

How do you respond to Shakespeare's presentation of Katherina in the play? You may confine yourself to two scenes of your choice or range more widely if you prefer.

Katherina, at the beginning of the play, is shown as having many problems with her family. The inability of Kate's family to understand or deal with her is only a symptom of a greater underlying problem: the world in which Kate lives. Kate is obviously a highly intelligent, witty and spirited woman; however, the domestic Paduan woman's world leaves her no outlet in which to express her gifts. Padua has no place for Kate, and therefore rejects her as vile-tempered and laughable. Gremio dismisses her: "You may go to the devil's dam; your gifts are so great, here's none will hold you." (I.i.105-6). She is notorious throughout the city for her temper, and has been subject to humiliation and ridicule; the sarcasm with which she defends herself only adds to her image. A need for love and acceptance has turned to self-hatred, aggressiveness and defensiveness. Herein lies Kate's biggest problem. She is unable to let anyone in.

Contrasting this is the 'perfect' woman, her sister Bianca, who appears to be well mannered and knows her place in society is under her father, or once married, her husband. Having such contradictory characters makes Katherina's harsh tongue seem even more extreme and allows the other characters in the play to draw distinct comparisons between her and her sister.

In the taming scene (Act 2 Scene 1) it is the first time the reader really hears Katherina speak, as previously she has only spoken the occasional line. Here we see how Bianca and Katherina are treated differently by their father, "Poor girl, she weeps," says Baptista when he first sees Bianca tied up and his first actions are to tend to his youngest daughter and untie her hands. To Katherina he shows only shame, as he says she has, "a devilish spirit." Even when Katherina turns to him, asking if she is accepted as his daughter, Baptista refuses to answer. This clearly shows that Bianca is the favourite daughter in Baptista's eyes and Katherina is simply a nuisance who he has little time for.

Once Petruchio enters the room and he is alone with Katherina, Shakespeare portrays her as being quite sexually expressive, although she continues in her 'shrewish' behaviour. "Your were a movable," refers to Petruchio being easily got rid of, as if to suggest that Katherina wants to make it perfectly that she isn't like other women. She isn't going to bow down to men, but take control of the situation. They go on to talk about a wasp and made a sexual pun of, "with my tongue in your tail?" talking about Petruchio giving Katherina oral sex. Both parties do this form of flirting very aggressively with Katherina pitching her attitude to the level of her counterpart, by acting more masculine in her dominating approach.

Petruchio goes on to talk about, "Dian," the Goddess of Hunting and Chastity, wanting, "Kate be chaste and Dian sportful." This means that he wants to have sex with her. As we can see both parties are very forward about sex, by making Katherina seem so similar to Petruchio allows the reader to see how masculine her character is and reminds us of how opposite she is to her sister. This scene is a crucial turning point in the play as we see that there is one man capable of matching her feisty nature and standing up against her snide comments.

In Act 4 Scene 5 Katherina and Petruchio are journeying to the wedding of Bianca and Lucentio, where Petruchio forces Katherina to agree with everything he says. They were arguing about if the globe in the sky was the sun or the moon. Petruchio is trying to free her mind because he is trying to get full domination over her and believes that a woman should not question what her husband says, but simply obey his orders. By withholding items from Katherina he has the upper hand in this crafty trickery, "Go on and fetch our horses back, " he says as Katherina argues that the globe is the sky is in fact the sun, not the moon. Katherina eventually backs down, saying that; "be it moon, or sun, or what you please."

In this scene Katherina never gives us reason to believe she is actually being serious when she is 'submitting' to Petruchio. Katherina's replies to Petruchio are often very quick and use much the same language as Petruchio, for example;

Petruchio

I say it is the moon.

Katherina

I know it is the moon.

Shakespeare writes his verse in lines of ten syllables, this indentation in Katherina's line represents her jumping in quickly to finish Petruchio's line of ten syllables. Petruchio often uses the tactic of using more words than are necessary in order to take control of a conversation; he is a skilled linguist. We see Katherina doing this as well in order to mimic Petruchio and the way he talks. 'Young, budding virgin, fair, fresh and sweet whither away or where is thy abode? Happy the parents of so fair a child! Happier the man whom favourable stars allots thee for his lovely bedfellow' she says. She also uses the word 'stars', as does Petruchio in the speech preceding this one, perhaps to mimic his use of somewhat poetic vocabulary, like 'stars, spangle, heaven, beauty' and so on.

Here the reader sees the first signs that Katherina understands the rules of game put forward by Petruchio. As long as she does and agrees with everything he says then he will give her a happy, rich marriage and life for her will be much easier. This is the acting Katherina, as I do not believe she is convinced with what she is saying, she simply says it because it is what Petruchio wants to hear. She goes to prove that this is merely an act when she greets Vincentio as, "Young, budding virgin," knowing full well that he is an old man. As soon as Petruchio corrects her and changes his mind, saying, "Kate...thou art mad...this is a man," she quickly agrees with him, jesting that it was the sun that blinded her vision.

The whole of this scene focuses on Petruchio's control over Katherina, a complete transformation from Act 2 Scene 1 in which both are equals. Although we know Katherina is only joining in Petruchio's game, we are still unsure as to whether she has been tamed and is now a passive, obedient wife. As the whole scene is based on acting, it is hard to distinguish between the reality and fantasy. I think this was Shakespeare's aim because it brings in a sense of ambiguity, giving way for a range of contradictory opinions and takes on whether Katherina has really been tamed.

Some say she is being ironical, because she is satirising what Petruchio says. For example, "fair and fresh and sweet," is another phrase she uses to describe the 'woman' they meet on their travels. She could have merely called he a woman, without going into such detail. This could be interpreted as Katherina going over the top and satirising what Petruchio is commanding her to do. Or you may

believe that she has really been tamed and is simply doing as all Elizabethan women should do, be seen and not heard and do what they are told.

The climax of both the play and Katherina's behaviour comes in the last scene, when Katherina delivers her final speech to the guests at Bianca's wedding. She appears to have been tamed by her husband and willing to become a traditional woman. However, when you look closer you may think that the speech is another example of Katherina's irony towards her husband and society in general.

"To wound thy lord...blots thy beauty," she claims to both Bianca and the Widow, although we must notice that she herself is looking anything but beautiful. She has been deprived sleep and is wearing the simple clothes that she has left because the Tailor was accused of making terrible clothes. So maybe she is being ironical because she herself is not beautiful. Another example is when she describes the women as, "froud," which means shrewish, knowing that she herself has been called such a thing too. She could be making a mockery of herself and of men's shallow opinion of women.

"Vail your stomachs," Katherina says and let your husband look after you. Accept your faults and his, but never argue back to your husband. She wants women to lower their pride, but in the first meeting between Petruchio and herself she did no such thing. Instead she gave as good as she got and fought everything Petruchio said about her, "If you strike me, you are no gentleman."

For people who believe that Katherina really has changed and has finally been tamed by the only man in the play capable of doing so there are also examples of this too. "Our bodies are soft, and weak," which is true because in Elizabethan times woman did not work. Their place was considered to be in the home, looking after the children because women could not perform manual labour or learn, as it would infect their mind. So this reference is in fact based on truth and could be Katherina being genuinely submissive to Petruchio.

She goes on to say that, "My mind hath been as big as one of yours." She is admitting that she too was once a shrewish woman, who disobeyed her father and then her husband, but now she gives the impression that she is a changed woman and regrets what she once was. Then the speech could be seen as a warning to the other women of what they are turning into and how they must stop themselves before the situation gets too bad.

The final speech could be seen as Katherina finally conquering her problem of being unable to let anyone into her life. It signifies that she has accepted Petruchio as her husband and is beginning to show signs of feeling some kind of affection towards him, maybe not love, but something is definitely there. Whatever is the true meaning of Katherina we will never know and this is why Shakespeare presented her as he did. He wanted people to question her motives and actions, while trying to figure out whether or not she believes in what she is saying.

She provides hope for women who have been submissive all their lives, but to a gentlewoman is a constant reminder of what you could become if you do not take care of yourself and your husband.