started. Katherina and Bianca are not opposed to each other. A Katherina may be tamed into a Bianca, and a Bianca may turn out to be a Katherina.<sup>(26)</sup>



The taming plot of Katherina and the Bianca plot function as supplementary to each other. While the taming of Katherina, authorised at the end by her own submissive speech, rehearses the official doctrine that woman should be subjugated to man, the Bianca plot exposes the culture's deeper fear and fantasy that all women are, after all, shrewish. This misogynist fantasy legitimates the necessity of the masculine control over femaleness. Since all women are frail by nature, men must keep them straight. However, it is precisely the cultural polarisation of women that generates the possibility that those classified as chaste may in fact be whores. By producing an imaginary 'before' when all women are frail, patriarchal control is necessitated, made something inevitable. To use a Lacanian distinction, the taming of a woman is not the *goal* of this fantasy, but its *aim*.<sup>27</sup>

The complementary narratives of Katherina and Bianca thus stage the cultural production/naturalisation of two kinds of femininity. In one narrative, gender hierarchy is rationalised by the invocation of a female body, while the other narrative legitimates patriarchal control of femininity. The title of the play bridges the two plots. While it clearly refers to the main plot of Katherina's subjection, the word *taming* precisely locates female rebellion in a prior natural/naturalised world that needs to be controlled by culture. Is *The Taming of the Shrew*, then, an anti-feminist, male-chauvinist text?

Perhaps it is. But it also betrays its own vulnerability. So long as the taming of a woman is a spiral movement that repeats itself endlessly, it may fail to repeat at any moment. The play also reveals, in its effort to endorse the socially-maintained naturalising discourse, that gender is merely performatively produced. Here, I think, is a possibility of a subversive production of *The Taming of the Shrew* on the modern stage.

#### Notes

- (1) Ann Thompson, in Introduction to her edition of *The Taming of the Shrew* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984), 25.
- (2) Robert B. Heilman, in Introduction to his edition of *The Taming of the Shrew* (1966. New York: New American Library, 1987), xxxii and xxxv.
- (3) John C. Bean, 'Comic Structure and the Humanizing of Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*' in Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely, ed., *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (1980. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1983), 65–78; 66.
- (4) See, for example, Coppélia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1981), 104–18; and Marianne Novy, *Love's Argument: Gender Relations in Shakespeare* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984), 45–62.
- (5) Richard A. Burt, 'Charisma, Coercion, and Comic Form in *The Taming of the Shrew*' in *Criticism* 26 (1984): 295–311. Rpt. in Harold Bloom, ed., *William Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew* (Modern Critical Interpretations. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), 79 – 92; 89 and 90.
- (6) Barbara Freedman, *Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis, and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), 114–53; Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991), 33–50; and Maureen Quilligan, 'Staging the Gender: William Shakespeare and Elizabeth Cary' in James Grantham Turner, ed., *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, Images* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 208–32.
- (7) Cecil C. Seronsy, "'Supposes" as the Unifying Theme in *The Taming of the Shrew*' in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 14 (1963): 15–30, is unique in its emphasis on the sub-plot.
- (8) All references to Shakespeare's works are to G. Blakemore Evans, ed., *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974). Hereafter cited in the text.
- (9) Freedman observes that 'Shakespearean comedy typically deflects class problems onto the

- instance of the rebellious female whose punishment and correction constitute the narrative action' (*Staging the Gaze*, 134). See also Lynda E. Boose's sensitive historicisation of this point in 'The Taming of the Shrew, Good Husbandry, and Enclosure' in Russ McDonald, ed., *Shakespeare Reread: The Texts in New Contexts* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994), 193–225.
- (10) In the parallel play, *The Taming of a Shrew*, it is not a hostess but a tapster who beats out Sly/Slie. See Graham Holderness and Bryan Loughrey, ed., *A Pleasant Conceited Historie, Called The Taming of a Shrew* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 43. The relation of the two texts is a question which I want to keep beyond the scope of this present essay.
- (11) To cart someone was of course a punishment prescribed to prostitutes. But it was also a punishment for bawds. Here is a possibility that links Katherina with the Hostess in the Induction: both represent woman proprietors, feminine independence that threatens masculine authority. There may also be a connection between the Hostess's threat to Sly of 'A pair of stocks' (Ind.i.2) and Katherina's treatment of Hortensio/Litio: 'And there I stood amazed for a while, / As on a pillory, looking through the lute' (II.i.155–6).
- (12) Peter Stallybrass, 'Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed', in Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers, ed., *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986), 123–42; 131.
- (13) See, for example, Ruth Nevo, *Comic Transformations in Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1980), 37–68; esp. 39–41.
- (14) Irene Dash, *Wooing, Wedding, and Power: Women in Shakespeare's Plays* (New York: Columbia UP, 1981), 43.
- (15) Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 136; Butler's italics. See also her 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination' in Diana Fuss, ed., *Inside / Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 13–31.
- (16) This is not to say that Katherina is a lesbian. For the problem of 'lesbian' as a category, see Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', 13–7. Female homoeroticism is further problematic in a Renaissance text, since little study has yet been made, in contrast to the numerous attempts that have been made over the past decade on male homoeroticism in early modern England. But see Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London: Routledge, 1992), esp. 91–116.
- (17) See Newman, *Fashioning Femininity*, 39–43.
- (18) Quilligan, 'Staging the Gender', 222.
- (19) Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 145; Butler's italics.
- (20) For a love triangle and male homosocial desire, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985). See also Gayle Rubin's influential essay, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes Toward a Political Economy of Sex' in Rayna Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157–210.
- (21) Convents were often thought by Renaissance writers to be a hotbed of illicit sex. Conversely, many brothels in Renaissance Italy were organised much like a convent. See Guido Ruggiero, 'Marriage, Love, Sex, and the Renaissance Civic Morality' in Turner, ed., *Sexuality and Gender*, 10–30; esp. 14 and 21.
- (22) See C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedies: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (1959. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972); and Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (New York: Columbia UP, 1965).
- (23) Freedman, *Staging the Gaze*, 139.
- (24) Cf. Butler's critique of the Kristevan 'semiotic' in *Gender Trouble*, 79–93. Katherina's speech, 'I will be free, / Even to the

uttermost, as I please, in words' (IV.iii.79–80), might be taken as locating her rebellion in the semiotic, which, under the linguistic control of Petruchio, is possible only temporarily.

- (25) H. J. Oliver, in a note to his edition of *The Taming of the Shrew* (1982. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994), 223.
- (26) In John Fletcher's sequel to *The Taming of the Shrew* appears another Byancha, who is the instigator of women's revolt. See John Fletcher, *The Woman's Prize, or The Tamer Tamed*, in Fredson Bowers, ed., *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, Volume IV (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979), 1–148.
- (27) Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Alan Sheridan. 1977. New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), 179; and Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 5. In *The Taming of a Shrew*, Slie returns at the end of the play and says: 'I know now how to tame a shrew,...lle to my/ Wife presently and tame her too' (Holderness and Loughrey, ed., *A Shrew*, 89).