

“‘Tis Bargain’d ‘Twixt Us”: The Reclamation of Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*

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Abstract

Using games as a theoretical structure helps to bridge the gap between Renaissance expectations and modern wishes concerning Kate’s behaviour and Petruchio’s treatment of her in William Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*, allowing us to recognize which of the two main characters’ actions are for entertainment only and which are intended to produce significant and lasting results that benefit the players and contribute to the forward movement of the play. Two different game structures exist in *The Taming of the Shrew*. The sparks of sexual tension are the most readily apparent indication of the linguistic game, but an analysis of the underlying social games reveals that their relationship is largely about restructuring Kate’s voice and actions in a more acceptable fashion for a Renaissance audience. The key difference is that, while society and/or characters are unchanged by a recreation game, in re-creation games both are transformed in permanent and significant ways.

Key words: *games, role play, recreation/re-creation, social decorum, Shakespeare*

Readers and audiences who dislike *The Taming of the Shrew* often object to what they perceive as a misogynistic posture expressed in *The Taming of the Shrew*. For them, a happy ending to the play can only be achieved by ignoring a great deal of Petruchio’s conduct or applying readings to the play which make Kate’s comportment anachronistic for Renaissance audiences, even though they would also disagree with the social expectations of those audiences. But to read Kate’s aggressive voice and rebellious stance as attempts to assert her independence and reclaim her personal autonomy makes her anachronistic for the Renaissance audiences for whom she was created, audiences who expected women’s demeanour to be fairly circumspect and radically curtailed¹.

If we look past the witty repartee of the surface game to locate such an underlying social game structure, we are able to explain Kate’s behaviour, as well as Petruchio’s, in a far more satisfying manner than simply that of an ongoing skirmish in the “battle of the sexes”. An analysis of *The Taming of the Shrew* which locates and discusses these social games

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reveals that Kate and Petruchio's relationship is largely about restructuring or revising Kate's vocality and boldness in a more acceptable fashion for a Renaissance audience. He is not deliberately subduing her personality or violating her right to be what she is, he is helping her understand how discourse can be most effective.

Games have been with us since time began, according to Johan Huizinga, author of *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1950), and they continue to be used today with great effectiveness. Certainly many dramas portray the struggles of adults as they learn to cope with new challenges just as children learn how to behave as adults—through the games that society plays with its members. To pursue a study of drama as a game, or perhaps a compilation of many games, that educates or teaches its characters new modes of behaviour follows a tradition of perceiving game within drama in which characters learn how to perform their social roles effectively and also provides the literary critic with a means to examine “the goals and norms of ... culture” (Wilson 1990: 8).

Game, as a construct, has five major characteristics upon which all major game theorists such as Huizinga and others cited herein agree. First, play is free time and what we indulge in when we are not involved in the business of living or sustaining our lives. Second, a game is not ordinary life but outside the realm of the everyday and, therefore, somehow, appears special or unusual. Third, even though games are often spontaneous, they create order through their own set of rules which eliminate chaos so that many players may participate, and any deviation from those rules spoils the game and generates disorder. Fourth, they are spatially separated from real life by specific boundaries (i.e. a game board or playing field hedged off from the rest of the world) in which the rules are strictly maintained. Fifth, play is, in spite of a player's utter absorption in it, conscious of being only pretend.

The problem remains that simple definitions of game, a singularly unsimple concept, do not completely suffice for an understanding of how game-playing can be used to delineate between the recreation and re-creation games. Therefore, the distinction between the ostentatious or incidental and the greater challenge and intellectual effort to the player is a distinction between games played for recreational pursuits (i.e. punning, bragging, practical joking, flyting) and those played to re-create, re-educate, or re-claim particular individuals or social situations which threaten to disrupt more productive experiences, allowing players to direct their energies into achieving their goals rather than merely protesting about the inequities they face. Thus, at least two different levels of game playing are

employed in Shakespeare's comedies: the first, which is recreational in nature, and a second which is re-creation and involves a more deliberate action and which is task or goal oriented.

While the major characteristics of game described above can tell us much about play and game, they do not tell us much about those who play those games. And such information is vital if we are to understand the characters who employ games structures—either their motives or their intentions for and during the game. Henry Hamburger, a sociologist and game-theoretician, asks the very questions we need in order to make important determinations about the characters involved in game playing, the same questions which also provide a vital difference between games of recreation and games which re-create: Who has decisions to make? What are the different options available? What will be the results of the various possible combinations of choices? Which results are preferred by whom? Hamburger tells us that, because these questions concern decisions, we must eliminate as players “anyone who has no decisions to make” or “anyone who has no preference among the possible outcomes of the situation” (Hamburger 1979: 2). His emphasis on decision-making allows us to define the key difference between recreation and re-creation games: recreation rarely relies on decision making as anything other than a strategy used to win a game; but, for re-creation game players, however, decisions — and the authority to enforce them — separate players from non-players in every attempt to control and manipulate others into specific reactions.

The re-creation game lies beneath the linguistic level of “entertainment” but is rooted in action and motive rather than on linguistic dexterity. It possesses the same major characteristics of recreation games, but the stakes in re-creation games are much higher than those of recreation games and they almost always help move the plot along, forcing the permanent resolution of an issue brought into contention by another player's move. Bernard Suits says: “To play a game is to engage in activity directed towards bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by rules, where the rules prohibit more efficient in favour of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity” (Suits 1978: 34). These additional features are key issues. Without them, nothing exists within the action of the play to engage our interest beyond the pleasure of the moment. We would neither care about the outcome of the action nor, indeed, if there were action at all.

Re-creation games produce a tension which engages our interest and involves us, intellectually and emotionally, in the machinations of the

antagonist and the conflicts facing the protagonist, so that we care about the resolution of the plot instead of leaving the theatre before the play ends. Roger Callois, author of *Man, Play, and Games*, explains how this tension is a necessary part of play: “[Play] is uncertain activity. Doubt must remain until the end, and hinges upon the denouement. ... An outcome known in advance, with no possibility of error or surprise, clearly leading to an inescapable result, is incompatible with the nature of play” (Callois 1965: 7). Tension implies not only an engagement of our interest, but also that something important is being risked by the players. In re-creation games the thing risked most frequently is not material, but intrinsic. “Play often involves personal vulnerability, challenges, and dangers, calling as it does for self-surrender or self-surpassing behaviour” (Farrell 1975: 40). In games that re-create, players wager a certain outcome at the peril of their honour; in other words, they give their word that a thing will come to pass. If it does, their reputations increase; if not, their reputations suffer.

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Petruchio is the agent by whom Kate is saved from herself, as it were, and from her reputation as an undesirable woman. His taming of her is a clever game in which her intellect and spirit of competition are engaged for the purpose of restraining the behaviour which prevents her from achieving her goals and implementing, instead, an alternate behaviour based on accepted social patterns which Shakespeare’s audience would have recognized and which ultimately proves far more successful than bullying her. Essentially, Petruchio, in claiming that it is “bargain’d ‘twixt us”, reconstructs Kate’s public persona from a woman out of control to one who can control others (2.1.304). He helps her re-create herself while retaining the best parts of her personality, bringing her from a woman who protests to a one who acts to achieve her goals.

Of the two different levels of game playing employed in *The Taming of the Shrew*, the linguistic, or recreation game, is, first and foremost, a mode of self-presentation (Gadamer 1992: 108). Petruchio’s mask of blustering chauvinism is a sign of the game in which entertainment via linguistic self-presentation is the primary reason for playing. This game is witty, spontaneous and often employs elaborate language, different from the plain speech of business or normal living, and is generally exercised in intimate or small circles because it tends to become unwieldy in large or uninitiated groups. His explanation to Hortensio of why he is in Padua makes this clear:

I have thrust myself into this maze,
Happily to wive and thrive as best I may.
Crowns in my purse I have, and goods at home,

And so am come abroad to see the world. [...]
I come to wive it wealthily in Padua;
If wealthily, then happily in Padua. (1.2.55-58 and 75-76)

Linguistic recreation is what we all participated in as children, where pretending was a major factor of the games, in which linguistic dexterity was a highly prized advantage. The stakes at this level are generally never very high, and (accidents aside) a bruised ego is the most serious injury that can be sustained.

The second level of game, the re-creation game, requires a more deliberate stroke to begin the action and is task or goal oriented in its purpose. Because it is goal-oriented, the stakes in re-creational games are much higher and they almost always help move the plot forward by forcing a reaction from another player. The best players, therefore, are those that continually move the plot forward to completion. Perhaps the most challenging example of this type of deliberate stroke is Petruchio's soliloquy at the end of Act 4, scene 1 where he plots how to "kill a wife with kindness" (4.1.208) which, most detractors believe, shows little regard for Kate's welfare and is a plan of torture and repression. However, the speech cannot be taken literally, as he deprives them both—not only her—of a single meal and one night's sleep, and bears a striking resemblance to his soliloquy in Act 2, scene 1, where he cheerfully intends to oppose her anticipated bad temper.

While a number of games are being played between the various characters of this play, and in the Induction, those between Kate and Petruchio provide the clearest examples of the two levels of "game" within the play. Almost all of their encounters fit the paradigm for game discussed above: first, most are played during "free time" since, technically, Kate and Petruchio are on their honeymoon and not engaged in the business of everyday life; second, they are outside the parameters of the everyday in that they are married but virtual strangers to each other, a fact which increases their tension level because they are not yet comfortable enough to act unguardedly; third, their games create order because Petruchio helps Kate find a way to relocate herself within a social construct she had been excluded from for chaotic behaviour; fourth, they are spatially separated from the other characters for most of the game, either appearing alone together or away from family members and long-time acquaintances; fifth, while both characters are utterly absorbed in the game, they are, at various times, conscious of an element of pretend. Petruchio's speech to the audience, prior to meeting Kate for the first time, clearly indicates that he

will deal with Kate's behaviour by pretending, or manipulating, her responses:

I'll attend her here,
And woo her with some spirit when she comes.
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 wash'd with dew;
Say she be mute, and will not speak a word,
Then I'll commend her volubility,
And say she uttereth piercing eloquence;
If she do bid me pack, I'll give her thanks,
As though she bid me stay by her a week;
If she deny to wed, I'll crave the day
When I shall ask the bans, and when be married. (2.1.168-180)

Petruchio's abrupt but clear switch only moments later from the linguistic and recreational game he has been indulging in with Kate to his plain speech signals the beginning of a re-creation game. Here he sets aside the pretend to clearly and deliberately tell her:

setting all this chat aside,
Thus in plain terms: your father hath consented
That you shall be my wife; your dowry 'greed on,
And will you, nill you, I will marry you. [...]
For I am he am born to tame you, Kate,... [...]
I must and will have Katherine to my wife. (2.1.268-271, 276, 280)

With this declaration, Petruchio has three options: first, to let Kate continue to disrupt the lives around her; second, to help her relocate her behaviour in a fashion that will meet with social expectations; or third, to physically intimidate her into submission and conformity. The possible results of his choice are: first, to be a husband at the mercy of an unruly wife; second, to have a spirited, but happy wife who has learned to govern herself; or third, to have a wife frightened of him and broken in spirit. His preferred outcome is easily predicted: he, like most of us, would prefer to have a happy marriage with a woman who retains the spirit which attracted him in the first place. His shift here from playful flirting through language foils Kate's attempts to dismiss him as a suitor, "Let him that mov'd you hither/Remove you hence .../Go, fool" (195-196 and 257), but he persists and the plot – again – moves forward.

Kate becomes a player in this game when she does not leave the very late and madly-dressed Petruchio at the church in Act 3. Her choices to this point are not necessarily good ones, but she does not have a lot of power from which to negotiate, since Petruchio and Baptista have arranged the marriage between themselves without asking her opinion. While she has a preference in the outcome of the game she is involved in, and can choose to be either happy or unhappy once she is married, she has no real decision to make concerning the offer of marriage to her since it is arranged between the two men. The options which she has once she is married, however, are clear: she can either leave her home and take her chances with Petruchio or stay home and be miserable as an unwanted and humiliated old-maid daughter: "Now must the world point at poor Katherine,/And say, 'Lo, there is mad Petruchio's wife,/If it would please him come and marry her!'" (3.2.18-20). Since she has never indicated that she would prefer to remain unmarried, she chooses Petruchio and uncertainty over inescapable misery.

When it comes to linguistic play—the recreational game—Kate is talented but unsophisticated. While she is witty and possesses a skilful tongue, she does not understand the rules of the social game that Petruchio plays so deftly. One reason for this lack may be that there are no other women — save Bianca — in the dramatic structure of *The Taming of the Shrew* from whom she might have learned such necessary social, interactive skills. Her mother is absent, as are aunts and serving women. If this were a real-life situation, Kate as the eldest daughter would have stepped into her absent mother's place and taken over the management of her father's house. Because Baptista is a wealthy man, she may have been directing a large household staff and acting as his hostess from a relatively young age. She, in essence, would have been forced to feign an adult position while Bianca enjoyed being cherished by her father and taught — at least by example — how to behave in social situations. For Kate, language is an aggressive form of rebellion and a sword she wields to protect or to assert herself. The violence of her linguistic attack is an indication of her level of frustration at being unable to interact the way she sees others doing. Yet, this inability on her part does not detract from her skilful and clever manipulation of the language. In her article "Petruchio the Sophist and Language as Creation in *The Taming of the Shrew*", Tita French Baumlin points out that: "Katerina is, in short, using her language to drive away not only potential, undesirable suitors but family members and potential friends, as well. Her language serves then, not to graft her firmly into the network of social interaction but rather to isolate her from all humanity" (Baumlin 1989: 238). She does not

know how to play the games that those around her play, and she needs the encounters with Petruchio in order to learn the socially acceptable forms of language which allow her to enter into the same social and cultural game in which everyone else participates.

Petruchio hopes to help Kate re-create herself in a manner more in keeping with Renaissance expectations for female deportment and to authorize her public voice under more decorous circumstances. His task is to *show* Kate how to act and then help her find a way to suitable reactions. He cannot *tell* her, because she would misinterpret his words as criticism after the fashion of her family and her sister's suitors. In fact, a visual example may be more helpful than words in any case because Kate is equally as skilled as Petruchio at verbal play and may misinterpret his words as an invitation to verbal battle. His use of re-creation games, in this case as both example and instruction, helps move the plot forward for it allows him to show her how her actions appear as well as how it affects others, and he is able to redirect that behaviour and speech into a far more acceptable configuration. Without a re-creation game to help move the plot forward, Kate would continue the disruptive activities which exclude her from society's acceptance.

Petruchio's efforts to show Kate how he values her begin early in their relationship -- practically with his decision to marry her. When Gremio and Tranio bait him about Kate's "I'll see thee hang'd on Sunday first" (2.1.299), after he has announced they will wed in a few days, his cold "If she and I be pleas'd, what's that to you?" (2.1.303) protects Kate from their offensive attacks as well as prevents any more from occurring. He has made it clear that an insult to her is an insult to him.

Petruchio's interest in redirecting Kate's behaviour into more acceptable mien is the impetus behind his seemingly inappropriate behaviour on their wedding day. Petruchio is clearly not bothered by his mad attire and disruptive deportment at the wedding, but at no point does he turn his performance against Kate, instead his actions are directed toward the wedding guests, the priest, and the sexton. His reply to Tranio and Baptista's attempt to get him into more appropriate clothing, "To me she's married, not unto my clothes" (3.2.117), foreshadows the words he will use later with the tailor to drive home the notion that clothes are not important: "'tis the mind that makes the body rich" (4.3.172). The qualities which make Petruchio the man he is are more important than the clothes he wears or the actions he takes, just as what is central to Kate lies not in the turbulent behaviour everyone mistakes for the real Kate.

Petruchio's protestations of burned meat and an improperly made bed can also be attributed to the fact that he believes she is worthy of better things; and, to insure that she comes to realize it also, he personally oversees her re-creation. We must remember that he is her companion throughout the game; nothing happens to her that he does not share. He does not eat or sleep just as she does not eat or sleep. He travels back and forth from his home to Padua the same number of times as she does. He even decides they should both appear in old clothes at Bianca's wedding feast in order to keep the tailor and haberdasher from dictating how Kate should appear in public. All these prove the truth of his earlier claim "that all is done in reverend care of her" (4.1.204). He repeatedly demonstrates that he and she together are better than she has been by herself. Callois explains that play is present in various forms: "some serious, some playful, but all rooted in ... productive culture by allowing the innate human need of rhythm, harmony, change, alternation, contrast and climax, etc., to unfold in full richness ... that strives for honour, dignity, superiority and beauty" (Callois 1965: 75). None of his re-creative acts are torture or punishment as those who object to this play claim; this is, after all, a comedy and not a tragedy. Rather he allows her to behave as she chooses, but he makes clear that consequences will follow those choices.

Petruchio helps Kate re-create her mental image of herself as a person of value whose "honour peereth in the meanest habit" (4.3.174) and is not dependent on or disguised by outward display. That he means to join her in a more modest attire is an outward symbol that she is of more value to him and to his reputation as a person than their fancy dress would be. Martha Andresen-Thom, in her article "Shrew-Taming and Other Rituals of Aggression: Baiting and Bonding on the Stage and in the Wild", points out that they *both* will appear at the wedding feast in the clothing of those who "conspicuously align themselves against a world that sets too much store in appearances" (Andresen-Thom 1982: 135). Her observation cannot fail to point out the differences between this couple who values the inner qualities and the other characters gathered in their finest "ruffs and cuffs, and fardingales, and things" (4.3.56).

We should recognize the interchange between Kate and Petruchio on the road back to Padua for Bianca's wedding in Act 4, scene 5 as the moment at which Kate finally understands what Petruchio is attempting and willingly begins to participate in the game rather than oppose him. Their play is a re-creation game in which Petruchio teaches Kate that he will not ask words or deeds of her frivolously, a knowledge which has a

tremendous impact on the ending of the play. In this scene it only appears as if he wants her to agree with what he says no matter how outlandish it may appear: "It shall be moon, or star, or what I list,/Or ere I journey to your father's house" (4.5.6-8). Contrary to those opinions which point to this section of the play as further evidence of Petruchio's insistence on male superiority even in the most ridiculous of instances, Kate has learned, by untold stops and starts in her journey toward Padua, that Petruchio has a reason for asking her to agree with him. Here, he not only wants her to trust him, but he also authorizes her to speak in public even if it is only silly speech—unlike her father and the suitors who constantly deride her discourse no matter what she says. While she may not understand the reasons for his insistence on this point, she eventually agrees "it shall be so for Katherine" (4.5.22). When Vincentio enters the scene few moments later, Petruchio engages in a game of make-believe designed to test her resolve to trust him and to speak at his direction. But, without warning, Kate comes to understand the larger goal and almost runs away with the game. Her willingness to tease old Vincentio signals a trust in Petruchio that she does not bestow on anyone else and that trust is rewarded by Vincentio's amusement and his calling her a "merry mistress" (4.5.53) rather than the ugly names used by her sister's suitors.

This moment is pivotal in Kate's re-creation because if Kate does not learn to trust Petruchio at some point, they will be doomed to reenact the conflict which has brought them together. Neither will find peace or happiness in their relationship. But Kate does take a chance and, as a result, learns that Petruchio will neither humiliate her nor deliberately place her in a situation where she would embarrass herself. As long as she can trust him to protect her, she can do as he asks. What she knows, and the others do not, is that Petruchio values *her* and would not frivolously request her compliance. Both the recreation and re-creation games at his country house and on the way back to Padua have reconstructed her esteem to the point that she knows his requests somehow concern her value to him and that she need not worry about what others may be thinking of her.

Kate has come to realize that, when Petruchio asks her to say a certain thing or to act a certain way, he is offering her a choice and that her choices will have consequences, as they do for everyone. He demands nothing from her. Certainly he does not demand that she abandon her autonomy and personal sovereignty for his ideal of womanhood. She understands that "To *say* as he says, to *do* as he directs, is not necessarily to *be* what he may wish -- that is, his thing, his possession, an extension of

himself. She can be herself, she can assert herself, moreover, using just those behavioural and verbal forms Petruchio has insisted upon" (Andresen-Thom 1982: 136-137). Her acquiescence, to both his call to come and his commands to first discard her hat and then to instruct the other wives, is a measure of her willingness, in turn, to value Petruchio above what the rest of the assembly may think of the both of them. And because they have become partners joined against those who would devalue them both, Kate does not address society's expectations of women (something in which she *is* an expert), but confronts a husband's realistic expectation for the woman he values above all others: that their "soft conditions and ... hearts/Should well agree with [their] external parts" (5.2.167-168). Kate's humble offer to place her hand beneath her husband's foot, far from being surrender, is a public acknowledgement of his value to her as helpmate and chief supporter, just as his prevention of the action and his support of her public voice is a measure of his valuation of her right to speak and act as she chooses.

And speak she does. The supposedly repressive content of Kate's final speech is at odds with the implicit message of independence represented by a powerful female protagonist giving the longest speech of the play (Newman 1986: 99). No one has forced her to speak *these* words; she makes her own choice to do so. It contains no references to the supposed moral inferiority of women or of alleged unalienable male rights to expect submission from women. Its emphasis, instead, is on the "reciprocity of duties in marriage, based on the complementary natures of man and woman", as well as the reciprocity of respect and value of a married couple for one another's public and private reputations (Bean 1983: 68-69).

Throughout their interactions in the play, Petruchio has repeatedly stressed the fact that he honours Kate. His defence of her to the suitors, the wedding guests, and the tailor and haberdasher have convinced her that she can trust him to protect and defend her against those who would devalue her. His constant reinforcement of her public voice and teaching her the proper times in which to speak boldly have told her that he respects her right to express opinions and make observations about the world in which she lives. She has learned that, as long as he continues to protect and care for her, "to watch the night in storms, the day in cold" (5.2.150) so to speak, she can do as he asks. Her entire speech, in fact, is a reiteration of the bargain she and Petruchio have forged between them during her recreation: to value and honour the one who has earned trust. As long as he does this, she can do anything he asks of her. Therefore, we must see Kate's

speech as her vocal contract with Petruchio to depend on and believe in his appreciation of her abilities.

Her final speech cannot be taken out of the context of the game playing --both recreational and re-creational -- that precedes it. Perhaps here, where she has an opportunity to castigate the company for their treatment of her, we see the strongest evidence of her re-creation. She has never pretended to be anything less than what she has always portrayed herself: an intelligent and independent human being capable of making her own decisions, who values herself and is of value to those who can appreciate what she has to offer. She restrains any impulse she might have had to behave in an unseemly fashion and because she speaks rationally, persuasively, sincerely, and quietly, they have no other recourse but to listen. She remains what she has always been, but now she possesses an awareness of the rules of which, earlier, she was unaware: "My mind that been as big as one of yours,/ My heart as great, my reason haply more" (5.2.170-171).

Petruchio helps Kate realize that she lacks a recognizable discourse which allows her value to be acknowledged and ratified by those who originally scorned her. So, rather than Petruchio's "taming" of Kate being representative of the brutal mistreatment dealt to women who defy the patriarchal order, Petruchio instead teaches Kate how and when to re-create her words and actions to harmonize with social expectations. He provides her the means by which she is able to join in a social and cultural game which allows her to manipulate the situation and scold those who have scolded and manipulated her.

Notes

1. Authors of conduct books of the period repeatedly stressed the importance of a woman curtailing her public appearances, her tongue, and her public and private demeanour. For example, see Juan Luis Vives, *A Very Fruitful and Pleasant Book Called the Instruction of a Christian Woman*, (1523), Edmund Tilney, *The Flower of Friendship* (1568), and Philip Stubbes, *A Crystal Glass for Christian Women, containing a Most Excellent Discourse of The Godly Life and Christian Death of Mistress Katherine Stubbes* (1591).

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