

Spring 2019

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## Recommended Citation

Reisenwitz, Brianna, "Misinterpretations of The Taming of the Shrew: Adaptations and Their Emphasis on Gender" (2019). *HON499 projects*. 24.  
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Honors 499

25 April, 2019

Misinterpretations of *The Taming of the Shrew*: Adaptations and Their Emphasis on Gender

Certain elements of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* lead it to be viewed as a misogynistic play. It focuses on Katherine, a "shrew" who needs to get married so that her younger sister, Bianca, can get married. While she comes from a wealthy family, Katherine is not the typical wife men seek; her sister Bianca has many suitors, and they convince another man, Petruchio, to marry Katherine. After they marry, Katherine gives a long, uncharacteristic retraction speech honoring her husband and preaching why women should be submissive. This speech comes as a surprise from the way she has been previously characterized in the play. It is problematic because it seems to show a woman being abused and becoming subservient to her husband. Modern adaptations put the main focus on gender in order to tell this story, above all other interpretations. Other interpretations arise when looking at the play through the framing story. Shakespeare opens the play with a story of a poor, drunken beggar being convinced he is noble with a wife. It does not take much convincing from two men who are playing a joke on the beggar, and the main plot of *The Taming of the Shrew* is actually a play the men put on for the beggar's entertainment. While Shakespeare presents a lens to look at the main plot of the story with the induction scene, it is largely ignored and left out of most adaptations entirely, leading people to misread the play. Viewing Shakespeare through a contemporary lens the way adaptations present it leads audiences to make assumptions about gender that are inflicted by

today's gender stereotypes. The book *Vinegar Girl*, the films *Isi Life Mein*, *10 Things I Hate About You*, *Deliver Us From Eva*, and the television show *BBC's ShakespeaRe-Told* show how modern adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew* focus solely on gender biases indicative of this time period, and not Shakespeare's time period because they ignore an important portion of the play that Shakespeare included.

There are many different ways to interpret this play, depending on how it is looked at. In "Holding Up A Mirror To Nature? Adapting The Taming of The Shrew for Teenagers and Pedagogy" Agnieszka Rasmus says Josie Lawrence, who portrays Kate in a production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, described Petruchio's treatment of Kate as "abuse" and "physical and mental torture," (Rasmus, 56). On the other hand, in "Shakespeare and Women" Phyllis Rackin says Meryl Streep, who played Katherine in an adaptation as well, described Petruchio and Katherine as having "an incredible passion and love," (Rackin, 54). While both of these actresses played the same character, they viewed the roles much differently. For a play that leaves a lot up to interpretation, it would seem natural for modern adaptations to focus more on showing women in a more positive light. However, they tend to focus on women being controlled by men, and construct a narrative where love is better than a woman having autonomy over herself. While Lawrence and Streep are in different adaptations with different readings of the same character, their descriptions of the characters they play show that they are still preoccupied with gender. Instead of talking about Katherine as a powerful woman, these adaptations dismiss the possibility that the play has other meanings aside from subservience or love.

Remaking plays that have gender issues in a modern time period gives the adapters an opportunity to present the play with more equality. In "'Writing Back': Contemporary Re-

Visionary Fiction” Peter Widdowson says that works can “be revised and re-visioned as part of the process of restoring a voice, a history and an identity to those hitherto exploited, marginalized and silenced by dominant interests and ideologies” (Widdowson, 505-506).

Although the play does include treatment of women that would not be tolerated today, adaptations can depict different outcomes. The original play does not limit itself to a single misogynistic interpretation, yet adaptations keep returning to this interpretation. Modern day representations of *The Taming of the Shrew* are actually more focused on issues between men and women than the original play was to begin with.

In order to analyze adaptations of this play, it is important to acknowledge why this play is still being discussed hundreds of years later. According to Marjorie Garber in “Shakespeare and Modern Culture”, “Shakespeare makes modern culture and modern culture makes Shakespeare.” She continues this idea by stating that many concepts believed today were first introduced by Shakespeare, therefore our thinking “naturally” is already “scripted” by him. Garber also highlights Shakespeare’s modernity because of his contributions to psychology. The way one thinks of themselves and others is formed by Shakespeare’s ideas. Garber continues, explaining that “journalists routinely describe the disgrace of a public leader as a ‘downfall of Shakespearean proportions.” Similarly, in an article published by Newstex, “The Economist: Free exchange: Why Lawyers Love Shakespeare” it is explained that lawyers allude to Shakespeare because his works are so well known. For example, the article describes a murder case, the situation was described as, “human tragedy of Shakespearean proportions,” by the judge. As the article states, Shakespeare is “not of an age, but for all time.” Shakespeare occupies a large enough space still today that he is used frequently for comparison. His works feel familiar; even people who have not actually read any of the actual texts of his plays can

recognize a comparison to Shakespeare, or attribute the name of a play or a character to Shakespeare. Unfortunately, though, even though the works are still present, adaptations show the tendency to leave out the intricacies and many layers involved in the stories Shakespeare told. This can confuse people with the meaning of a lot of Shakespeare's plays; in the same way that a murder case and a disgrace of a public leader can be vastly different from the situations Shakespeare wrote about, the same can be said for Shakespeare adaptations overall.

A main reason that Shakespeare's works could be misinterpreted has to do with differences in language. Michael Anderegg addresses the language barrier that exists between adaptations and the original in *Cinematic Shakespeare*. He says, "The problem is not simply that too much has been cut but that what is left has not been provided with a structure or form of its own to compensate for what has been lost. The words that remain are literally incomprehensible because they lack context," (Anderegg, Ch 1). Although Shakespeare is English, and we do have the same words today, these words have different meanings as time goes by. Taking those same words and applying them to different situations, as one does with adaptations, is problematic because of the lack of context. Over time, even when different words are used in adaptations, the initial misinterpretation by contemporary readers can be portrayed into adaptations. For example, in "Connections: Reexamining 'The Taming of the Shrew' in the era of #MeToo" Evan Dawson and Megan Mack discuss how Shakespeare's audience would have thought of the word taming as in reference to birds. The way birds are "tamed" is by the trainer also undergoing what the bird goes through. Shakespeare's audience would have understood this, however, today tamed is usually in reference to a "dog" and portrays more of a dominant/submissive dynamic, rather than one of equal taming.

Out of context, Shakespeare's works are difficult to interpret due to the meaning of words changing over time, but something else contributes to differences between the original and adaptations. While modern adaptations do not seem to entirely follow Shakespeare in context, they also do not seem to only adapt from his play either, but include the history of the play over time. Anderegg explains, "A Shakespeare film always alludes to the original, no matter how close or loose an adaptation it may be, and those allusions also refer to three or four hundred years of theatrical history that have become a part of our understanding of that play, (Anderegg, Ch 1). While the original piece is Shakespeare's, many adaptations tend to follow suit with other adaptations that came before it, and for that reason, the original meaning can be skewed or misinterpreted.

Despite having several different interpretations, adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew* tend to focus on gender because of misinterpretations of not only the original text but of the world Shakespeare lived in. Rackin discusses the reasoning behind this by talking about inaccurate views on gender. She says, "because the history of women's struggle [...] is relatively well documented, studies of women's history often construct a meliorist narrative in which the progress women have made in recent times represents the final stage in a long upward trajectory" (Rackin, 27). However, Rackin describes this documentation as "incomplete" as it has only been "well documented [...] during the last two centuries" (Rackin, 27). This leaves four centuries prior, when Shakespeare was writing, out of the narrative. Due to the progress that has been made to this day, the idea that women were entirely submissive and considered less than their male counterparts is the mindset that some people take on when looking at this play. Women are looked at today as having more power than ever before, and while still not being entirely equal, people think of the past as being much worse than what is experienced today.

This mindset causes a narrow, gender focused view that ignores other elements that may be at work in the play.

The lack of information about specific instances of gender roles in Shakespeare's time cause assumptions about women and men that are not necessarily true. Rackin argues that not "every women was subordinate in every way to every man," (27). Some women may have even been in "positions of authority and power that would be considered exceptional even today" (Rackin, 27). A person's class was important to the opportunities they had; gender did not automatically assume a person's fate. Rasmus says, "there is a great chasm between Shakespeare's times with their attitudes to women and marriage and those of the early 21st century," (Rasmus, 56). To accurately look at Shakespeare as he originally intended the plays to be performed and its interpretations, people must come to terms with the fact that the situation in which Shakespeare wrote the play was not as black and white as critics of adaptations of the play supposed. Even though there is "a chasm" between women today and women in the past, that does not necessarily mean there is a straight line from oppressed to equal when it comes to how women are treated. The way in which history has painted the journey to women's equality may have assisted in forming an assumption about the audiences Shakespeare wrote for, but there is a lack of evidence suggesting that this assumption has any real merit. While the play undoubtedly has misogynistic elements, Shakespeare is doing more work in this play than adaptations focus on.

Adaptations may be lacking in relaying the possible interpretations of Shakespeare's works, and modern adaptations on *The Taming of the Shrew* are no exception. While all of them have different settings, a few major themes are present which show a preoccupation with gender. Although the themes do not seem to all focus on gender, the way in which they operate in the

adaptations shows that the dynamic between men and women are at the forefront of the stories. A few patterns are evident when looking at modern day adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew*, specifically the novel *Vinegar Girl* by Anne Tyler, the movies *Isi Life Mein*, *10 Things I Hate About You*, *Deliver Us From Eva*, and BBC's *ShakespeaRe-Told: The Taming of the Shrew*. Today's audiences have a different set of circumstances and beliefs that are taken into consideration when recreating Shakespeare's works. While some elements of the original story are included, a lot has to be changed in order for the story to work today. As Shakespeare's original play has various interpretations, adaptations do not necessarily have that luxury. In "Lovers and Tamers: Transmediations of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* to Visual Culture," Mihaela Ursa explains that, "When transmediating to visual culture, the former textual ambiguity of the play is lost or at least reduced to a considerable extent, in the sense that each adaptation is bound to follow only one interpretive line. This reduction is paradoxical because it sheds new light upon the Shakespearean text at the same time it silences alternative interpretations," (Ursa 8-9). Certain patterns emerge because of the limited amount of interpretations in the play, meaning that adapters of Shakespeare tend to follow specific guidelines to tell the story today, as seen in adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Deception and exchange show up in the original play, but in the adaptations, they show up as a display of power between the sexes. Love and male control are also presented frequently in the adaptations because of their focus on gender, while in the play these ideas are less focused on.

Deception is present in *The Taming of the Shrew* within the framing story. Christopher Sly is deceived by two men who tell him he is noble when he is actually a poor beggar. Because of the framing story, it makes sense that Katherine may be deceiving everyone into believing she has changed when she gives the retraction speech. Deception shows up in the adaptations as

well, but because there is no framing story, the deception is less ambiguous and more straightforward. The way the deception presents itself in the adaptations is men lying to women, women lying to men, or men and women lying about something together. In all of these situations, the focus is on gender.

Men lying to women is how the deception works in *10 Things I Hate About You* and *Deliver Us From Eva*, but it is excusable in a way because it leads to love. *10 Things I Hate About You* centers on Kat Stratford, the shrew, and her younger sister Bianca. They are teenage girls being raised by their single father, who imposes a rule that Bianca cannot date until Kat does. *Deliver Us From Eva* is about Eva Dandridge, a single woman who is obsessed with controlling her 3 younger sisters' lives. Both stories deal with deception in the same way. In *10 Things I Hate About You*, a man named Patrick is bribed by a boy trying to date Bianca. Patrick is paid to take out Kat, and Kat is unaware that the bribe has taken place. Similarly, in *Deliver Us From Eva*, Eva's sisters' husbands pay a man named Raymond to take out Eva. They do this to get Eva out of their relationships and focused on her own. In both instances, the woman is viewed as shrewish and a man is the only way they will loosen up. At the end of both, the women discover that they were deceived and are rightfully upset and betrayed. The deception is easily forgiven though, because both men say they are in love. The implications are that love fixes everything, and are definitely problematic. After getting into a relationship based off of men paying each other, it seems strange that the women forgive so easily. It plays into gender stereotypes of women valuing love over something as important as respecting themselves, rather than showing strong women.

If men lying to women shows a flawed vision of women, women lying to men does the opposite, which is women taking power over their situation. This is how deception takes place in

*Isi Life Mein.* *Isi Life Mein* is an Indian adaptation from 2010 where a young Hindu girl, Rajnandani, who is supposed to be in an arranged marriage, goes to college, and has to lie to her father about it. The world Rajnandani grew up in was much more sheltered and devoid of choice than her life in Mumbai, so she and her mother had to hide college from her father. While this movie does focus more on gender issues that may have been prevalent in the original play, it is through the lens of Indian traditions that are vastly different from western traditions. Therefore, this movie potentially is the most anti-feminist right from the beginning. At the end, though, Rajnandani's father comes to his senses and he is the one to give a retraction speech against arranging a marriage for her daughter, which rectifies the situation for a modern audience. Rajnandani lied because of strict gender roles that she was supposed to succumb to, but, after the lie was discovered, it eventually led to a happy ending. While in this situation, it would seem that the woman has the least agency, it actually ends by giving the woman power in a way that the previous two adaptations did not.

When both men and women deceive others there is a difference from just one gender being deceptive. Men and women taking part in deceiving other people is how deception shows up in both *Vinegar Girl* and *BBC's ShakespeaRe-Told*. *Vinegar Girl* by Anne Tyler is a novel apart of the Hogarth Shakespeare series about Kate Batista, a pre-school teacher in her late twenties who lives with her scientist father and her younger sister, Bunny. Her father wants Kate to marry his lab assistant so he will not get deported. *BBC's ShakespeaRe-Told* is about Katherine, a politician who is shrewish; she is told to marry so she can advance in her career. In both situations, the women and men both have to act like the marriage is real. The deception comes on equal parts from both the men and the women, and they are trying to deceive the public into believing it is a real relationship. In both instances, the men and the women actually

fall in love. While the women have more agency, it is still problematic because they did not have much choice in starting the marriage organically. However, both women seem to be better for the relationships in the end, so the initial forced marriage aspect is somewhat easier to accept. This situation is in between either men deceiving or women deceiving because it grants power to both genders.

Exchange is an important element in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Just as deception displayed itself as the deceiving party having power, the same can be said for who gets what in an exchange. In *The Taming of the Shrew* the exchange takes place most explicitly through Petruchio gaining Katherine because she is wealthy. Bianca's suitors also get a chance to be with her once Katherine is married, because she can not marry until her sister does. The exchange, in this case, occurs between all of the male characters. Roh describes this as "the social exchange of women," (Roh, 51). However, if the framing story is again considered, and if it is supposed that Katherine is putting on an act of being a good wife, she may see that doing so is more beneficial than her previous behaviors. While it is hard to ignore the abusive aspects of the situation, some amount of exchange does take place between Katherine and Petruchio. Even if it is false, she gives him her compliance and in return she is not looked at as a shrew anymore – she is tamed. Petruchio definitely has more to gain, but Katherine "gains" a new identity. In the adaptations, the exchange usually takes place between the men, but affects the women, or, the women actually get to be a part of the exchange.

In both *10 Things I Hate About You* and *Deliver Us From Eva*, money is exchanged between the men to get both Patrick and Raymond to ask out the women, but despite not being involved in the exchange, the women still reap some benefits from the exchange taking place. Kat and Eva are both affected by the men exchanging money, because it resulted in their

relationships. This shows the power dynamic where men are in control of women; the women are more like pawns. *Vinegar Girl* operates in the same way, except the exchange is citizenship and not money. Dr. Battista has his daughter marry his lab assistant to keep him in the country. In all of these adaptations, the women actually do end up in love. Therefore, while they are not involved in the original exchange, they do benefit in the end that is supposed to justify the cruelty of either bribing or forcing marriage that opened the story. Elizabeth Lowry argues in a piece about *Vinegar Girl* for The Guardian that, “By taking him as her husband, the shrew doesn’t surrender her moxie, but rather finds a counterweight to her own strength. The balance of power the two Kates and their Petruchios achieve is the basis of a successful marriage” (Lowry). This “balance” could potentially be the exchange between Kate and Pyotr. She gains a marriage, and also her “counterweight” in life. That same idea can be applied to Kat with Patrick, as well as Eva and Raymond. The adaptations try to rectify the gender issues they base the entire plot off of in the end by giving the women a romantic partner, making them better off than they were before. While there is a happy ending, it gives the audience a false idea that everything is okay when in fact, it is perpetuating the stereotype that women only care about love.

The exchange in *Isi Life Mein* occurs in multiple ways between men, but also men and women, which should give equal power to both parties – but in this situation, it does not. Rajnandani’s father and the father of the man he wants to marry her off to is the most obvious exchange. The man would be gaining a wealthy bride. However, Vivaan and Rajnandani’s father also have another exchange, in which Vivaan gives Rajnandani’s father a large sum of money to help fund the extravagant wedding. That money then goes to another exchange, which is from Rajnandani’s family to all of the guests at the wedding in order to make it seem even

more extravagant. There also is somewhat of an exchange between Rajnandani and her father. In “More than an Indian Teen Shrew: Feminism and Postcolonialism in *Isi Life Mein*” Garcia-Periago explains that even though Rajnandani is not fully onboard with having an arranged marriage, her “father aims to ‘tame’ his daughter into the long-held values of the village to marry her to a wealthy suitor, and prosper economically,” (Garcia-Periago 120). Rajnandani has other dreams in mind, but, giving her a husband would in her father’s mind give her a secure future. By Rajnandani marrying who her father chooses, she would receive a secure future in exchange for upholding the “long-held values” in her Hindu family. This exchange somewhat includes her, but the reasoning behind takes all the power away from women. If this was the ending the movie went with, the exchange could be potentially be linked to the exchange that occurred in both *10 Things I Hate About You* and *Deliver Us From Eva*, as long as Rajnandani fell in love with her arranged partner. Luckily, this is not the ending the movie goes with, and the arranged marriage was cancelled by Rajnandani’s father. Although Rajnandani did not get anything out of the actual exchanges that took place, she was better off in the end because the exchange did not go through.

The exchange in *BBC’s ShakespaRe-Told* is money, but the difference is that Katherine is actually involved in the exchange. Although Katherine does not hand money over to Petruchio explicitly, it is implied that they will share the finances after being married. Harry thinks that the marriage between Petruchio and Katherine will give him Bianca in return, but he is wrong. However, Harry did give Petruchio the idea to be with Katherine, in hopes of an exchange where he would end up with Bianca. Katherine also takes part in this exchange, because marriage improves her reputation, and in turn, her career. This situation is unique because even without the love story, Katherine is benefiting from the exchange from the beginning. Displaying

exchange in this way is problematic, though, because Katherine is technically paying for her marriage to Petruchio. It is also problematic because she initially starts the relationship to help her career. Because Katherine and Petruchio end up in love, though, this fact is almost dismissed entirely; all that matters is that they are happily in love in the end, and the relationship was wanted by both parties involved from the beginning.

*The Taming of the Shrew* is not as focused on gender as the adaptations are, which explains why the adaptations have additional themes that are gender-related. In the adaptations, love and male control are prevalent and make up major plot points. While these elements are present in the original play, they are not as important or even mentioned as frequently. In the play, love is just one of many interpretations on Kate and Petruchio's relationship. Male control here is present based on the society they lived in, but there are different interpretations on control in the play. Men are all at work on the surface, but the potential manipulation by Katherine gives her more control than it may seem. The reason that these three themes differ from the first two mentioned is because of the focus they have on gender. While deception and exchange relate to gender in their effects, they are more neutral. Love and male control are inherently about gender, and therefore show up as major elements of the adaptations because they are more gender focused.

Love is a concept that comes up in all of the adaptations, but in very different ways. Both Kat in *10 Things I Hate About You* and Eva in *Deliver Us From Eva* fall in love with their male counterparts after spending some time with and getting to know them, but the love relationship is started under false pretenses. At the end, it is love again that forces them to forgive the other for lying to them in the first place. Despite both parties being paid to go out with them to begin with, all is forgiven because they are in love. The love they have is supposed to remedy any

wrongdoing by both Patrick and Petruchio, because they also love Kat and Eva back. This concept of love seems superficial, but it has to be accepted because the protagonists both accept it.

Love comes into play in *Vinegar Girl* and in BBC's *ShakespeaRe-Told* gradually, rather than beginning superficially. While at first, Kate and Katherine do not think they are in love with the men they are going to marry, quality time spent verbally sparring leads to love in both cases. Although Kate is initially turned off by Pyotr, and finds a lot of his foreign misunderstandings and miscommunications insulting, she comes to find them endearing later on. Meanwhile, Katherine is argumentative when Petruchio is domineering, but it is subtly revealed overtime that she enjoys the bickering with her significant other and comes to respect him. In "Taming 10 Things I Hate About You: Shakespeare and The Teenage Film Audience," Monique Pittman states that, "the socially formed gender roles can be tolerated because the love relationship creates an illusion of equality" (Pittman 144). It seems as though both Kate and Katherine are completely at odds with the men they are supposed to marry, but once they are in love, all of the wrongdoing by their partners is "tolerated" rather than looked at clearly. Because the women now love the men, it is accepted that they are together in the end even though it was not what they wanted to begin with.

Finally, love in *Isi Life Mein* is different because it is not coercive in the same ways the it was in the other adaptations. Although their first encounter was not the best, Ramajandani appears to be infatuated with Vivaan almost right away. He also appears to share the same feelings overtime. There was never a moment where Ramjandani was against her feelings for Vivaan, aside from the fact that her father would not approve. She had no personal issues with Vivaan's character, and they developed a normal relationship, rather than one based on lies or

exchange between the two of them. This relationship seems to be the most healthy and genuine, because it does not involve any coercing or convincing on either of their parts. They did not intend to fall in love, but they did anyway.

Male control is a major element in the adaptations because of the gender struggles they present. Men having power over women is the backbone that most of these adaptations operate under. Even in situations where it seems as though a woman has control, there is a male who perpetuated each decision. In *Isi Life Mein*, male control is inherent in Rajnandani's culture, but this adaptation shows a relinquishment of male control. Rajnandani's father is in control of the household, which means he has control over Rajnandani's life. She has to lie about what she wants to do in the future because her circumstances seem to render her powerless in making her own decisions. Her father wants her to marry someone he chooses and spend her life in the traditional way she grew up. Even though Rajnandani's mother approved of her continuing her education, as his wife she is not supposed to make that decision on her own. It is clear that in their family dynamic, the father is at the root of all decisions made. That is why it is not until Rajnandani's father changes his mind and gives his retraction speech that she is able to be with who she wants, and do what she wants with her life. She does not even contest her father controlling her life, because in her cultural that is what is considered normal. Therefore, Rajnandani's father giving the retraction speech in the end is extremely powerful and shows him surrendering some of that control.

Male control in *10 Things I Hate About You* is seen with Kat and Bianca's father because he is protective over his daughters. Although it is not as intense as Rajnandani's situation, the rule that Bianca cannot date until Kat does is imposed by the father. He is also the only parental figure that the girls have, because their mother is not in the picture. The father is in control of

where his daughters go, when they can date, and even where Kat will go to school. While his intentions are to protect his daughters, and he is not purposely dominating them just because they are women, he still is the one who ultimately controls his daughters' lives. He seems to relinquish some of his control towards the end, but as an overly-cautious single, strict father, not entirely. It is not until Kat's father changes his mind and becomes less strict that she is allowed to her dream school that is on the other side of the country.

Finally, male control is exhibited in *BBC's Shakespeare-Told* even though the woman occupies a higher position than her male counterpart. Although Katherine is already a powerful woman, it is clear that Petruchio's intentions are to dominate her. However, the fact that she is expected to marry in the first place to improve her reputation is suggested to her by her male colleague to begin with. Not only is the marriage itself against what Katherine would want, but the idea of marriage was not even her idea to begin with. Although she falls in love and the movie has a happy ending, the underlying male motives are still present. In David Auburn's *Proof: Taming Cinderella*, it is explained that it "claims to challenge perceptions of women as incapable of authority in fields that have traditionally been dominated by men; however, the familiar affirmation of patriarchal hegemony lurks beneath the surface," (Schafer 13). Katherine goes on to be Leader of the Opposition, but apparently it is at the cost of her independence as a woman. Although she occupies a powerful position, it seems that she could only get there with a man by her side, rather than on her own. In this adaptation, Katherine seems like the character who would have the most control; however, just like Rajnandani and Kat, she is in fact operating under the control of a male figure.

While all of these adaptations are different stories, the reason that they are able to have these themes in common is because they focus on gender; they can only focus on gender because

they do not include the framing story. The lack of the framing story in modern adaptations is problematic because it changes the entire meaning of the play. Pittman explains what the framing story does for the play. She says, “The frame [...] introduces the problem of identity by considering how the self takes form, posing the question: can identity be constructed and reconstructed almost exclusively through language and the articulated perceptions of other human beings?” (Pittman, 145). She continues, also explaining that Katherine does not appear to be the “fiend of hell” she is described as until “after her identity has been constructed through the descriptions of others,” (Pittman, 145). Therefore, what the audience sees could be Katherine putting on an act rather than simply conforming to gender norms.

Even if the play itself is inherently misogynistic, the framing story challenges gender as the focal point by presenting a key element in most of Shakespeare’s works. In “Determinate Contradictions in Seventeenth-Century Drama: Inheritance, Gender, and Exchange in Shakespeare Jonson, Middleton, and Behn,” Seung-Hee Roh says, “If Shakespeare does not make his characters revolutionary forerunners, or if he does not encourage their rebellious impulse to develop political will or construct a social utopia, he at least allows them to strive to redefine the terms of their own existence and to exercise an ambition for social mobility,” (Roh, 60). Katherine’s choice to appear as if she is conforming to be a typical wife could be her way of “redefin[ing] the terms of [her] own existence,” rather than submission. This would lead the focus to be on identity, and not gender at all. Rackin also explains that in the framing story, it is not the “distinctions that separate men from women,” that is focused on, but “those that separate people who occupy disparate ranks in the social hierarchy,” (Rackin, 57). Therefore, this could mean that Katherine’s speech at the end of the play is not meant to be indicative of how she truly feels, but it may be representative of her playing the role of a wife, and not the shrew that

everyone views her as. According to Roh's logic, Katherine in this play is simply showing "ambition" to advance socially. In that case, gender in the sense of deceiving women, exchange without involving woman, love as the end-all-be-all, and male control are not at work at all – instead, Katherine is aware of her situation and is taking charge.

The framing story itself has much different implications for the rest of the play. While the main plot of *The Taming of The Shrew* can be looked at as presenting views of gender literally, "framed by the Induction, the taming plot comes to the audience as a farcical theatrical performance rather than a representation of actual life," (Rackin, 55). The following plot after the induction, in that case, is not meant to be taken as a actual representation of what real life looks like. She continues, explaining that the play was "probably [intended] as farce, for the action is replete with slapstick comedy, and the characters are portrayed in one-dimensional stereotypes," (Rackin, 55). The stereotypical behavior of men being dominant and women being submissive is the exact reason that audiences may have a problem with this play, but the framing story changes this. Because female characters were played by males in Shakespeare's time, Rackin explains that Katherine "presented by a cross-dressed boy," (55) would read much differently to an audience in which Shakespeare originally created the play. The play itself, with the framing story, would be looked at by his audiences as "a performance of theatrical shapeshifting," (Rackin, 55). The gender issues, therefore, should not be taken as seriously. It is likely that Katherine's behavior is ingenuine; while she could have many different motives for deciding to play the role of a wife, it is difficult to ignore the possibility that she is pretending after reading an induction that focuses on pretending.

While there are definitely misogynistic elements, the induction needs to be considered to get a more accurate view of what the meaning of the story could be. The framing story involves

a drunk beggar being convinced he is a nobleman. While he is skeptical at first, two men convince him it is true, and then go on to perform the play that is the rest of the plot of *The Taming of the Shrew* for the beggar's entertainment. Many modern adaptations leave out the framing story and for that reason they focus more on gender, when the original play may have been more about identity overall. As previously stated, adaptations, especially modern adaptations, have the ability to show a better picture of women than what was previously presented. It is interesting to see that instead, adaptations show women mostly in a negative light. Looking at the framing story, it is clear that Shakespeare may not have intended for the supposed mistreatment of women to be taken literally – yet the adaptations do anyway. Shakespeare sets up a story about identity to open the play, and the following play shows elements of identity potentially being at work. However, identity is not a major point in any of the adaptations. The framing story calls into question the legitimacy of Katherine's actions at the end of the play, which is the main issue people have with the story. While it makes no sense for Katherine to completely switch her behavior, framed by a story about faking an identity, her speech does not come across as genuine. Her speech, in that case, is not to be taken literally.

*The Taming of the Shrew* is viewed through a narrow lens in today's adaptations, when many different interpretations exist. While it is hundreds of years old, the timelessness of Shakespeare makes his works relevant today. However, with adaptations the ideas in his plays are forced to become more black and white, taking away the ambiguity. Modern adaptations have chosen to ignore other interpretations, leaving gender as the main point of this play. Based on the framing story, as well as history, this play was not meant to be read as an accurate representation of real life, or exactly what Shakespeare believed marriage should be. Adaptations ignore the framing story and therefore ignore other ideas about what the play is

about. The misogyny definitely is present, but they are telling of modern perceptions, and not accurate representations of what Shakespeare intended.

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