

"Bad Reputations: Kate, Kat, and Ten Things I Hate about Shrew"

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In the past one hundred years, one of the most important social issues has been the subject of equality. However, this has not always been the case. For centuries, western civilization was a primarily patriarchal society, but in recent years, this issue of equality has permeated all parts of our social world, including literature. Thus we find literature critics placing twenty-first century values on ancient works, hoping to find elements of social equality where, often times, there is none to be found. For example, critics in recent years have attempted to describe William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* as a feminist work, when, in truth, it is largely the opposite. Petruchio's actions can be seen as nothing if not patriarchal, enforcing the generally misogynistic culture of the day, and Katherina, the supposed feminist hero, is presented to both the characters in the story and the audience as spiteful, vicious, and generally spoiled. The only real reason to wed Kate, it seems, is financial. However, modern critics still attempt to proclaim Kate as the model of female individualism, or, in the least, a decent example of it.

In Gil Junger's recent film adaptation of *Taming of the Shrew*, *10 Things I Hate About You*, the character of Katarina is

transformed into this feminist ideal. In *10 Things*, Kat is seen much the same way as Kate from *Taming of the Shrew* is by other characters in the film, but is presented to the audience, and thus later "tamed", in an entirely different way. The contrasting natures of these two stories highlight the patriarchal nature of *The Taming of the Shrew*.

The main thing Kat and Kate have in common is the way they are viewed by other characters. Kate is often called "a shrew" or "curst", or rather "intolerably curst/ and shrowd and froward, so beyond all measure" that men "would not wed her for a mine of gold" (Shakespeare I.ii.89-92), for she would make a "shrewd, ill-favor'd wife" (60). Katherina is called a "fiend of hell", and, thus, to be married to her is to be "married to hell" (I.i.88, 125). It is that reason that Hortensio states, "No mates for you, / unless you were of a gentler, milder mould." (59-60) Gremio, concerning marrying Kate, states, "I had as lief take her dowry with this condition: to be whipt at the high cross every morning" (131-133). Tranio simply states "That wench is stark mad or wonderful froward" (69). Even her own father calls her "hilding of a devilish spirit". (II.i.26)

Kat knows a similar list of descriptions. She is also called a "shrew", as well as a "mewling rampallian wretch". Bianca calls her sister "completely wretched", "a particularly hideous breed of loser", and simply "a bitch" (Junger *10 Things I Hate about You*). In one scene, Katarina speaks with the guidance counselor

about her conduct and the way she is perceived by others. "[Perky:] People tend to see you as somewhat... [Kat:] Tempestuous? [Perky:] Heinous bitch is the term used most often. You might want to work on that." Kat is even called a "wild beast" by her would-be suitor Patrick. This is reminiscent of Kate being called a "wild cat" (Shakespeare I.ii.196).

However, it is in the case of Bianca that the stories take their first diversion. In *Taming*, Kate is called "good sister" by Bianca (Shakespeare II.i.1). In that same scene, Baptista asks "when did she cross thee with a bitter word?" (28), implying that Bianca has been nothing but polite to Katherina. However, Bianca in *10 Things* scathes her "hard-boiled, hot-blooded and willfully manless older sister" (Morris) regularly, providing the worst of the insults against her.

It should be noted that neither Kat nor Kate is entirely undeserving of the titles they are given. "Kat, who describes the boys at Padua as 'unwashed miscreants,' prides herself on being repulsive." (Rhodes). That is why Kat says that she doesn't date. However, that is not the only reason, because "Kat's rotten attitude is a major turnoff to every guy at school." (E! Entertainment) Reviews describe Kat as "the school pariah... smart-mouthed and nasty" (LaSalle) with an "unhelpful attitude towards the opposite sex" (Cochrane). Kat's "smart-mouthed" (LaSalle) attitude is similar to Kate's, who is "renown'd in Padua for her scolding tongue" (Shakespeare I.ii.100)

Kate scathes everyone in sight, especially Petruchio; she is, after all, the shrew in the theatrical reality of the play. And she goes beyond mere threats and verbal abuse and commits what amounts to mayhem: she ties her sister's hands and then strikes her, bashes Hortensio over the head with his lute breaking both his head and his lute, and strikes Petruchio when he comes to court her. Then, in the fourth act, she beats the servant, Gremio, although we can easily forgive this for she is being simultaneously starved and teased with offers of food—on Petruchio's orders of course.

(Krimms 4)

Thus both Kat and Kate contribute, at least in part, to their bad reputation. However, it is the way each deals with this reputation that displays the differences in their characters.

In Kat's first entrance in the film, Joan Jett's song "Bad Reputation" is played, the lyrics of which echo Kat's feminist point of view. It should be noted that, while the first line "I don't give a damn about my bad reputation" would be indicative of both Kat and Kate, the rest of the song would only be indicative of the feminist attitude that Kat is given.

I don't give a damn about my reputation. You're living in the past. It's a new generation. A girl can do what she wants to do and that's what I'm gonna do. I don't give a damn about my bad reputation. Oh, no. Not me. I don't give a damn about my reputation. Never said I wanted to improve my

station. I'm only doing good when I'm having fun and I don't have to please no one. And I don't give a damn about my bad reputation. [Sic] (Jett qtd. in Junger *10 Things I Hate about You*)

In effect, Katarina is "a spirited feminist who doesn't date and sneers at the conformism and idiocy of teen-age social life" (Holden).

Katarina Stratford [is] a Seattle high school senior of such surpassing superiority she has outgrown any interest in mere popularity. She says exactly what she thinks and cares not what others, teachers and fellow students alike, think of her in return (Thomas).

The effective moral being taught by Kat's character is that it is "ok to march to your own drummer. In addition, it shows a main female character who's not defined by a man or a relationship. She's independent and that's ok." (Clinton) Thus, Katarina becomes the feminist ideal, symbolizing intelligence, independence, and, unlike her counterpart, an ability to love. A lot of this comes from her being given the emotional depth that Katherina lacks.

Along the way we get a better understanding of why Kat behaves the way she does. The great thing about Katarina... is that she's not about to apologize for her sarcastic directness. She is capable of giving credit on those rare occasions she believes it is due, and she has, underneath

her hard veneer, a capacity to be made as vulnerable by love as anyone else. (Holden)

In a very emotional scene between Bianca and Kat, we find out the true reason that Kat is so hardened against the popular culture. Kat reveals to Bianca that she and one of Bianca's would be suitors, Joey Donner, dated in ninth grade, and that they had sex. Kat was pressured into this by both the pain of her mother leaving (which is yet another question that is left unanswered in the original text) as well as peer pressure.

Everyone was doing it, so I did it. Afterwards, I told him [Joey] I didn't want to anymore, and he got pissed and he dumped me. After that, I swore I would never again do anything just because everyone else was doing it, and I haven't since (Junger *10 Things I Hate about You*).

Kat is given more depth than Kate, and thus, the audience identifies with her.

Modern presentations of *The Taming of the Shrew* have attempted to remedy this lack of depth and audience identification, especially in the case of Kate's famous submissive speech. For example, in one presentation, the director had Katherina wink at the audience whilst on her way to her wedding bed. "That wink... signaled a change from shrewish woman to shrewd wife, her goal of dominance the same as the beginning of the play but her tactics now more refined" (Andresen-Thom 123). However, such motivations are more read into, rather than out of,

the original text. Irving Ribner saw *Taming of the Shrew* as a story of not one, but two false examples of marriage that are to be ridiculed. He cites the use of deception in the wooing of Bianca as evidence that her wedding is not to be seen as valid (170-71). However, with the predominance of deception in the love process throughout Shakespeare's plays, especially in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, this cannot be easily argued.

In the end, we are left with the patriarchal play we have today, with the ending that Bernard Shaw described as "altogether disgusting to modern sensibility" (330). No doubt Katerina would join with Shaw in this statement, given her dislike for "patriarchal values" (Junger *10 Things I Hate about You*). Of course, Kate herself shows no love for the male led society she is in. However, the difference lies in the depth of Kat's personality and the difference in wooing methods that that causes. The polarized difference between the tactics of Petruchio and Patrick are striking. Where Petruchio based his plan of attack upon domination, self-elevation, and the creation of illusion, Patrick based his wooing upon equalization, self-humiliation, and the dispelling of illusion.

The difference in these two stories can be seen in the first planning scene in each story. In *10 Things*, Patrick asks "so, you're going to help me tame the wild beast" (Junger), to which Michael responds "we'll find out what she likes." Petruchio, on the other hand, claims to need no information about her

whatsoever, save that she is rich.

If thou know/ one rich enough to be Petruchio's wife/ .../ be she as foul as Florentius' love,/ as old as Sibyl, and as curst and shrowd/ as Socrates' Xantippe, or worse,/ she moves me not, or removes not at least/ affection's edge on me. [whe'er] she is as rough/ as the swelling of the Adriatic seas;/ I come to wive it wealthily in Padua;/ if wealthily, then happily in Padua. (Shakespeare I.ii.66-76)

In other words, Petruchio is, in Patrick's words, "in it for the cash" (Junger). In the beginning of the relationship, Patrick is concerned with reality, where Petruchio is utterly disinterested in it. Petruchio, thus, sees no problem in creating illusion to gain what he wants. When he arrives at Baptista's house, Petruchio asks, "Pray have you not a daughter call'd Katherina, fair and virtuous?" going on further to rave about Kate's "beauty and her wit, her affability and bashful modesty, her wondrous qualities and mild behavior." (II.i.41-42,48-50) Later, when he meets Katherina, Petruchio blatantly contradicts reality when she makes the claim "They call me Katherine that do talk of me" (184), with this statement:

You lie, in faith, for you are call'd plain Kate,/ and bonny Kate, and sometimes Kate the curst;/ but, Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom,/ Kate of Kate Hall, my super-dainty Kate,/ for dainties are all Kates: and therefore, Kate,/ take this of me, Kate of my consolation—/hearing thy

mildness prais'd in every town,/ thy virtues spoke of, and
 thy beauty sounded,/ yet not so deeply as to thee belongs,/
 myself am mov'd to woo thee for my wife. (185-94)

However, Petruchio does not stop here:

Throughout the play, he deliberately misunderstands her and
 tries to undermine her sense of her own personality by
 insisting that she is not in fact a shrew, a claim as
 preposterous as his insulting insistence that the sun is the
 moon. (Krimms 4)

Petruchio furthers this illusion in his retelling of the events
 to Baptista, claiming that she loved him in private, but
 pretended to hate him in public, making the statement that, "when
 men and women are alone, a meacock wretch can make the curtest
 shrew" (312-13). Petruchio bases the marriage upon lies, thus
 gain property rather than a person.

Patrick's pattern, however, is wholly different than
 Petruchio's. Patrick begins with finding out her interests, and
 continues by getting to know the real person by asking questions
 like "So what's your excuse... for acting the way we do?" (Junger
10 Things I Hate about You). Later, Kat and Patrick have another
 scene in which they fight illusions in a very tangible way by
 dispelling famous rumors about each of them, which led into a
 talk about personal and family life. Kat, in the end, begins to
 feel so open that she asks Patrick, "Tell me something real,
 something no one else knows" (Junger). Kat and Patrick's

relationship becomes based upon reality, save the bribe that initiated it, whereas, Petruchio and Kate's relationship was based upon non-reality. However, that is not the only way in which Kate and Kat's wooing were different.

When Cameron told Patrick what he had discovered about Kat, he seemed confused about what to do with the information.

[Cameron:] Here is a list of her interests: Tai food, feminist prose, and angry girl music of the indie rock persuasion. [Patrick:] So I'm supposed to buy her a book and some noodles, and sit around and listen to chicks who can't play their instruments, right? [*Sic*] (*Junger 10 Things I Hate about You*)

Patrick needed something substantial to proceed with courting Kat, when all Petruchio needed was a name and a price. In addition, Patrick's course of action in the courting process shows a major difference in the way Kate and Kat were courted.

"[Cameron:] Have you ever been to Club Skunk? Her favorite band is playing there tomorrow night. [Patrick:] Look, I can't be seen at Club Skunk, alright? [Cameron:] Yeah, but she'll be there. She's got tickets. [Michael:] Listen, assail your ears for one night" (*Junger*).

Patrick knew that to be seen at Club Skunk, the most hardcore feminist rock club in the area, was social suicide in his circle of friends. Nevertheless, the next night he showed up at the club and even impressed her with his knowledge of "angry girl

music". As well, while attempting to yell over the band, he was overheard by the entire audience saying "I was watching you out there before. I've never seen you look so sexy" (Junger). That elicited Kat's first sincere laugh in the entire film, which set the groundwork for Patrick's other tools in wooing Kat, equalization and self-humiliation. Another example of this is when Patrick angered her to the point that she "hates him with the power of a thousand suns" (Junger). Cameron's advice to him is to "sacrifice yourself on the alter of dignity and even the score". To do this, Patrick takes some, if not drastic, at least elaborate measures. "Trying to win her heart, he waits until she's on the athletic field, and then sings 'I love you baby' over the P.A. system, having bribed the school's marching band to accompany him" (Ebert), " and Kat is utterly delighted with it. Her taming is so easily accomplished that it's almost a piece of cake" (Holden). To Katarina, this is the sign that "he (Patrick) is sufficiently cool and self-confident [enough] to allow Katarina to discover for herself his worthiness" (Thomas). It is in one of the subsequent scenes that Kat asks Patrick to tell her "something no one else knows" (Junger). Throughout the entire film, Patrick continually encourages Kat to "do what you want to do" (Junger), allowing Kat enough freedom to feel that her ideals are accepted and ok.

However, Petruchio's pattern is entirely different from that of Patrick. His plan is to subdue Katherina. His mission, in a

true sense, is to "tame the wild beast" (Junger) "Petruccio bets upon his wife as he would upon a hawk or a hound, and his victory is that of any good trainer of dogs" (Ribner 170). "The basic assumption of any shrew play is that the man should rule both his house and his home... Petruccio's first words upon crossing his threshold—'where be these knaves?' (IV.i.123)—reflect his position as the ultimate authority in the house" (Perret 224, 225). Petruccio forces Kate to go through the lengthy ordeal of the wedding and the trip home, then proceeds to starve her.

Petruccio insists that all this is done 'in loving care of her' to help her become a loving—that is, compliant—wife. His posturing pretense that he is only acting on Kate's behalf is calculated to suppress her rage and this, of course, only further infuriates her. Petruccio's counterfeit kindness is arguably the cruelest of all. (Krimms 52)

Huston calls this forced marriage and the subsequent submission the "wedding rape", the idea being that "it is hardly a wedding at all" (75). The story is not about love, but about power, where the patriarchal hero male figure gains nothing more than a trophy wife with a broken spirit.

In conclusion, a thorough examination of these two characters provides a vision of two strikingly different personalities. Kat from *10 Things I Hate about You* is a true individual with a sense of independence and a heart waiting to be won by a man who will accept her, temper issues and all.

Conversely, Kate from *Taming of the Shrew* is a spoiled brat who wants nothing but to get her way, and can only be won by someone strong enough to tell her what to do. In truth, Katherina is not the feminist hero, but rather the feminist martyr. Both ladies were hated for their strong wills and loud mouths, but while Kat, the true feminist hero, is won by a feeling of mutual respect and understanding, Kate is won by the stronger hand.

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