Affective Resistance: Performing Passivity and Playing A-Part in The Taming of the Shrew

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THE STAGE HISTORY OF TAMING OF THE SHREW speaks to the near impossibility of representing submissive femininity. From John Lacy’s popular adaptation Sauny the Scott (1698) to David Garrick’s long-running Catharine and Petruchio (1754), the problem of staging masculine empowerment through the reformation of feminine intransigence suggests that feminine tractability is a hard act to authenticate. Petruchio’s challenge, in all versions of the story, is to animate a legitimate subject whose identity is comprehensible in relation to his own character but whose virtue is believable outside the context in which he presents her.1 The display of Katharine’s obedience provides empirical evidence of Petruchio’s ability to reaffirm a cultural ideal, in that her final speech performs the rhetorical figuration of desirable femininity current in early modern discourse. Her passive affect, however, also satisfies twentieth-century standards for “normal” femininity, meeting Freud’s criteria for distinguishing genders by their social and sexual functions: “One might consider characterizing femininity psychologically as giving preference to passive aims. This is not, of course, the same thing as passivity; to achieve a passive aim may call for a large amount of activity.”2 Katharine must learn to act in a passive manner to separate her identity from that of the shrew, a process that is apparently neither as comforting nor as simple as Freud imagines. Or so later transformations of Shakespeare’s text would indicate: Lacy and Garrick illustrate that taming a shrew is one thing but that a shrew tamed is quite a different matter altogether.

I would like to thank Leah S. Marcus, Lynn Enterline, Kathryn Schwarz, and Thomas L. Berger for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.


Later responses to and interpretations of Katharine's altered behavior reveal that her final speech is more transgressive than transformative. Lacy's revision of the Shakespearean plot suggests that it is the extremity of its taming that really demonstrates Petruchio's power.\(^3\) That Margaret resists more aggressively supposedly justifies his more viciss methods. After Margaret attacks Petruchio, and fends off his attempt to have one of her teeth removed by the barber, Petruchio claims her sullen silence must indicate that she is dead and makes preparations to have his wife buried alive.\(^4\) Margaret yields to this pressure, promising to be a good wife, without the accompanying speech of submission:

Hold, hold my dear Petruchio; you have overcome me, and I beg your pardon. Henceforth I will not dare to think a thought shall cross your pleasure. Set me at liberty, and on my knees I'll make my recantation.\(^5\)

Lacy's Petruchio manages Margaret through physical violence, and feminine agency, even one directed toward passive aims, is eliminated. Garrick's revision of Shakespeare is also concerned with Petruchio's power, and though Garrick does not subject Catharine to taming rituals more extreme than those in the Shakespeare play, he wishes to show Petruchio's autonomy. Garrick's play is especially careful in its presentation of Catharine's speech of obedience; Petruchio guides Catharine's words, and Bianca's resistance validates the truth of Catharine's speech. Her metaphor of a muddied fountain is interrupted by Bianca's "Sister, be quiet."\(^6\) Petruchio shows his mastery over Catharine but also over categories of femininity when he bids Bianca to be silent and Catharine to continue: "Nay, learn you that lesson. On, on, I say."\(^7\) Garrick is attentive to Petruchio's performance of agency, perhaps sensing the need for his continued policing of Catharine's apparent transformation.

I mention these versions of the shrew-taming story before turning to Shakespeare because they demonstrate a basic premise of this essay. Both Lacy and Garrick assume that female agency, in any form, is threatening to male power. If a woman is allowed to enact passivity without masculine intervention, then she threat-


\(^4\) Lacy, 391–93. Lacy's Margaret, quite unlike Shakespeare's Katharine, is calculating and vengeful: "but I am resolved, now I'm got home again, I'll be revenged. I'll muster up the spite of all the cursed women since Noah's flood to do him mischief and add new vigour to my tongue" (384).

\(^5\) Lacy, 393.


\(^7\) Garrick, 219.
ens to upset the precarious balance of power that hierarchizes idealized gender relations. Furthermore, masculine agency needs feminine resistance in order to warrant its affect. Petruchio needs a Margaret or a Catharine who challenges his dominance. As long as Petruchio tames, he wields power. If he actually achieves the project of animating feminine virtue, then his control over that category declines. Lacy points to this problem even as he seeks to displace it, making Margaret perpetually recalcitrant until she is cowed into submission. There is no textual evidence to suggest that she takes up the identity foisted upon her without the constant threat of physical punishment that Petruchio represents. Likewise, Garrick seeks to protect Petruchio’s agency by insisting that feminine resistance continues in the figure of Bianca, and that Petruchio maintains control over the femininity Katharine affects. If Petruchio’s performance of power is to remain convincing, Garrick’s version suggests, it must be visible in Katharine’s performance of submission. For Garrick’s Petruchio to be the whip-cracking, swaggering hero that Kemble portrays in his edition of _Katharine and Petruchio_ (1810), then male agency must direct Katharine’s obedience.8

This is not to say, of course, that Petruchio has less power in Shakespeare’s tale of taming. On the contrary, Petruchio exercises brutal force in fashioning Katharine to suit his pleasure. Lacy’s and Garrick’s doctorings of _Shrew_ only excavate an ideology already present in Shakespeare in order to prevent the ambiguities in the Folio from becoming culturally persuasive. As I hope to show, Shakespeare’s play is also a game that uses femininity to distribute categories of wealth and status. Furthermore, to be comprehensible, animating feminine virtue requires the typology of the shrew. But, in reading Shakespeare’s drama of shrew-taming, I seek to demonstrate that constructing Katharine as virtuous provides the rhetorical apparatus for demolishing the differences in agency that separate the sexes. Without winking at the audience, Katharine shows that female submission must be a performance, because her autonomy derives from redirecting agency through the guise of passivity.

**SHUFFLING SUBJECTS**

In Shakespeare’s play the noblest man defines himself by acquiring, in a commercial transaction, the worthiest woman. As with the princes in Robert Greene’s _Penelope’s Web_, the status of each man depends on his female partner’s virtue.9

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Verifying the authentic status of such virtue, however, requires a contrasting female figure who, in her negativity, guarantees genuine feminine virtue. Fixing the category of “shrew” becomes crucial, because the woman who occupies that position verifies feminine virtue through the difference she performs. Katharine is, therefore, a designated piece in this masculine status game, and manipulation of her is necessary in order to gain esteem in Padua’s patriarchal network. When the play begins, identity seems to be transparent, correspondence among appearance, performance, and essence absolute. Furthermore, Paduan men act as if their expectations produce feminine character, because they assume that they are in charge of feminine identity in this society. Believing that Katharine is a shrew makes her one, because that is the only subject position her community allows her.

Before she even speaks, Gremio refuses Baptista’s invitation to court Katharine, claiming that “To cart her” would be a more appropriate response to Katharine’s “rough” manner (1.1.55).10 When Katharine protests her identification as a shrew, she corroborates the terms that mark her as one. Responding to her father’s invitation with derision, Katharine illustrates her undesirability by pointing to her inferior social position: “I pray you, sir, is it your will / To make a stale of me amongst these mates?” (ll. 57–58). Her complaint allows Hortensio to expand the terms of her categorization, asserting that she will never marry “Unless [she] were of gentler, milder mold” (l. 60). Gremio and Hortensio read Katharine’s refusal to be ruled by male fantasies of femininity as a justification of men’s ability to entertain such fantasies.

For Gremio and Hortensio, Katharine becomes the ideological figure of a shrew, whose only function is to manifest the reality of their primary fantasy—the ideal of female virtue associated with Bianca.11 Katharine’s interaction in the opening scene with her sister’s suitors convinces Lucentio of Bianca’s virtue, for he compares her response to this scene with Katharine’s. Tranio calls attention to Katharine’s conduct, thinking her a humorous spectacle “stark mad or wonderful froward” (l. 69), but his exclamation only prompts Lucentio to remark on Bianca’s contrasting demeanor: “But in the other’s silence do I see / Maid’s mild behavior and sobriety” (ll. 70–71). As the play frames her response, however, Katharine’s reaction is not meant to expose the system of male fantasy that distinguishes the two sisters. In

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11 Slavoj Žižek’s discussion in The Sublime Object of Ideology (London and New York: Verso, 1989) of the anti-Semitic ideological figure of the Jew is analogous in its operation to the figure of the shrew in the play’s generalization. Žižek argues that fantasies born of ideological investments work to support belief in a fictional real, which is how the shrew category functions in relation to the fictional reality of male power (48–49).
fact, her sarcastic withdrawal—"Why, and I trust I may go too, may I not?" (l. 102)—asserts her autonomy, but in so doing, it also reinforces the binary categorization that this scene enacts. Bianca is thought virtuous and is treated with admiration. Katharine is called "froward" and is provoked to anger. One can imagine the tables turning on these women: if Bianca were labeled a "fiend of hell" (l. 88), or were treated with the disrespect shown to Katharine, Lucentio's description of her as "mild" might also need revision.

The play's differentiation of the two sisters demonstrates the system of identity formation in this play. Lucentio, believing in the fictions of femininity staged by this interaction, enters into the male competition that will reward its winner with the fantasy Bianca represents. That fantasy, as Petruchio's intervention in this competition illustrates, is the desire to secure masculine nobility through feminine virtue. If Bianca is fixed in the position of superlative femininity, and Lucentio can gain her hand in marriage, then he may fashion his own masculinity by means of the quality she embodies. Her virtue will authenticate his worth. Hence, the ultimate male fantasy in this play is to self-fashion, or to achieve status through one's own design. Petruchio exploits the rules of this game by reading literally the terms on which the competition is based. Instead of joining the Bianca chase, in which Bianca corresponds directly to feminine virtue, Petruchio deconstructs categories of femininity, insisting that the female subjects who occupy the positions of shrewish and virtuous woman are interchangeable. He thus claims to instigate a contest of virtue formation, wherein the best man creates the best woman. As Wayne Rebhorn makes clear, Petruchio seeks to install himself in the position of rhetor, a man able to manipulate linguistic figures shaping identity in order to fashion his own. His social identity rests on two assumptions, each of which is shakily tethered to the other: one is that if he can contain an unruly woman, he can convince others of his superiority by making her reflect an idealized image of him. The other is that he can control himself by controlling a woman, so he can control a woman by controlling himself.

Petruchio seeks to take command of the system that distributes identity in this culture, attempting to install himself in a position of masculine security by re-

12 John C. Bean claims that the play is a game, one that revises the farcical fabliau elements of earlier shrew-taming stories with a "humanizing" program of matrimonial reform ("Comic Structure and the Humanizing of Kate in The Taming of the Shrew" in The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare, Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely, eds. [Urbana, Chicago, and London: U of Illinois P. 1980], 65–78). While I would agree that Katharine is released from "the fabliau stereotype of the shrew turned household drudge" (Bean, 66), her transformation destabilizes the masculine control that Petruchio seeks.

arranging the referents of femininity. He transforms Katharine’s behavior by making her perception of the world accord with that which he specifies. Petruchio does not apply this method of reformation just to Kate; rather, this rhetorical strategy is one that Petruchio uses on everyone in the play.\(^\text{14}\) Whenever anyone tells Petruchio of Katharine’s shrewish disposition, he refuses to credit such claims, declaring that he “will board her, though she chide as loud / As thunder when the clouds in autumn crack” (1.2.94–95). When Gremio expresses incredulity at Petruchio’s determination, asking, “But will you woo this wildcat?” (l. 195), Petruchio delivers an oration that hierarchizes disruption, relegating the strife a chiding wife can produce to the private, domestic, and trivial domain of the household, a place any empowered husband can manage:

Think you a little din can daunt mine ears?  
Have I not in my time heard lions roar? . . .  
And do you tell me of a woman’s tongue,  
That gives not half so great a blow to hear  
As will a chestnut in a farmer’s fire?  
Tush, tush! Fear boys with bugs.  

(ll. 198–99, 206–9)\(^\text{15}\)

Petruchio converts the guarantor of his wealth into a signifier of his nobility, using his bravado to manifest his empowerment.\(^\text{16}\)

**Redrawing Representations**

Before Petruchio meets Katharine, he attempts to redefine the position Katharine supposedly occupies. He seeks “Katharina, fair and virtuous,” a designation Baptista refuses to recognize, replying, “I have a daughter, sir, called Katherina” (2.1.43–44). After Petruchio lists the traits he expects to find in a wife (beauty,

\(^\text{14}\) Richard Rainolde claims that a rhetorician’s purpose is “to drawe unto them the hartes of a multitude” (The Foundation of Rhetoric. 1563, ed. R. C. Alston [Menston, UK: Scolar Press, 1972], sig. A1’), Petruchio seems to take the empowering promises of rhetorical discourse literally, seeking to write his success through Katharine’s identity.

\(^\text{15}\) Geoffrey Fenton expresses the masculine desire to tame women through linguistic representation, demonstrating that Petruchio’s approach was not isolated in the sixteenth century: “seeing a wife is gien in discipline and correction to her husband, and that she is neyther meare sauvage, nor desparite intractable (which though she were, yet men make tame both Lions and Tygers) it were good first to vse doctrine as well by him selfe as others hir parentes and nearest kinred, and bringing her to the conference of sermons, to league vnproued no gentle, easie or friendly meane, that may further her conversion” (A forme of Christian polite . . . [London, 1574], 270).

\(^\text{16}\) For a discussion of Petruchio’s union of “symbolic” and “economic” capital, in the terms identified by Pierre Bourdieu, see Natasha Korda, “Household Kates: Domestica
modesty, mildness), Baptista discourages Petruchio, believing that his daughter Katharine cannot gratify such wishes: “She is not for your turn, the more my grief” (l. 63). Petruchio then uses the power he hopes to exert over Katharine to reclassify her identity in the community, telling Baptista that gaining Katharine’s love “is nothing” (l. 130), countering her defiance with his confidence: “I am as peremptory as she proud-minded” (l. 131). He will use Katharine to assert power over those who determine her socially. Petruchio must teach others to read Katharine in the way that he does, but in order to transform their perspectives, he must teach Katharine to read herself according to his desires.

Everywhere she turns, Katharine is called “shrew,” a designation that demonstrates the shaping program already applied to her in Padua. At the beginning of Act 2, she interrogates a bound Bianca, and to her sister’s entreaties to be released, she reacts with physical violence. Later she responds to the instruction of the disguised Hortensio by breaking a lute over his head, refusing to be ruled by his advice, even in a field that requires training. Finally, when she meets Petruchio, their verbal sparring becomes physical when she “tries” his self-declared gentle status with blows. Katharine meets linguistic provocation with physical force. Her aggression arises from the category of shrew itself, because the behavior her sister displays can look desirable only in comparison to extreme displays of feminine aggression. Edmund Tilney’s articulation of ideal feminine submission in The Flower of Friendship might appear as self-interested as it sounds today if no reason for such male domination could be cited:

the wise man may not be contented onely with his spouses virginitie, but by little and little must gently procure that he may steal away her private will, and appetite, so that of two bodies there may be made one onely hart.

Katharine is the example that proves the need for such regulation, and Bianca is the product that such cultivation generates. Bianca’s deference frustrates Katharine, because it implies that the categories assigned to the two sisters really apply. When Katharine protests, “Her silence flouts me” (2.1.29), she recognizes that the quiet submission Bianca performs associates Katharine with the stereotype of brawling shrew.

But Petruchio does not call Katharine a shrew, and he does not treat her like a shrew, which makes him successful in his project of reorganization. Petruchio seems

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17 Fenton claims that it is more honorable for a man to correct his wife without violence: “Tobie and Job endured with patience the reproches of their wyues, without beatinge them, but with gentle declaration they corrected them, and had them afterwardes very obedient” (269).

to recognize the structural differentiation operative in classifying femininity, because he seeks to redistribute terms of femininity without changing the categories of shrewish and virtuous woman. He articulates his strategy of wooing before he meets Katharine, claiming that he will treat her as if she behaves as Bianca does:

    Say that she rail, why then I'll tell her plain
    She sings as sweetly as a nightingale.
    Say that she frown, I'll say she looks as clear
    As morning roses newly washed with dew.

(ll. 170–73)

He tells her she is what she is not, changing the feminine term that refers to her: “Hearing thy mildness praised in every town, / Thy virtues spoke of, and thy beauty sounded” (ll. 191–92). Katharine, perhaps rightly, thinks Petruchio is mad and strikes him to test the veracity of his signifiers. As Emily Detmer points out, many sixteenth-century marriage manuals link conduct to status, claiming that a gentle husband proves his nobility. Petruchio performs masculine dominance through physical restraint, exercising his aggression only through socially sanctioned methods for producing desirable feminine subservience.

Petruchio imposes on Katharine the same gender stereotype that her father and Bianca’s suitors do; however, his inversion of categories gives him an advantage over Katharine, because it gives her a new position in this field of meaning. No matter how much contemporary audiences may enjoy the spirit Katharine displays in her shrew performance, the role seems to offer her little pleasure. She repeatedly protests her treatment and is repeatedly ignored or treated even more roughly for her shrewish habits. Petruchio considers her will, or her desire, no more than other characters in the play do. However, his categorization of Katharine at least offers her a more desirable position. If she is virtuous, she will receive common respect, not common reproof. As Leah S. Marcus puts it, “She also earns the right to be treated like a gentlewoman rather than a hoyden.” However, Katharine resists Petruchio’s imposition of virtuousness just as vigorously as she does others’

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attribution of shrewishness. Her frustration registers the pain such categorization, whether positive or negative, inflicts.\(^{22}\) Petruchio’s verbal agility avoids physical violence, but it inflicts symbolic violence, demonstrating the harm that rhetorical ideals administer to those whom they are used to contain.\(^{22}\)

**MIS-TAKING FEMININITY**

Petruchio’s strategy for achieving cultural revolution, in which he rotates the positions occupied by different members of his society, seems to be one of rhetorical misrepresentation. He misrepresents Katharine to her father, to herself, and to the other men of Padua in order to mischaracterize his own success in courtship. He tells Baptista, Gremio, and Tranio that they have misjudged Katharine, that her shrewishness is just an act, “for policy, / For she’s not froward, but modest as the dove” (2.1.289–90). When Katharine tells him that she would be hanged before she would marry him, he claims that his apparent failure is also a public performance: “’Tis bargained twixt us twain, being alone, / That she shall still be curst in company” (l. 302–3). Katharine only acts like a shrew; she really is virtuous. Petruchio asserts the detachable, performative nature of feminine categories, only to claim the ability to perceive in their pure states the identities named by those categories. Petruchio appears to rewrite the qualifications for feminine virtue, ironically claiming that what makes Katharine appear to be unruly really proves her essential tractability. What Petruchio does, however, is to claim exclusive interpretive mastery over Katharine’s character. He gets to decide if she fits the shrew-position, which is a power that affects the reality of those who have hitherto determined her gender role.\(^{24}\)

Petruchio’s capacity to transform Katharine is perhaps disturbing to twentieth-century readers because his success depends on the belief of his audiences. Shirley Nelson Garner expresses the fear that audiences will be attracted to Petruchio’s

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\(^{22}\) Laurie E. Maguire, in a discussion of *Shrew*, *1 Henry IV*, and *Henry V*, makes the interesting point “that the name Kate assumes an almost generic quality and becomes a synecdoche for ‘woman’” (“‘Household Kates: Chez Petruchio, Percy and Plantagenet’ in *Gloriana’s Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance*, S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wyné-Davies, eds. [Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1992], 129–65, esp. 130). Petruchio’s manipulation of Katharine’s name makes her a synecdoche for different categories of *woman* in and of herself.

\(^{23}\) As Henry Smith claims in his 1591 sermon *A Preparative to Mariage*, “Though a woman bee wise and painfull, and haue many good parts, yet if she bee a shrewe, her troublesome iarring in the end will . . . causeth her good husewiferie to be euill spoken off” (fol. 83).

\(^{24}\) John Dod and Robert Cleaver, in their marriage manual *A Godly Forme of Housholde Government . . .* (London, 1614), assert the preeminence of the male perspective: “For as men should obey the laws of their cities, so women the manners of their husbands. . . . For an honest matron hath no need of any greater staff, but of one word, or sour countenance” (95).
performance, as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch apparently was when he remarked that “one cannot help thinking a little wistfully that the Petruchian discipline had something to say for itself.”

Shakespeare's play delineates a fantasy, one wherein a man controls the categories that determine women's social status. But such control is an illusion that can be sustained only by making women occupy defined categories. The play shows the process by which Petruchio attempts to give an impression of absolute control, but unless we believe that women really do fall into diametrically opposed categories, types that can be carefully defined and accurately represented, we realize that his control is equally illusory. For his ruse to succeed, he must convince the other characters in the play (including the female characters) that such essential categories obtain. Katharine is no more shrew, or virtuous woman, than is Bianca; the two are only made comprehensible in these terms, but these terms are ones we must believe in for them to be persuasive.

That Katharine was ever a shrew is contradicted by her response to Petruchio's conduct on their wedding day. His absence threatens to make Katharine look like a fool, not a shrew, because her anger would express the gentle station his disregard denies:

No shame but mine. I must, forsooth, be forced
To give my hand opposed against my heart
Unto a mad-brain rudesby full of spleen,
Who wooed in haste and means to wed at leisure.

(3.2.8-11)

No matter how degraded Katharine is by the common estimation of her as a shrew, that abuse is nothing compared to the treatment Petruchio administers in the name of freeing her from that undesirable position. Were he to abandon her, she would not be confirmed a shrew but, rather, would be identified as unmarrigeable. These are distinct categories in Paduan society, as even Baptista's reaction to Katharine's tears attests: "such an injury would vex a very saint, / Much more a shrew of thy impatient humor" (ll. 28–29). Katharine's conduct is thus desirably feminine and illustrates that shrew is a name she is asked to bear only in relation to her submissive sister.

But Petruchio's strategy depends on Katharine bearing the name of shrew without actually performing its role. Like a domestic machiavel, Petruchio undertakes a ruthless program of disorientation to separate Katharine from her former

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Petruchio relishes the power of his role as oppressor, employing socio-political terms to express his method of domination: “Thus have I politicly begun my reign” (4.1.176). Katharine must calm him, or humor him, in order to get food, sleep, or peace. She cannot act like a shrew if she wants to survive. Before he ever returns to Padua, therefore, Petruchio declares his method a success:

This is a way to kill a wife with kindness;  
And thus I’ll curb her mad and headstrong humor.  
He that knows better how to tame a shrew,  
Now let him speak. ’Tis charity to show.  

(ll. 196–99)

Lest his audience think that Katharine seems pathetic, or perhaps begin to doubt the need for such a program, Petruchio reinvokes the identity he supposedly works to eliminate. Katharine will always be a shrew, but under Petruchio’s guidance she will be unable to act as one. Petruchio, therefore, declares Katharine’s essential character in order to illustrate his authority. Just as he does earlier, Petruchio privileges himself as being able to see through the fiction of identity and perceive the character beneath. If Katharine no longer appears to be a shrew, such a transformation is wrought only through Petruchio’s agency. He plays the same game as the rest of the men in Padua, exercising authority over Katharine’s gender identity by denying her investment in her status.

**Enacting Passivity**

Petruchio shares with his audience the assumption that feminine agency and virtue are mutually exclusive. But his program also seems to indicate that absolute feminine passivity is an artificial condition produced by masculine desire. Thus when Katharine asks Grumio for meat, she does so only because Petruchio has humbled her. Katharine is not accustomed to such subservience, as her plea for food makes explicit:

But I, who never knew how to entreat,  
Nor never needed that I should entreat,  
Am starved for meat, giddy for lack of sleep,  
With oaths kept waking, and with brawling fed.  

(4.3.7–10)

Katharine’s words reveal the impossibility of remaining virtuous, attesting to the fact that complete passivity would lead to self-annihilation. But when she beats Grumio because he “feed’st [her] with the very name of meat!” (l. 32), she justifies Petruchio’s claim that such treatment is necessary to enforce passivity. Katharine is right back in the predicament that plagued her at the beginning of
the play, but this time her body becomes literally a register of the gender category that defines her.

Petruchio does not beat Katharine then, but he does abuse her verbally. Since Petruchio acts "under name of perfect love" (l. 12), Katharine is unable to argue against Petruchio's cruelty, because any active resistance to his regulation would demonstrate its necessity. Her only defense is verbal protest, but Petruchio denies even her ability to express her own desires by treating her like a child who must be tended.\(^{26}\) As Joel Fineman argues, "In ways which are so traditional that they might be called proverbial, Shakespeare's \textit{Taming of the Shrew} assumes—it turns out to make no difference whether it does so ironically—that the language of woman is at odds with the order and authority of man."\(^{27}\) Katharine illustrates her own expectations of feminine virtue, claiming that she wants clothing that signifies her worth in the culture: "This doth fit the time, / And gentlewomen wear such caps as these" (ll. 69–70). But Petruchio separates her from such a designation, telling her that she may have the cap she wants \textit{when} she becomes gentle. Petruchio determines \textit{whether} she meets expectations of feminine virtue; until she meets his standards of wifely obedience, she cannot wear signs denoting feminine virtue. Katharine can "tell the anger of [her] heart" (l. 77); she can speak until her heart breaks. But such displays of agency will only validate the authority Petruchio seeks to exert over her. Petruchio's taming, therefore, \textit{denies} any investment she might have in her own identity, repressing feminine agency in her character and thus in his own.

Katharine's predicament illustrates the paradox of feminine virtue, for she must \textit{enact passivity} in order to satisfy Petruchio's expectations of her character. Without another woman against whom to measure her conduct, Katharine's every move demonstrates her agency, which separates her in increasingly extreme ways from basic necessities of existence. She cannot get sleep, food, or quiet unless she returns to the community that originally labeled her \textit{shrew}. But Petruchio will not allow her to return to Padua until her agency appears to derive from his particular will. Hortensio, after witnessing Petruchio's tirade over Katharine's attire, incredulously remarks, "Why, so this gallant will command the sun" (l. 188); but the façade of absolute control is exactly what Petruchio hopes to achieve. Until she agrees that the sun is the moon, Katharine will get no relief from Petruchio's confining domination. When she resists his claim to absolute authority, saying "I know it is the sun

\(^{26}\) Juan Luis Vives expresses this contention in direct terms: "For all though there be one made of two / yet the woman is as daughter vnto her husbande / and of nature more weke" (\textit{A very frutefull and pleasant boke called the Instructio[n] of a Christen Woma[n]}, trans. Richard Hyrd [London, 1529], sig. X3\(^{\text{v}}\)).

that shines so bright” (4.5.5), Hortensio cautions her, “Say as he says, or we shall never go” (l. 11), expressing the pragmatic operation of the passivity Katharine must enact. She must not seem to affirm anything that Petruchio does not first sanction. He must appear in control of her agency for her conduct to pass as submissive. Thus, even if she knows he is wrong, feigning agreement allows her to achieve her own desires:

But the sun it is not, when you say it is not,  
And the moon changes even as your mind.  
What you will have it named, even that it is,  
And so it shall be for Katharine.

(ll. 19–22)

She now no longer wishes to speak her heart’s anger; she just wants to get to Padua to escape the prison in which her husband has kept her since her wedding day.

Petruchio’s project of dissociation, meant to separate Katharine from the feminine aggression characteristic of shrewishness, allows Katharine to exercise her will only when she performs the guise of passive feminine virtue. In her isolated resistance, that agency becomes one of self-annihilation because her actions cannot qualify as passive. The company of other women, however, gives her a kind of agency, because it is her performance of feminine submission that distinguishes her from her former identity. When she finally gets back to Padua, those from whom she was removed on her wedding day act as if Kate remains a shrew, reading her agency only through the interpretive mastery they have hitherto exercised over her character. The widow speaks this assumption in her address to Katharine, playing the old game of differential articulation, asserting her own virtue in relation to Katharine’s supposed shrewishness. She reads Katharine’s agency only in relation to the model of femininity Padua imposes, claiming that Katharine’s agency directs Petruchio’s character: “Your husband, being troubled with a shrew, / Measures my husband’s sorrow by his woe” (5.2.28–29). Petruchio revolutionizes this mode of reading, however, transforming himself and every other character by his reappointment of Katharine’s feminine agency. Her performance has the power to revise his status and re-form the other men and women of the play.

Hence we return to the same old binary system of classification. This time it is Katharine who will set a new standard for feminine virtue, and it is her agency, which paradoxically demonstrates her submission, that illustrates the supposed failures of women. Same as it ever was, the standards for virtue are set and removed from the interests of parties other than the women expected to perform them. As the widow and Bianca make clear during the first round of the contest, the demands made of them are part of a masculine game that should not really concern them. Bianca is busy—she does not want to trouble herself to humor her hus-
band's frivolous command. The widow's reply is even more on point: “She says you have some goodly jest in hand” (5.2.95). Only Katharine, who has been trained to display her feminine agency as the product of her masculine partner's power, comes on command. She seems an agent of Petruchio's will, which makes her conduct count as passive despite its competitive bent. She is unlike the other wives, and her “virtue” defines their conduct as inappropriate. Katharine is the marker of differential articulation, simultaneously ranking women and men in this game.

Categorizations of gender and rank are rearranged in the play's closing scene, but these distinctions are reinforced by their continued ability to mark difference within the community. Cloaking feminine agency in the right garb determines cultural differences between women and men. Petruchio uses Katharine to silence the protest of the other women, preventing their critique—“Fie, what a foolish duty call you this?” (5.2.129)—from taking hold. Petruchio orders Katharine to “tell these headstrong women / What duty they do owe their lords and husbands” (ll. 134–35) as a display of his authority and as a performance of her submission. Katharine's final speech deploys tropes of submission aggressively. Although Katharine retains the strength of character many readers find so appealing, Petruchio coopts her strength for his own benefit. Seeing beyond her feigned obedience, however, does not do much to free Katharine. In fact, if we assume that Katharine remains her “old” self to please Petruchio, we risk accepting the essentialist claims about women by which Petruchio justifies his taming methods in the first place.

RADICAL AFFECT

Feminine virtue is of course a performance, but to believe that shrewishness is not also a performance that theorizes feminine agency in order to stage masculine competition is to subscribe to the gender categories that Paduan culture naturalizes. The widow and Bianca are no more shrews at the end of the play than Katharine was at the beginning; their agency no longer counts as passivity because Katharine's performance outdoes theirs. She acts more passive, embracing a logical contradiction that, through its ridiculous mandate, permits her more freedom than did her former displays of autonomy. Katharine's behavior outstrips any expectations Petruchio could have devised for her; she does not only what he says but reaches beyond what he says, thus demonstrating the failures inherent in the categorical system of identity. By accepting the model of femininity foisted on her, Katharine gains a degree of autonomy. By speaking the category of feminine virtue that masculine discourse would define, she steps outside the boundaries of subjectivity imagined by Petruchio. He cannot help but be pleased, because she makes literal his desire for absolute feminine submission. But by performing her subjec-
tion in such independent terms, she exposes the illusory nature of the power he would wield over her.

Petruchio's rhetorical agility can no longer manage Katharine's body, because by adopting the model of feminine virtue that masculine discourse constructs, she occupies the place of creator which Petruchio covets. By stepping into the role of submission, Katharine evades the categories that her passivity instates. If we read Katharine's final performance of abjection as a response to Petruchio's agency, then we miss the productive power that she ironically wields through the appearance of passivity. Slavoj Žižek argues that the act of violating prohibitions actually serves to sustain the Law, because such transgressions show the need for established order; 28 Katharine's repeated association with the category of shrew, read alongside the widow's and Bianca's protests against the masculine discourse defining them, demonstrates that male control depends on sustaining the myth of female insubordination. Exposing the implications of female subservience, on the other hand, reveals currents of feminine agency that cannot be contained by masculine discourse, desire, or representation.

Katharine is at her most subversive, therefore, when she offers to place her hand under Petruchio's foot, because she makes visible the regimes of power that mark gender difference and decide social status in Padua. When Katharine offers this extreme display, she does "what is allowed, that is, what the existing order explicitly allows, although it prohibits it at the level of implicit unwritten prohibitions." 29 Katharine focuses attention on male domination, but in so doing, she places herself outside its domain. Katharine undermines the male discourse that regulates women by identifying with it unreservedly; by taking on the ideology of femininity that Petruchio promotes, she takes from Petruchio the feminine submission he purports to desire. Katharine's performance limits Petruchio's response to sanction: "Why, there's a wench! Come on, and kiss me, Kate" (5.2.184). This feeble attempt to redirect her agency, moreover, admits that Katharine's performance of passivity does not need masculine intervention for its execution. Katharine's pose of submission, which must be at once sincere and artificial, is thus the most destabilizing aspect of the play. Lucentio's bewilderment at Katharine's transformation—"'Tis a wonder, by your leave, she will be tamed so" (1.193)—bolsters the lingering suspicion that Katharine's virtue and Petruchio's power are illusory. Katharine's speech exposes the agency involved in passivity, and by reifying the masculine rhetoric that seeks to inscribe her, she blurs the division of power meant to separate the genders.

29 Žižek, The Fragile Absolute, 147.
Adapters Lacy and Garrick make more visible the discomfiting implications of Katharine's wifely obedience, but twentieth-century puzzlings over whether or not Katharine "means it" when she enacts her final role also indicate continued cultural unease with her subservience. Robert Heilman identifies what he calls a "revisionist" impulse in post-World War II critical interpretations of Shrew which explains Katharine's behavior as a product of male aggression, and which work to celebrate that strength of character which makes her undesirable in Padua. While more recent new-historicist criticism relates the play's taming school to cultural practices of wife-beating and social coercion, thereby conforming the play's ideologies to early modern notions of wifely subservience, John Fletcher's response in The Woman's Prize; or, The Tamer Tamed (1611) indicates that the social desirability of female abjection was an equally complicated issue in the early seventeenth century. His play, which kills off Katharine and serves revenge to Petruchio through the vehicle of his new wife, Maria, ensures that Petruchio's power does not pass itself off as authentic.

Fletcher's play underscores the ambiguity of Katharine's final speech, suggesting that perfect feminine subservience actually opens a space for feminine power. When "Petruchio Furius" marries Maria, she is known as a mild woman who will be "buried" by Petruchio's methods of domination. Maria departs from this persona, she explains, in order to save Petruchio from an unprovoked taming that will undermine his masculinity: "there's a fellow / Must yet ... Be made a man, for yet he is a monster." Maria becomes shrewish in order to tame Petruchio, but when she gains control, the need for her domination evaporates. Fletcher's work identifies Taming of the Shrew's unsettling ending in its answer, implying that Katharine's performance of obedience eliminates the need for masculine control. In Fletcher at least, when Petruchio is tamed, so is Maria. The Woman's Prize; or, The Tamer Tamed, then, embraces the multiplicity that Katharine's performance enables, even in its reflexive title.

By contrast, the ambiguous ending of Shakespeare’s play now often produces anxiety, as Bernard Shaw illustrates when he describes the final scene as embarrassing and “altogether disgusting to modern sensibility.” Shaw’s discomfort, however, contradicts his sense that the shrew-taming plot gives “an honest and masterly picture of a real man, whose like we have all met.” Shaw’s embarrassment stems, he says, from its portrait of feminine submission but not from its profile of masculine domination. The anxiety Shaw reports, I submit, is the same sort that Lacy and Garrick try to resolve by means of their theatrical responses to Shakespeare’s text: namely, Katharine’s final gesture of obedience reveals Petruchio’s lack of control, despite his performance of authoritative masculinity. Shaw’s desire to apologize to the woman with whom he views Katharine’s routine is yet another attempt to feel for the woman and hence to direct her agency through his own. He wants to assert the reality of masculine agency and the artificiality of feminine passivity, but, as Katharine’s speech demonstrates, the poles of such a dichotomy do not split that neatly. Real or ruse, that’s the frightening question; and Katharine’s bearing suggests that the active/passive binary meant to represent gender difference is really only a ruse.

Playing A-Part

Shaw’s objection to the play’s ending is part of a long critical and theatrical tradition that attempts to see behind the mask of Katharine’s obedience in order to test her conviction. When Shaw insists that Katharine’s passivity must be artificial, he, like many other critics, works to deconstruct the performativity of identity. Such a desire is one that the play itself encourages, since Petruchio uses this strategy to re-form Katharine’s image. Assuming the role Petruchio can never take, therefore, appears to be the fantasy of revisionist interpretations. To see behind her mask does not change our view of Katharine, who remains a shrew and therefore subject to male regulation. Fletcher’s seventeenth-century play, on the other hand, enjoys the multiplicity implied by Katharine’s performance, inviting its audience to take pleasure in the potentialities that her passivity opens up. These very different responses to Shakespeare’s text demonstrate that Katharine’s submission overflows the boundaries of agency that keep Petruchio’s masculine power intact.

34 Shaw, 188.
35 The court of Charles I apparently took up this invitation to enjoyment, because when both Shakespeare’s play and Fletcher’s answer were performed in short succession in 1633, *Shrew* was “liked,” but *The Woman’s Prize* was “very well liked” (*The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. H. J. Oliver [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982], 64).
Taking Katharine's affect of submission seriously, finally, vitiates the notion that feminine passivity must be subject to masculine agency. Instead of putting Petuchio back together again, this speech, with its powerful ability to fragment gender hegemony, serves as a marker of gender performativity which remains unstable.