

**“An exploration of the way Shakespeare presents Katerina in the play”**

Katerina is the female protagonist of the play and to me the second most interesting character in it, next only to abominable Petruchio. The way Shakespeare presents her is very complex, entertaining and open to interpretation. She had been given many roles in the play; daughter to Baptista, sister to Bianca, fiancée and wife to Petruchio, suitor's worst nightmare, mistress to servants and of course the town Shrew. Kate is a complex character because Shakespeare had presented her so differently from other females of the period he lived in. Namely the time where a woman's highest virtues are her abilities to be obedient, placid, meek, uncomplaining, and discreet, plus their abilities in the homemaking process and those mundane things, like playing the pianoforte, painting and sewing. But Kate, as numerous others of Shakespeare's female protagonists, won't stand these stereotypical assumptions. She is of no 'gentler or milder mould' and is considered very 'froward' and compared to the 'devil' himself. She flaunts convention and isn't averse to quick thinking, wit, physical violence and strong language. Kate is a very determined character who taunts and mocks those people around her when she doesn't get her way.

Shakespeare presents Kate's relationship and interaction with her family in a very stereotypical way. It is easily assumed that Baptista favors Bianca more than he does Katerina. It is also clear that this is having an adverse effect on his relationship with Kate. As a daughter Kate is benevolent, bitter and spiteful. Bianca, who she describes as 'his treasure' and she on the other as he says is a 'devilish spirit' don't get along at all. He is a typical father who favors the more virtuous daughter than the clever one. This actually brings in mind King Lear and his three daughters, another play by Shakespeare, which questions relationships, honesty and love. We don't see her pay a lot of respect to Baptista because his character doesn't seem to like Katerina at all. 'Was ever gentlemen grieved as I' says a lot to his parenting skills. He doesn't try to understand Kate at all and a misunderstood child with that amount of spirit in her would naturally turn 'mad' especially since it rubs her that he shows so much affection to Bianca and none to her. Shakespeare presents Kate and Bianca as a relationship of opposites. Since Bianca's characterization is of a 'sweet', 'modest', and 'much prized' lady she contrasts sharply to Kate's characterization which is of a 'froward' and 'stark mad', wench. They are of complete opposites and one assumes that Shakespeare did this deliberately to emphasize Katerina's character traits. As a sister she is much punishing and a bit of a bully who is not averse to using force to get what she wants, as the audience sees in Act 2, Scene 1. But behind all this we get the sense that Bianca is much smarter than that and taunts Katerina on what she cannot have. Sadly Katerina lacks that insight which suggests that Bianca maybe much smarter or else more calculating than her emotionally spurred sister does. Shakespeare probably made this relationship to make the audience more sympathetic to Katerina as we finally see what is behind her shrewish behavior.

Shakespeare presents the audience with scenes where we see Katerina interacting with Bianca's suitors in an amusing way. Scornful and volubly abusive, this may stem from her jealousy that her sister has suitors and Katerina has none. But in spite that she still couldn't tolerate 'these mates' and said that she would rather 'comb your noodle with a three legged stool and paint your face and use you like a fool.' They, on the other hand also can't tolerate her, 'Katherine the curst'. They think that even with her dowry, which is quite considerable, 'any man is so very a fool to be married to hell.' These relationships outside family is also used to emphasize Kate's character and show us how the outside world, Padua, who makes no effort to understand her at all, sees her since

we know that Katerina is known throughout Padua and beyond for her shrewishness. This also makes us think how totally loveless and friendless she is.

Then there the main relationship that Shakespeare presents which of course includes Kate and Petruchio. We see them alone in a room on the stage getting acquainted in a very strange way. From the very first meeting, Kate is in the disadvantage. She clearly does not see Petruchio's motive, therefore making her wary but also curious. Petruchio's motto of 'wiv[ing] it wealthily' may seem very unromantic to the audience, but in this instance Shakespeare presents us with a Katerina who is a woman, not the shrew. For the scene to work on stage there has to be the element of sexuality in the innuendoes and undercurrents between the two characters, especially Kate. Katerina tries to bait him all the time by using animalistic words not fit for a real lady, the audience get a sense that she maybe doing this deliberately to test his temper, and see how he would respond. She is obviously not impressed by the speech about her virtues, and is quickly roused into anger when Petruchio showed no sign of abating his attack and defense against sallies Kate throws at him. No one challenges Kate quite like this and this time it looks like she's barely holding to her own, which makes her mad. He even equals her on the 'waspy' speech. One of the most memorable lines; 'Asses are made to bear and so are you. Women are made to bear and so are you.' Is truly a very entertaining provocation speech by both of them. Kate, fed up with all the heated exchange of animalistic language, infuriated at being told that she would marry him with or without her consent and probably testing his gentlemanly intentions, hit him squarely in the face. But this was a grave mistake for Kate. She was shown a display of Petruchio's disciplinary tendencies.

Shakespeare presents us with a situation where Petruchio, who is determined to bring 'wild Kate to a conformable as other household Kates', to her knees plans a very elaborate taming. The audience knows that Kate must go through a kind of taming as the title of the play indicates, but how we don't know. Step one was in Act 3, the wedding scene. Kate was so bitter and outraged when she thought that Petruchio wouldn't show up, cursing everyone about the 'mad-brained rudesby' who had taken her in, as she believed. Shakespeare must have instilled in her character the contempt of men in general and this would have been the ultimate humiliation, to be stood-up. We don't actually see the wedding ourselves but through the narrating of Signor Gremio we find out about the scandalous happenings in the church where Katerina suffered so much humiliation in the hands of Petruchio. This must have put a lot of pressure on Katerina who was so afraid to be stood up, then when the groom finally showed up, started humiliating her in front of everyone. Shakespeare allowed us to see Kate in another light as indicated by Gremio when he said that Katerina was a 'lamb, a dove, a fool to him' when he himself was saying just six scenes before that she was the 'devil' and 'hell' herself. The juxtaposition and ironic element is amusing. Shakespeare uses this effective technique as he did with the journey, which was narrated by Grumio, to let us see how the others see the current developments.

If Kate is the rock, then Petruchio is the hard place. She was finally beginning to realise that she can't do anything to Petruchio using her old techniques since he was more shrewish than she is anyway. There's just so much humiliation a girl could take. We see a humbled Kate as she 'entreats' Petruchio, which could not have been easy, to stay and even go so far as to emotionally blackmail him by saying that if he loves her they should stay. This unexpected change from the normal loudmouth and demanding woman is astonishing, and it was only the beginning.

Even the journey was a humiliation. Journeys which symbolizes change and in this instance we do see the change. Petruchio determined to tame her 'to make her come and know her keepers

call' decides that the way to do it was through deprivation, much like how hawkers tame their birds, but in this instance it is by 'killing a wife with kindness'. Petruchio with his strong personality and cunning mind is seen crushing Kate's resistance to a pulp. With her in his household and him controlling everything in it, she is powerless to do anything. She can't do anything and she was isolated. She can't even control the servants. She humbled herself so far as to beg with Grumio to give her anything edible, even a 'neat's foot'. Shakespeare presents us with a Kate who is angry but at the same time almost biddable. It was clear that something had changed when we see her, Petruchio, the haberdasher and of course Hortensio who was new at the game. We see Katerina almost begging for the hat and the dress which was, to Petruchio, not good enough for her. Hortensio who was astonished by the change he senses in Katerina and the way Petruchio is treating her is obviously sympathetic to her. Kate was overjoyed to hear that they were going back to Padua to see her family that she was almost like a puppy, eager to please but once in a while, we see her feiry personality emerging and challenging Petruchio, 'my tongue will tell the anger of my heart', an evidence maybe that she is not quite tamed as everyone deems her to be.

Along the way, Shakespeare presents Katerina was presented much changed from the woman she was in the first journey. In front of astonished Hortensio, who we keep saying aside comments, we see her agreeing to Petruchio's foolish baiting, 'and be it moon or sun or what you please; if you please to call it rush candle, henceforth I vow it shall be for me'. To me this was the instance Katerina had finally acknowledge her defeat, or shall we say pseudo-defeat. And apparently Petruchio also sensed that, even Hortensio commented on it saying that Petruchio should 'go thy ways, the field is won'. But Petruchio had to be sure, and Shakespeare presents us with the challenge of seeing if Katerina had truly been tamed, or as Bianca does, now knows how to play the game. The test of the 'budding virgin' who was really an 'old, wrinkled, weathered' man was also a joy to see as we can tell that Kate was acting deliberately even after Petruchio embarrassed her by pointing out the mistake he deliberately made.

Shakespeare presents Katerina in a new solidarity with her new husband as they watch the unfolding of the mysterious and confusing goings on in Bianca's love life. They were the audience to these happenings much reminiscent to the first scene where she was the one being watched. Then it was Tranio and Lucentio who has a very close relationship and now the same could be said for Kate and Petruchio. They even share amusement at this 'ado' and we could finally see their closeness. But Petruchio, the ever cunning put yet another test for our Katerina. To kiss him without reserve in the middle of a crowded street with others looking on. It this was like a seal to their trust and shows how much Katerina had changed. 'Better once than never, for never too late' is apt for Katerina. This was Kate's chance to have something and she grasped it, even underhandedly. Truly the 'field had been won'.

Shakespeare presents us with a Katerina more subdued with the sense of barbed deliberation in her answers, in which suggests to the audience that this Kate is more subtle and wordly who has the same spirit but knows how to use it to hurt someone in a more delicate way. A far cry from the Kate who said early on that 'a woman maybe a fool/If she had not a spirit to resist'. Then the ultimate test for Katerina. The speech she gave in front of everyone was a litany of what a good wife should be. Petruchio was very confident in her and it showed. It maybe that they were planning this all along but some would say that it was the ultimate sexist speech ever. Her speech was deliberate and slow, emphasizing each word with a look to a 'froward wife', namely Bianca and the widow. This would seem very much effective in stage. In the end of the speech, which ended beautifully in rhyming couplets 'in token of which duty, if he please,/my hand is ready may it do him ease', we

could make our own assumption, whether this was planned by both Katerina and Petruchio, him to make more money and her to finally fool them so much that it would bring her amusement and gratification after all those years of abandonment by her own family. It can also be read as a real submission of a broken woman, much like a meekness of a broken horse. But I prefer to think it is the former.

Katerina has to be the most changed character in this whole play. And the way Shakespeare presents her is very interesting since I think no female in his other plays are quite like her, she had the spirit of queen Elizabeth but at the beginning a sense of a toddler. But as the play progress and with Petruchio's character to guide her. She finally sees an advantage to her shrewdness and finally uses it to her advantage. And if my interpretation was right she had used it well to her advantage.