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**THE WOMAN QUESTION IN WILLIAM  
SHAKESPEARE'S THE TAMING OF THE  
SHREW**

**BA thesis**

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## ABSTRACT

To this day, female objectification is noticeable in many areas of one's life. The act of men overpowering women cannot be considered a thing of the past, as it still creates chaos in a woman's life. In spite of the challenges they face, women of today are unsupportive of each other. In order to combat the toxic standards that women are expected to abide by, they ought to work together and tackle these issues with a united front. Main purpose of this thesis is to analyse and provide factual background information about female objectification and toxic masculinity that took place within the patriarchal society during the latter half of the Renaissance – the 16-17<sup>th</sup> century.

This thesis expounds on the woman question in *The Taming of the Shrew*, since to this day it begs the question: why are many women objectified for simply being a woman? Why are they told to behave in a certain way in numerous cultures? Therefore, the play by William Shakespeare aids to unravel the misogynistic views that men held towards women at the time. Women in the Renaissance period were oppressed by male opinion, as they were told to behave, look, and think in a way that correlated with their religious morals. Personal freedom as such did not exist in that time, as women were handed over from one male to another as mere objects, which is an issue that still exists in various cultures today. The writer of this thesis uses background knowledge to provide some context for the in-depth analysis of the play. The layout of this thesis is as follows: there is an introduction where the main argument and purpose are provided, the first core chapter is a literature review, which consists of general information about female oppression and second chapter is about the empirical part of the discussion: analyses of *The Taming of the Shrew* and how the main characters contribute to female suffering. Specifically, the empirical part observes the first encounter between the two protagonists Petruchio and Katherina, and the final scene where Katherina shows numerous acts of obedience as well as the final speech. In the analysis a few external sources are used to decipher some of the Shakespearean terms that are unknown to the general reader. The final part is the conclusion, where the author concludes everything that the analysis provided. The main idea, that the females being suffocated by male authority, will be proven based on the background information provided in the first chapter and from the primary source William Shakespeare's play *The Taming of the Shrew*.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis based on William Shakespeare's infamous play *The Taming of the Shrew* will examine the objectification of a woman in the Renaissance era. The purpose for writing this thesis is to both analyse and portray the female vulnerability in the Renaissance era, where men held a strong importance over their daughters and wives. However, the suffocation of female freedom has been a major issue in today's world as well as in the past hence the author of this thesis would like to prove an argument by observing the 16-17<sup>th</sup> century male power infused society in general as well as in Shakespeare's infamous play the *Taming of the Shrew* which has been the focus point for many other feminist works.

The main argument of this thesis is that a female had no voice and was perceived as commodity by her family as well as society. This work uses various methods to support the main argument; review of in-depth background information on how the society viewed the female position in a patriarchal society, through analysing two main scenes of the play, and an analysis of certain characters. The play provides numerous instances of a superior gender degrading the inferior, that being the female. Thus, the thesis will begin with presenting the stereotypes of what women had to obey. Then the maternal parent's importance in one's life will be examined in order to support the idea of female objectification and silencing. The third aspect observed will be marriage, to exemplify misogynistic social rules about women and their position as a wife. Following from that, the thesis will analyse the two chosen significant scenes that provide a number of examples where through the male roles in the female protagonist's life female silencing and objectification takes place. Based on the analysis of the *Taming of The Shrew* and the other relevant literary sources, this thesis will prove that women have in numerous occasions been oppressed by male supremacy, and to have a voice meant putting their life in jeopardy.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The present author will argue that from an early age, women were to behave and express themselves in a certain manner that would please everyone around her. For decades females were objectified for their looks and manners, that is still valid to this day. To be a female in the Renaissance male-power-infused society required a woman to be submissive, obedient. There was strong emphasis on chastity and being in a lower position than men (Burke 2000: 118) (Simms 2016: 18; Credit 1992: 12). A set of rules were written by men during the Renaissance era, known as treatises, which consisted of written rules on how a dutiful female should behave, in general, as well as in the presence of a male companion (Credit 1992: 1). Treatises were written by males within society, who saw it as their duty to teach women to behave according to religious views. This kind of power hunger led them to control their prospective future wives (Calvo 1991: 1) (Simms 2016: 18). The present author believes that an invention that these treatises indicate a man's plan to reduce female freedom.

In most cases females were even restricted in areas that would give them any kind of freedom; for instance, in their appearance or how they should raise their children. Acting the opposite to what they ought to would cause harm to their reputation and eliminate the possibility of securing a prospective husband. Credit (1992: 1) indicates that a woman's main goal was obedience and modesty. As they were mainly considered as the weaker gender, hence they should behave accordingly. Additionally, the same author (1992: 2) has also stated that a young woman was perceived a fortune to her family and to the husband as well, for she could bring monetary value and strong connections to both sides.

History tends to show that women have generally been the object of taming; an act which at times became uncontrollably vile. The female silencing has been a major issue and one that the present writer would like to exemplify with one of the most gruesome acts of inhumanity done to women. The article *Horses and Women in The Taming of the Shrew*

provides an illustration from Llewellynn Jewitt's (1866) essay about the female dehumanisation. In case of wanting to silence one's wife one could force them to wear a bridle. It was an instrument to cut off the woman's tongue if she dared open her mouth; hence, it prevented her from having a voice. The cause for this cruel invention was to tame women from rebelling against men (Hartwig 1982: 289-291). Justifications for these actions were as ludicrous as the taming method; woman who dares to have a voice of her own meets with a fate of being a victim of violence and degradation (1982:291). The bridle wearers were openly walked through the town for other women to witness their humiliation. This, the author of this thesis believes was to prevent women from any future rebellion. Another woman witnessing the taming method would become silent and eventually too frightened to raise her voice to her husband. Thus, men succeeded in sealing their wives' mouths from opposing against the superior gender again.

The church played a significant role in society as it was the major deciding factor for female behavior and social order (Throne 2003: 56). Certain severe treatments of women were mainly justified by stating the church supports the idea of treating females in a manner that would be considered dehumanizing in this age (ibid). Yet, the society in which they lived supported male power, hence the female was left to either abide by the patriarchal rules or be treated according to it (Throne 2003: 53).

In many cultures to this day as well as in the past the common position for a male was the head of the house, hence the husband immediately became the protector of the weaker gender, the woman. The Renaissance society was eminently supportive of male dominance because of the Church; thus, females had to behave and portray themselves according to the given rules. In the 16-17<sup>th</sup> century women had it tough, as a role of the upmost importance for a husband is to have control over their wife (Calvo 1991) (Simms 2016: 18). The mannerisms that females had to follow were associated with how they were perceived by the church. The

only two personas for a woman to be were Eve or the Virgin Mary; the latter being praised the most (Credit 1992: 2). Eve is the sinner and worshipping the mother of Jesus (Thorne 2003: 53). By creating two complete opposites the Church played an important role in creating the image of the society. The present writer suggests that people during those ages were quite familiar with the story of Eve being tempted to lead a sinful life, hence they were quick to judge females and to not trust them. A persona the woman should never be was Eve, as she carries danger around (Credit 1992: 4). If left alone, a 'vulnerable' woman would be tempted to lead a sinful life just as her forerunner Eve, thus she needs a solid man to become as great as the Virgin Mary (Credit 1992: 4). The present author believes that the concept of being a strong independent woman was not even acknowledged, thus excluding that thought, the ones who rebelled against rules were feared and regarded as corrupted by temptation. On the other hand, the ideal role model for a woman was the Virgin Mary with all her faultlessness. Primarily, being God-fearing, submissive and trusting of one's husband, and a loving mother figure were all the essential ideal female qualities that Mary had (Russell 1990: 75) (Credit 1992: 3). Credit (1992) also emphasises the physical importance; being solely appealing to their husband was another way of fitting into the Virgin Mary ideal. Overall, the church regarded Eve as doomed and Virgin Mary as the ideal role model for every woman to strive for, as she was known to be the most pure and obedient creature to walk the earth. Credit (1992) also emphasises that the ideal women along with other qualities had to be sensible, never succumbing to their own emotions. Either way a woman was ultimately inferior to a man, be it as the sinner Eve or the female role model Virgin Mary, there was no escape from male dominance.

### **1.1. Parenthood**

The position of a father was the head of the family; the reason being self-explanatory as the society was mostly powered by male authority (Young 2009: 28). Being a father in the

Renaissance era held a strong importance as this was the head of the household. The utmost goal for the patriarchs then was to protect and ultimately provide for the best for their children (Young 2009: 30). The present writer suggests it resulted in them leading and carrying the ultimate power by ruling their daughter's or wife's life.

Karaman (2015: 39) states that a world in which the majority saw females as the weaker gender is mostly known as patriarchal society; additionally, by objectifying the female, oedipal or masculine subjectivity could be established within the society. Rose (1991: 293) states that during the renaissance era a married woman was practically owned by her husband and had no legal rights. Furthermore, being non-existent and having no legal rights over the guardianship of one's children went hand in hand with being a mother in the Renaissance era

There is an intriguing approach by Keith Thomas (1959: 195-216) suggesting a possibility as to why males should feel the need to overpower females. As a result of intercourse, the woman is the sole person to bear a child not the man; hence, men feel incomplete, because of being unable to create or carry another human life. The initial male response to that would be feeling of inferiority, thus this emotion directed at child-bearing could be the start of male-dominated society. Hence, men take the ultimate power of being a mother from women and claim themselves as the mother (Rose 1991: 299).

As regards the maternal figure, Rose (1991: 301) provides an insight into how mothers were perceived. At times they were considered a threat to their own children, solely by virtue showing excessive affection. Hence, the right approach would be lack of affection and a restricted relationship between the mother and child. In a 'perfect' world, a motherless adulthood is the height of reaching the peak in one's life, as emotional bond can make a person weaker and dependent on maternal figure. The author Rose also remarks about idea of the child being given excessive love by the mother, which may result in the person becoming obsessed and dependant on his/her mother. Thus, in the case of wanting to raise an independent child

who can be successful on their own, the mother must sacrifice her love for the greater cause (Rose 1991: 301).

Moreover, on the matter of parenthood, William Gouge, states that even in case of both mother and father becoming one person, they should always be referred as parent rather than their own individual titles, resulting in harmony. By being the parent, they should have the same authority over the child. Nonetheless, the wife was always one step below her husband, known as his subject (Rose 1991: 308).

## **1.2. Marriage**

Next step right after being a modest daughter was to be an obedient wife (Credit 1992: 9). To become someone's wife was considered to be something that every woman should be able to achieve in their life, whereas for men it added to their masculinity and reputation (Simms 2016: 1). Credit (1992) emphasises the role of women being that they had no other mission in their life apart from being a commodity to their husband and household. Females were from an early age prepared for marriage; for how to be a mother, and a wife to a husband, which also proves the author of this thesis' main argument. Moreover, an intriguing aspect is that at an early age the young girl's worthiness for future marriage was solely decided on her looks. If the girl was unattractive she would finish in a convent (Klapisch-Zuber 1985: 109) (Credit 1992: 9). Thus, physical appearance held a strong position in a young girl's life, as she had to look most appealing for future suitors. This is yet another case of objectification, where the female had no power over herself, as her family decided for her future (Klapisch-Zuber 1985: 123) (Credit 1992: 10).

In *Women During the Italian Renaissance: stereotypes vs. realities* (1992) Leslie K. Credit talks about the set of physical rules women had to obey. In order to look pleasing for the opposite sex they ought to follow certain beauty standards. Physical appearance held a strong

importance in a woman's life, along with chastity and faith. It was to be taken seriously as beauty was as crucial as any other factor in becoming the ideal woman. One of the prime examples is that the ideal women's hair colour in the Renaissance was golden, hence many hours in the sun or cremes may have helped to achieve that look or simply getting a blonde wig (Dubreton 1961: 224-225) (Credit 1992: 14-15). To add to the absurdity of stereotypes women had to fit: a woman's white of the eye should be slightly bluish. In today's world it would have not been that great of an issue, as we have coloured contact lenses, though back then then many of the women could have ended up in the convent just because of their wrong eye colour. Additionally, women had to go that far as to change the shape of their noses and somehow have a dimple, if they initially did not have one (Dubreton 1961: 224-225) (Credit 1992: 14). The present writer believes that females were under pressure to fit into the ideal that was only managed with the help of make up or miracle while staying "natural". Yet in the case of not fitting into the criteria a woman would be deemed unattractive, thus ending without a companion, which led to her being either taken to a convent or left alone.

Young (2009: 28) in his book talks about marriage in general, considering how the only allowed marital form was being monogamous. Notably during the Renaissance, marriage with close relatives was illicit. In case of an incestuous marriage, the connections would be limited to a certain smaller group of people; however, when marrying someone outside of one's own family line, a greater social connection would develop, providing better ties within society (Young 2009: 40). Hence, especially the daughter held a strong importance in a family as they were the helping factor to achieve an exceptional lineage (Young 2009: 74). The present writer of this thesis suggests that this is another aspect that supports the females being viewed as the commodity and the family claiming them as their own.

Simms (2016: 7) talks about various types of marriages; one being the arranged, the second companionate marriage. Companionate marriage when compared to the arranged

marriage was viewed rather ominously. It was thought to be a doomed marriage, for the woman acted upon their physical needs and choose their own dowry owner. As in the companionate marriage a dowry was equivalent to one's virginity, hence it being the most personal property of a woman. Whereas an arranged marriage was rationally settled between the newlyweds, and their families, therefore being the favourable one (Stone 1979: 128) (Simms 2016: 7). The father will choose an appropriate groom for his daughter, thereafter, turning to, the dowry. After settling on a decent dowry both the man and woman can begin their courtship, and subsequently the matrimony can take place. Simms (2016: 7) talks about the companionate marriage being the epitome of one's ideal marriage, as they could choose the owner of their personal dowry, hymen. The writer of this thesis emphasises the matter that as it opposes the social norms as well as the religious point of views, companionate marriage encourages leading a sinful life before betrothal. To have a prosperous future one had to agree to being arranged into a marriage and thus securing a better future. The ability to control one's own dowry inevitably causes some women to choose companionate marriage over arranged marriage. This type of marriage can be seen as a way of liberation from male dominance, allowing women to have a voice of their own. The woman not wanting to entrust her personal dowry to men, they ensured their own future groom.

## 2. THE ANALYSIS OF THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

*The Taming of the Shrew* circles around the main idea of female objectification as well as silencing women through various obedience or taming methods. The play has two main protagonists; the shrew known as Katherina and the tamer of the wild cat Petruchio, who end up in an arranged marriage. The female protagonist is rather wild in her behaviour whereas her younger sister Bianca, is known for her obedience, silence and modesty, and ends up being in a companionate marriage. In contrast to her sister, Katherina is shrewish, witty and violent; unattractive from the standpoint of suitors and society. Hence unfortunately, no man in Padua wishes to marry the elder sister, as they are preoccupied with Bianca, who is the ideal prospective wife. To briefly summarise the main plot of the play: Baptista the father of the female protagonists is desperate to marry off his eldest daughter, then like a miracle he is approached by Petruchio who wishes to marry Katherina the shrew. Therefore, Baptista gives Katherina to a man they barely know to save her reputation as being known as the spinster. Thus, the first suitor gained access to tame the shrew. From that point onwards, Katherina's taming process continues until the end where she portrays the epitome of an obedient wife.

### 2.1. Play's character analysis

The entire play is written in satire which helps to call attention to important issues within the social order, such as the severe treatment of or demeaning approach to women (Thorne 2003: 54). In the present author's opinion when observing both sisters, the first eminent difference between the two is that Bianca uses her false demeanour as a tool to acquire her powerful position within society. Every other male in Bianca's life sees her as the epitome of a virtuous woman, whereas Katherina, on the other hand, is seen as the sinner. In the play it is impossible to not notice that both sisters are compared to each other, be it by their own father or any other person in that society (Gündüz 2018: 838). The author of the thesis compares two

sisters to the female personas from the religious point of view – Eve and the Virgin Mary. During the 16-17<sup>th</sup> century, there was a stereotypical idea that women had to adopt, namely being modest, chaste, mild and most important of all submissive (2018: 838). The present writer suggests that the society in Shakespeare's play is blind to Katherina's incredible cleverness in turning men into not wanting to meddle with her; which makes her modest in her own manner. She chooses to protect herself with the shrewish wild cat mask to not get any more damaged. Yet, this is another way of understanding the emotional destruction male have cause women, be it by their inhumane remarks or abusive behaviour. Observing the behavioural pattern of Katherina there is a possibility for her to be more modest and virginal than, for instance, her sister Bianca. Nonetheless, the society perceives Katherina as the evil one, as they are blinded by Bianca's exceptional beauty and mildness. This demonstrates the point that either way the female is a victim of toxic masculinity. Katherina's roughness is a great mechanism for not meddling with the opposite gender, which is the ideal way of how a female should behave to be virtuous in that age. On the other hand, Bianca is objectified for being the perfect woman to have as a wife and to own.

Baptista's favouritism of his youngest daughter Bianca makes Katherina unavoidably jealous for her father's affection. Thus, to get any form of attention she chooses to behave recklessly and in a negative way. Moreover, the play does not provide any background information about Katherina's mother nor the deeper cause for her negative attitude. The present author suggests the reason for her shrewish behaviour is the result of her father's lack of attention. Yet, Sherri Thorne suggests another factor missing motherhood in addition to society degrading Katherina might be the cause of her shrewish behaviour as well (Thorne 2003: 58). The author of this thesis agrees with latter statement. A maternal bond with the child is needed as much as the paternal one, as they coexist to create harmony, or else the child would lack a specific kind of affection.

The male power infused society creates a realm in which the female is silenced, and the only authority can be in a father or a husband. To support the idea Hatice Karaman (2015: 45) gives a strong emphasis stating that “It is the patriarchal culture which has suffocated mothers and women in general”. This is a culture that creates its own authority to silence the woman’s voice in either raising her child or contributing as a mother. The relationship between mother-son is absent as much as the mother- daughter one; however, by the dramatization of having no mother the play can emanate a better heroin character. Creating the female character as vulnerable and lacking mother’s affection can appear as truly heroic. Karaman (2015: 45) yet again notes that the underlying reason for Katherina’s negative attitude indicates a loss or a possibility of a silenced mother. As the shrewish temper grows wilder, there is no mother to provide emotional safety for her. Also, the fact of no mention of a maternal figure within the play suggest the idea of Katherina never receiving any form of parental affection. The cause of Katherina’s temper hence justified (Thorne 2003: 58). Hatice Karaman (2015: 46) indicates that the patriarchal society saw females as the weaker gender. Hence, being a danger to the child’s growth mothers were eliminated either silencing, having no freedom or in extreme cases death during or after labour. When observing the play *Taming of the Shrew* one can notice a missing maternal figure, which results in Bianca being manipulative toward her father by falsely impersonating a modest mild girl to get what she desires. On the other hand, due to lack of motherly care Katherina seeks love from Baptista who does not respond with the same, as he thinks somewhat ill of his daughter for she is not as admirable as Bianca. Thus, Katherina could feel invisible and did not consider it likely that someone might ever develop strong emotions for her, for instance Petruchio. The most questionable matter is whether Baptista loves both his daughters equally or if he favours the youngest one over the eldest. That can be explained through him marrying off the eldest, whilst being fully aware of Katherina’s reputation.

The present author suggests that in the patriarchal society a woman was never to be alone, they had to be owned by someone, thus they were married off to a wealthy man or anyone else who showed any kind of interest in one's daughter. The objectification of women in the examined play appears in terms of Baptista selling his daughters to the man who seemingly is the richest, either to provide himself great wealthy connections or a prosperous future for both Katherina and Bianca. Indeed, the main goal as a father in that society was to grant protection to one's child's end to ensure their wellbeing, therefore Baptista avoided any discrimination when it came to wedding off his daughters. Yet, he married Katherina off lightly without doing any proper background check on the first suitor who agreed to wed the "crazy" one. Baptista knew that the eldest had to be wed first, hence the younger favourite child can get the opportunity to be married afterwards. The issue is solved by two impatient suitors of Bianca who yet again do not approve of Baptista's way of handling the situation, hence Katherina is sold to the highest and the only bidder (Simms 2016: 26). This leaves no doubt as to the unfairness of the situation, as the events led to Katherina being wed to the most demanding and self-proclaimed tamer. Moreover, for equality both sisters should get married; however, considering her daughter's reputation among men Baptista took the risk even though he knew what he ought to do for his children. Hence, the first suitor for Katherina seemed as the heaven's gift from above to resolve the issue. Although one cannot miss the objectification of females in this case as well, Katherina being given to another man (implication of a female being a mere item to hand over to the buyer). The idea that a female could stay as a daughter or a single woman was against the social rules, as it was believed that if left alone women can become dangerous, hence they needed male guidance. By arranging Katherina's marriage Baptista did his duty as a father in a patriarchal society, one cannot blame nor agree with him, as it was the social order.

Prior to marriage as well as afterwards as a married man, Petruchio chooses to use somewhat harsh taming methods on Katherina to achieve his full supremacy over her, although it never results in physical abuse. Within the play portraying women as animals or objects is common. In the following scene Petruchio reveals his misogynistic thoughts after being legally married to Katherina (4.1.188-194). Petruchio portrays the ultimate toxic masculinity by stating that women are like wild birds who ought to be trained/tamed. Right after achieving his goal to wed Katherina, Petruchio feels triumphant and declares his starting reign over the shrew, as his plan is to completely tame her. Katherina will be trained to behave according to Petruchio's personal needs; she will be tamed until she entirely succumbs to him in obedience. He admits he is a falconer, a tamer who will make his wife obey him at all cost. This attitude emphasises the severe treatment of women, as mere animals who cannot be without the guidance of a male in their life. This supports as well as illustrates the reality of a female never achieving any personal liberty and being dehumanised by the male superior (Thorne 2003: 56).

## **2.2. Petruchio's Taming of Katherina**

When observing the taming process of Katherina one can say that Petruchio's taming method is not as severe as, for instance, compared to those men who forced women to wear a bridle. Petruchio's behaviour can be explained as he struggles to be both loving and controlling in a way the society required him to be. Yet, at the same time he tries to have a fairer approach to Katherina, as he knows Katherina has many layers to reveal. Hence while taming her, he challenges her to bring forth her real self and to trust him. Yet, Petruchio desires full authority over her, and those who are familiar with the play cannot miss the objectifying terms he chose to exemplify the situation while demeaning her. Moreover, Petruchio is both a modern and a narrow-minded misogynistic character. Although his power hunger does make him at times

unbearably rude and intimidating, the controlling side of Petruchio comes out once when Katherina responds the same way to his informality. On the other hand, his openness manifests when he notices Katherina's vulnerability.

One of the most prominent and memorable scenes in the *Taming of the Shrew* is of Katherina's first encounter with Petruchio, in which sensitive as well as many witty words are exchanged. Their witty jousting indicates how they are both intelligent and sexually competitive. However, a notion of sexual innuendo can be sensed when reading behind the written words. Prior to meeting Katherina, Petruchio decides on a cunning plan in his head, that is 'the taming plan of Katherina' (2.1.76-189). The author of this thesis suggests that Petruchio's ingenious plan for taming Katherina includes using reverse psychology in order to control the shrew. Petruchio intends to approach her in a special manner that Katherina has never encountered before to tame her – a manipulation scheme. With his ingenious plan of being gentler and kinder, in contrast to society and family, he hopes to ensure a spot in the wild cat's heart. Every step and word by Petruchio is precisely planned beforehand. The present writer notes that the beginning of Petruchio's taming plan requires both being charming and utterly brazen; however, he tries to manipulate Katherina into thinking that she can trust him. His plan also consists of him replacing every negative aspect of her with a positive emotion. Petruchio plans to play the missing role in her life, that being the caring person, however, one cannot overlook the sincerity in his plan to tame as well as wed her in the end. This indicates his desire to capture her fully, both her vulnerability as well as the shrewish side. In the witty wordplay Petruchio provokingly aims to overcome Katherina's shrewish mask to get to her actual self, as he realises that there is much more to her than what she portrays (Thorne 2003:60). Petruchio knows that under Katherina's shrewish mask there is a woman of his dreams (ibid).

Their courting begins with Petruchio greeting her with a simple “Kate” (2.1.190). Petruchio decides to create a relaxed environment for her by casually giving her a nickname. However, this can have other meanings as well, as using a short form of one’s name in the very first encounter can equally show disrespect. Supporting source Sherri Thorne (2003: 61) provides information about the hidden meaning behind to Petruchio using just a nickname. Here the source suggests that Petruchio greeting her with Kate may indicate the possibility of him belittling or creating a sex object out of her. This is because the most prominent meaning for Kate stands for a bird (finch), cat, and a prostitute (ibid). To gain immediate control of their first encounter, Petruchio uses excessive friendliness. The connotations being significantly objectifying toward women, Petruchio chooses to show Katherina his superiority through the nickname. The present writer suggests that Petruchio’s idea is to break the barrier in the beginning, so their courting could end in both trusting each other. Also, one cannot miss Petruchio’s wish to create a loving ambiance by calling her Kate; he tries to emit a friendly side to him. Moreover, the lovers use the term ‘finch’ for showing affection (Thorne 2003: 61). Additionally, one who is called as ‘Kate’ is known to behave as a cat, hence the female objectification through animal connotation or as slander through the suggestion of being prostitutes (Thorne 2003: 61). Overall, the use of Kate during the first encounter illustrates sexism and oppression; by belittling her Petruchio displays supremacy over Katherina.

The present writer notes that Petruchio decides to further manipulate Katherina, hence changes the tactic by using reverse psychology on her, now referring to her as magical and charming, appealing to her with wooing that she has never witnessed before. One specific wording did strike as odd because it evidently objectifies Katherina as mere food, “my super-dainty Kate” (2.1.196). In Petruchio’s understanding Katherina would be another delicacy to savour, nobody special by any means. Yet another strikingly misogynistic way of referring to women. The need for Petruchio to capture Katherina could imply that for him she is unique in

her rather peculiar manner. The tamer's provocative expressions suggest that he is genuinely engrossed in her uniqueness. Either way the need to capture her is another form of objectification.

The primary sources for my analysis both from Thorne (2003) and Simms (2016) support and provide a great amount of understanding about the meaning behind some of the specific terms. Here the present author suggests that sexual connotations were used to provoke the game for Petruchio's own benefit, to show his masculinity. Katherina responds to the slander and dominance by calling him a furniture to sit on – an objectifying term to make a mockery out of him (2.1.206-208). Petruchio taking the opportunity to play with words tells her to sit on him making an intimate remark to take over the authority (2.1.209). Yet, after Katherina's comment about Petruchio being an 'an ass to bear', he responds with an utterly misogynistic comment about women being the 'bearers' (2.1.211). He indicates that men are always one step above women, as female will always have to 'bear' as 'baby-making factory' or bodies made to physically pleasure men (Simms 2016: 34). Clearly an objectifying remark as to take control of the situation – he produces the toxic masculinity through his choice of wording. As their witty word play continues, however, Petruchio attempts to take full control of the situation by denoting that Katherina is "too angry" as well as calling her a "wasp". The latter meaning woman with a "scolding tongue", referring to her infamous reputation as the curd. In this manner, Petruchio tries to overpower Katherina (2.1.222) (Simms 2016: 35). Katherina emasculates Petruchio by taking a male voice and stating that she is the one to sting. The reference for "sting" in this context is to male genitalia, while Katherina takes over the role of being the man and stinging Petruchio with her "penis", it automatically turns Petruchio's tongue into female genitalia. Although, he will not yield as he claims back the throne by referring to him "plucking" his penis from her genitalia (ibid).

Next (2.1.231-232) Petruchio makes a rather excessive sexual comment about his genitalia: “What, with my tongue in your tail?” The present author suggests a strong sense of sexual innuendo, though Petruchio immediately denies it. Petruchio went too far with flirting and Katherina inevitably felt attacked to say the least. Petruchio knew exactly what he triggered by openly sexually belittling her; he gained full authority through silencing Katherina. Protecting herself as well as her pride, in defence she provokingly tests his honour by using violence against him. Yet, Petruchio did not hit back but warned her that he will not be generous the next time. This indicates the possibility of using violence against her if she rebels again. However, what Katherina did not realise was that Petruchio sought a relationship that is equal in both positions, if she does anything against his will she will be expected to receive the same treatment.

Petruchio is not finished as he seeks to win her heart by comparing her to Dian, the goddess of chastity, and wishing her to be like Dian, chaste (2.1.273-276). The term “sportful” that Petruchio uses to indicate Katherina is known to denote a lustful person. It should be noted that he both praises as well as belittles Katherina while trying to woo her. Petruchio implies her to be not as chaste as Dian. Thus, asking Katherina to change roles with Dian the goddess of chastity. At the end of their courting (2.1.284) he reveals the dowry has been already been arranged, for they are nearly a married couple. However, it changes the whole situation, as from now on he holds the full authority within the relationship. Furthermore, Petruchio says: “will you, nill you, I will marry you,” as she has no other alternative than to marry him even if she does not approve of the idea itself. Thus, he once again silenced Katherina (2.1.286). Moreover, she is bound to him entirely as he does not allow her to be married to anyone else. At the end of the scene he proclaims to tame her from a “wild Kate” to a “Kate Conformable as other household Kates” as he was born to tame her (2.1.291-293). The present writer believes that Petruchio being somewhat delusional takes the lead and already claims her as his wife.

Petruchio does not believe in female freedom and voice, as he intends to make Katherina as mild as his other subjects, as he was “born to tame” her. Given her situation, Katherina feels defeated as she was married off without her consent and could not voice her own opinion. The courtship (2.1.294-295) ends with Baptista entering the room while Petruchio is reminding Katherina that he “must and will” make her his wife. Hence, there is a likelihood of him being infatuated with her hidden charms or that Petruchio sees it as his mission to tame a wild cat, to gain respect as well as reputation among other men.

### **2.2.1. Katherina's Obedience Speech**

At the end of the play, (Act 5. Scene 2) Katherina provides a speech on obedience and submission. Prior to her speech young men decide to test their wives’ obedience. Petruchio, Lucentio and Hortensio decide to show off their masculinity by calling for their wives to see who would obey. Petruchio’s pride is hurt once he hears he has failed to tame Katherina as his father-in-law states that he has the shrewdest wife among them all. Determined to prove him and others of their ignorance Petruchio suggests the obedience test and a winner would be provided with a decent wager (5.2.65- 77). Thus, they all call for their wives and the first to win the obedience test is Katherina, as she is the only wife to submissively respond by dutifully appearing at her husband’s side. To make the situation stingier for the wives, Petruchio orders Katherina to bring the disobedient wives next to their husbands.

In the next part (5.2.135-136) Katherina then rebelled against Petruchio’s second wish for her to remove the cap on her head. The present writer suggests it may be an indication of self-liberating act from Katherine’s standpoint, hence the rebellion against his order. Yet, Katherina rebelling against his order could mean she wants to show Petruchio that she is now an obedient wife. On the other hand, Petruchio ordering Katherina to remove the cap might be a demonstration to other male in the room that he has indeed has tamed the wild cat. Also,

Sherry Thorne (2003: 72) indicates the 'cap' can be interpreted in various ways as either Petruchio is keen on freeing Katherina from him or showing his authority yet again. Another theory is that the cap is a form of paying respect to one's religion during religious ceremonies, so wearing a cap results in respecting one's husband. Obedience to one's Lord and husband goes hand in hand. Hence, the cap is the symbol of being obedient to one's husband (ibid). Furthermore, to cause more humiliation Petruchio authorises Katherina to give a lecture on how women should obey and behave in the presence of their husbands (5.2.144-145). Thus, the third obedience test of Katherina begins with her lecturing women on how to be a faultless wife.

Petruchio giving permission for Katherina to have a voice can be interpreted in two ways: he wants equality in their relationship or he knows this speech was nothing but an act for people to believe he has tamed her. Thus, to display that Katherina can mould herself to be anything the society demands from a young Elizabethan woman, especially being the obedient selfless wife. Primarily, the lecture was directed at disobedient wives who had to be taught for their wrongdoings. Simms (2016: 44) adds that in the final speech Katherina ultimately acquires her freedom through the embodiment of a male figure; gaining authority, she scolds women as well as men for not educating their wives. As a female member of patriarchal society, Katherina could never achieve freedom on her own, nor have a voice of her own, unless she has permission, or another male authority accompanies her. The only way for her to gain any kind of liberty was through words, and in this last speech she was permissioned by her husband to voice an opinion, even if it is a mere mock speech.

Katherina's speech starts with a remark on how women harm men with their "scornful glances". She confronts women with their offence against men. Katherina teaches them to never show negative emotions at the presence of male, also to not look at them with spiteful eyes, only kind, for they will look unpleasant, and could kill the male desire. Women were not

even allowed to show disapproval, as they most of the time should be attractive as well as the source of positivity for their husbands (Simms 2016: 44). The following meaning from Katherina's speech supports the previous notion about women being objectified for their appearance. An aggressive attitude can make a woman look unlikeable which could harm their reputation among male. As it was necessary for women to obtain any kind of positive approval from the superior gender, they were obliged to behave and look attractive.

The author of this thesis suggests that seemingly, in the Renaissance era pleasing men should be women's top priority, as they are the 'gateway' to freedom. In the speech one can sense a strong misogynistic view people had in those days: that the husband was their lord (5.2.154), women were repaying men with affection and beauty for protecting them. Moreover, a man was in charge of the wife; thus, his priority was to protect her and provide safety (5.2.162-163). In most cases the husband was away from home as most of his time was spent at war or working at hazardous jobs. A husband is one's keeper, who can provide them anything that they desire and need, that being protection in most cases. This connotation makes women inferior to male, making them look fragile and in need of constant male protection – another symptom of a patriarchal society. Ultimately, this society tells women to pay for their sacrifice. Hence, women are indebted to men for the rest of their lives, be it with obedience, mildness or affection. In the next line, (5.2.171) Katherina compares a wife's duty to a citizen owing to his/her lord. Thus, what it denotes is that subjects equal wives. As the subjects obey their lords, a woman ought to do the same with their spouse, because she owes it to him.

Continuing her speech (5.2.175-176) Katherina tells women to never start a quarrel with their "lords", as it can put them in the position of a traitor. Home should only contain peace for the husband, thus women should never create a negative ambiance nor show any sign of discontent, most importantly, they should not fight back or talk back to their husbands. This could be unbearable for the man as well as ruin their relationship. She then goes on to say that

women ought to give both peace and affection, as it unfortunately is the on only way for them to ever have a voice in a patriarchal society. This thought alone connotes the subjectivity issue that took place in the Renaissance era. Moreover, she gives a notion of women being fragile souls who need men's protection – simply a mockery of the situation she is in.

For the final act of obedience, Katherina calls her fellow women to place their hands “below your husband's foot”. This can either indicate his authority or show her obedience to him as a wife. However, Petruchio surprisingly refuses and demands Katherina to kiss him (5.2.193-196). Sherri Thorne's (2003: 73) idea is that this could be another sign to show affection rather than his superiority. In addition, a hand under the superior's or husband's foot was a symbol of ultimate obedience. Another suggestion of Thorne is the mutual respect Petruchio and Katherina developed within their marriage, with which the present writer agrees. That argument shows in Katherina's behaviour – she indeed has fallen for her tamer, thus any form of affection, be it even submissiveness, is an act of love from her.

The writer of this thesis believes that the final speech of Katherina was not as sincere as it was meant to be, but she nonetheless gained society's trust by portraying herself as a modest and obedient wife. Moreover, the secondary source author Homer Simms supports the thought (2016: 47), suggesting that Katherina's speech can be interpreted in various ways; one being that it was a trial to test the reaction of her ‘new tamed persona’. Hence it was Katherina's tactic to manipulate the public by representing herself as the flawless obedient wife. Thus, the righteous winner of the obedience test in present writer's opinion is Katherina as she seemingly feigned being tamed. This can be supported by the final line of the play (5.2.206), that being Lucentio's where he states that Katherina “will be tamed so.” Yet, this does not confirm whether the complete transformation has occurred, leaving the reader questioning the credibility of Katherina's sudden change into a submissive obedient wife (2016: 55). Overall, the speech could have been delivered to teach the disobedient women, yet it could have been a

simple act for a better future. Katherina's speech had a tone of mockery in it, also could give her more time to consider the idea of enforcing the tamed wife persona on her or choosing to stay true herself.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to observe the inhumanity carried out against females within the Renaissance era taking the example of William Shakespeare's play *The Taming of the Shrew*. That the framework of misogyny set out in the beginning holds true was proven through the thorough analysis of the chosen scenes from the play. The thesis has shown that in that era females were inevitably objectified, be it as a daughter, wife or a mother. In every step of their life they were supposed to be obedient first and utmost to God, then second in importance to the male figure in their lives, be it their fathers or husbands. The only way for women to ever gain access to freedom or a voice required them to play the socially assigned part, as submissive and with plainness, as any indication of emotion could harm their reputation. Moreover, the only emotion they ought to show was obedience to their caretakers. The analyses of the background information on taming women and Shakespeare's play provided many examples of how the patriarchal culture chooses to place women on a lower pedestal than men. This approach can be explained through religious views or the narrow-mindedness that infected many of the men during the Renaissance era, yet a few exceptions occurred. By way of example, the male protagonist Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*, is indeed a misogynistic person who wishes to tame and capture Katherina. Nonetheless, one does see some sincerity in his actions to eventually tame her heart. Overall, women were regardless seen as the inferior gender, even if they pleased the men – that alone already indicates that women were deemed to be tamed to serve the supreme gender.

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# APPENDICES



Figure 1. The Chesterfield Brank

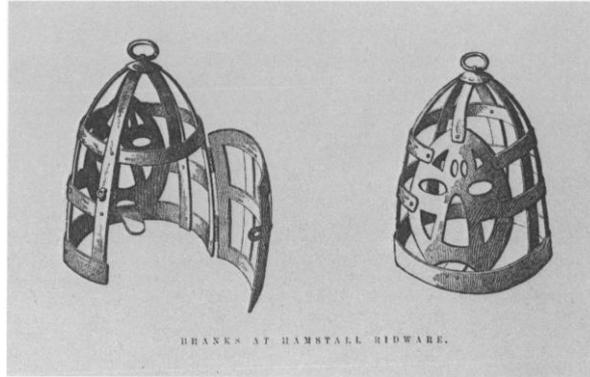


Figure 2. Bridle



Figure 3. 'The Witches Bridle'

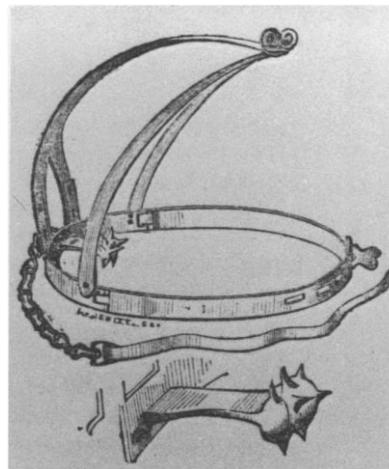


Figure 4. The Stockport Brank



Figure 5. Seen in Newcastle-on-Tyne



Figure 6. The Branking of Mary Curtys

## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Aibike Gaibli**

**The Woman Question in William Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew**

**Naise rolli küsimus William Shakespear'i näidendis „Tõrkosa taltsutus”**

bakalaureusetöö

2019

Lehekülgede arv: 32

Käesoleva töö põhieesmärk on analüüsida ja anda faktilist taustainformatsiooni naiste objektistamise ja toksilise maskuliinsuse kohta, mis leidis aset 16-17. sajandi patriarhaalses ühiskonnas. Nii minevikus kui ka tänases ühiskonnas naise sugu võrdub nõrkusega. Antud töös räägib naise rolli küsimusest William Shakespeare'i näidendis „Tõrkosa taltsutus“. Töös püstitatud väitele, et naise roll on madalamal positsioonil kui meeste ja peamiseks eesmärgiks on olla kuulekas tõestatakse läbi põhjaliku analüüsi ja toetudes teaduslikele allikatele. Diplomitöö käigus analüüsitakse karatereid ning väljavalitud stseene „Tõrkosa taltsutusest“.

Töö ülesehitus on järgnev: sissejuhatus, kus peamine argument ja eesmärk on välja toodud. Esimene peatükk on kirjanduse ülevaade, mis käsitleb ja toob välja naise rolli renessansi ajastul, toetudes erinevatele allikatele toetudes. Teine peatükk on empiiriline osa, milles arutletakse, kuidas osa näidendi tegelastest, kirjeldatakse lähemalt peategelaste Petruchio ja Katherina esmast kohtumist, ning lõpetuseks viimast stseeni, kus lisaks erinevatele kuuletus testidele, Katherina peab viimast kõne naiste rolli kohta. Analüüsis kasutatakse väliseid allikaid, et raskeid ja arusaamatuid termineid dešifreerida. Käesoleva töö viimane osa tööst on kokkuvõtte, milles võetakse kokku terve analüütiline osa kui ka kirjanduse ülevaade, ning leitakse väitele tõene kinnitus. Erinevad allikad ja analüüs andsid põhjaliku arusaama, sellest mida naise roll endast antud ajavahemikus ette kujutas ja millised arusaamad olid meestel naiste osas. Tõestust sai, et naistel polnud ei häält ega ka õigust vabadusele, ühiskonna nägemus oli neid pigem alandada ja alavääristada kui naisena.

Märksõnad: Tõrkosa Taltsutus, Shakespeare, inglise kirjandus, näidendi analüüs, feminism, naise roll, moraaliid, ühiskond, religioon, renessanss

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