

Barbara Józefik

“THE TAMING OF THE SHREW” — PATRIARCHY AND POWER IN A RELATIONSHIP, FAMILY, CULTURE

Jagiellonian University, Faculty of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry, University Hospital of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Laboratory of Systemic Psychology and Psychotherapy

power
patriarchate
Shakespeare

Summary

What is Shakespeare’s „The Taming of the Shrew” about? Is it a simple and easy to read comedy? What does it tell modern readers and viewers? The article presents the reflections developed from the perspective of a psychotherapist sensitive to the issues raised by the feminist movement and gender studies. The author shares her interpretation of the play and draws the attention to the definition of a woman’s role in a patriarchal culture, the resulting power dynamics in intimate relations, in family, in society, and to the difficulty in acquiring autonomy. She reflects on the meaning of the language, the meaning of narration in defining an identity, in defining relations, including those abusive ones. She comments on the confinement in stereotypical descriptions of the sexes which seems to be mirrored also in the classification and experiencing of the emotionality of women and men by psychotherapists, psychiatrists, and psychologist. Finally, she examines possible hypotheses related to the relationship dynamics in the family of the protagonist. All these considerations touch upon the key issues on every level: individual, relational, and social, making the play still truly relevant.

Maciej Pilecki, in his text Hamlet [1], which launches a series of articles inspired by Szymon Chrzóstowski and referring to the selected works of Shakespeare, cited the figure of Professor Maria Orwid’s father, who read Shakespeare’s play in September 1939, when German troops were entering Przemyśl. “What was Counsellor Pfeffer reading?” – this question troubled Maciej – “was it something humorous, perhaps *The Taming of the Shrew*?” We don’t know the answer, and we don’t know if it was *The Taming of the Shrew*, one of Shakespeare’s earliest works. What instead seems to be beyond doubt when we analyze the play is its seemingly humorous nature. The aim of this text is to support this thesis.

First, a brief plot summary. The play takes place in Padua, where a rich bourgeois Baptisto Minola, a father of two daughters – the elder Katherina, described as a mischievous wretch full of humour, and the younger, beautiful and well-mannered Bianca – wants to marry them off. Bianca has many admirers (among them the young and rich Lutentio and Hortensio and the aging merchant Gremio), but she cannot (because of her father’s decision) marry until her older sister finds a husband.

This makes the situation a stalemate. Katherina, because of her sharp tongue, has an established reputation as a villain, hence there are no suitors for her hand. The intrigue begins when desperate admirers of the beautiful and sweet Bianca, seeing little chance of anyone falling in love with Katherina, decide to find a candidate ready to take up the challenge, enticing him with the prospect of a sizeable dowry. Such a candidate turns out to be Petruchio of Verona, who is interested, as he makes no secret of it, in the material side of the marriage.

This simple story takes place within the complicated figure of the theatre within the theatre, or even, as Freedman (1991) writes [2], the theatre within the theatre within the theatre. The prologue that precedes the drama introduces the figure of an heir who arranges a performance at his manor using a drunk and unconscious simple boiler-maker named Sly, found by the roadside. He is disguised as the owner of the manor, and after awakening from his drunken stupor is reassured that this is his true state, and that the previous years when he lived as a simple man were a kind of delusion. Sly assumes a new identity and, as the heir, watches the play *The Taming of the Shrew* performed at the manor as if it was only for him. This structure of the play shows its specific context, moving in the space of assumed identities, thus posing the question what is and what is not reality. The play is staged in the courtly home theatre, so it is a theatre within a theatre, but at the same time it is performed for the actual theatre audience, which is the third level of illusion. Such a structure of the prologue enriches and gives new meaning to a text already exceptionally dense with interpretations.

Femininity in the patriarchal discourse

The Taming of the Shrew can be considered a flagship text on feminist and gender issues, illustrating how models of femininity, the role of women, expectations towards them, power relations between the two sexes, including power relations in marriage, are constructed in patriarchal culture. The axis of the play is the tension of the female role resulting from the way it is typically defined in patriarchal culture. It outlines the image of a woman confined to the domestic space, where she functions as a daughter dependent on her father's will and then as a wife dependent on her husband's will. The discourse of "domestication" and subjugation is so obvious that Shakespeare was able to build a comedy on it by introducing a rebellious, tough Katherina who questions the obviousness of this discourse and the obviousness of subjugation. This can be seen in the following dialogue, in which the father makes clear his desire to marry Katherina as a condition for the marriage of his younger daughter, his beloved Bianca, while Katherina questions this intention of the father by pointing out the transactional aspect of the situation in which she is the commodity.

BAPTISTA

Gentlemen, importune me no farther,

For how I firmly am resolved you know:

That is, not to bestow my youngest daughter

Before I have a husband for the elder.

KATHERINA

*I pray you, sir, I sit your will
To make a stale of me amongst these mates?*

And further:

BAPTISTA

Why, how now, daughter Katherine? In your dumps?

KATHERINA

*Call you me daughter? Now I promise you
You have showed a tender fatherly regard,
To wish me wed to one half lunatic,
A madcap ruffian and a swearing Jack,
That thinks with oaths to face the matter out. [Act 1, Sc. 1] [3]*

Looking at the time and place of the play, the father’s policy it is not surprising, marriages were arranged for centuries, a substantial dowry was an important attribute of a bride until modern times, a woman was expected to be an exemplary wife and mother, which in fact was supposed to be the aim of her life. Women remained under intense pressure of societal expectations, often being subjected to not only psychological but also physical violence. Virginia Woolf, in her essay *A Room of One’s Own* [4], quotes a passage from George Trevelyan’s *History of England* in which the author describes the position of women in the 15th century: “wife-beating was universally recognized as the right of every man and practiced without any shame in the heights as well as in the lowlands of society.... If a daughter refused to marry the gentleman her parents had chosen for her she risked being locked up, beaten, having her hurled around the room, all without the slightest protest from the public. Marriage was not a matter of personal feelings, but of family interests.” [per: 4, p. 170]. From this perspective, one should appreciate Katherine’s father’s concern for the emotional aspect of his daughter’s relationship, once a suitor had emerged and being interested in the dowry was ready to quickly finalize the marriage:

PETRUCHIO

*Let specialties be therefore drawn between us,
That covenants may be kept on either hand.*

BAPTISTA

*Ay, when the special thing is well obtained,
That is, her love, for that is all in all. [Act 2, Sc. 1] [3]*

This shows Baptista as a man who would not want to use coercion, for whom perhaps his daughter’s happiness would be important, although in the end he does not take her opinion in this matter into consideration. He treats the marriage of his younger daughter Bianca in a similar way, taking into account the size of a candidate’s fortune (“That can assure my daughter greatest dower Shall have my Bianca’s love “ [Act 2. Sc. 1]).

Katherine’s rather quick acceptance of the marriage proposal is surprising, although the sequence in which she resists Petruchio’s advances would foreshadow longer-lasting resistance. Also surprising is her growing anxiety when her fiancé delays his arrival for the wedding:

KATHERINA

*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.*

[...]

*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." [Act 3, Sc, 2] [3]*

This illustrates the power of the discourse associated with the role of a wife. When the marriage scenario is threatened, Katherine anticipates social rejection, experiences shame, ridicule. The oppression she finds herself in is clear – even if her earlier behavior was to be understood as an act of rebellion, it still does not bring a solution, does not lead to independence. It seems that Katherine ultimately accepts her role as a wife and agrees to the future defined by that role.

Apprenticing to the role of wife

A key aspect that is supposed to account for the comedic nature of the play is the process of apprenticing Katherine to properly play the role of an obedient wife. Petruchio proves to be a clever adversary, avoiding direct confrontation with Katherine, and aware of the importance of language, he uses paradox, reversing the meaning of her actions and statements and even more, connoting them positively. This is well illustrated in the passage when, after a sequence in which Katherine, using various arguments, rejects Petruchio's efforts, he comments:

*No, not a whit. I find you passing gentle.
'Twas told me you were rough, and coy, and sullen,
And now I find report a very liar.
For thou art pleasant, gamesome, passing courteous,
But slow in speech, yet sweet as springtime flowers.
Thou canst not frown, thou canst not look askance,
Nor bite the lip as angry wenches will,
Nor hast thou pleasure to be cross in talk. [Act 2, Sc. 1] [3]*

This strategy, which at first may seem to be an opportunity to liberate Katherine from the narrative of a bad girl that is perpetuated within and outside the family, in fact mystifies the reality, invalidates Katherine, her expectations, her requests, and confronts her with her lack of influence, her own powerlessness. For the possibility of Katherine building her own self-narrative [5] and co-creating a common one [6] does not appear here¹.

¹) This passage illustrating the process of subordination of female narrative to male narrative seems to be an ever-present and seen manifestation of patriarchal culture. It is worth quoting in this context Rebecca Solnit's book entitled "Men Explain Things to Me" [7].

Moreover, Petruchio’s strategy is explicitly embedded in the discourse of power. Petruchio’s sense of power is not concealed by him; on the contrary, it is stated explicitly, leaving no room for doubt that Katherina’s opinion has no meaning for him:

KATHERINA [asking Petruchio so they stay at their own wedding]:

Let me entreat you.

PETRUCHIO

*I am content you shall entreat me stay,
But yet not stay, entreat me how you can.*

[...]

*But for my bonny Kate, she must with me.
Nay, look not big, nor stamp, nor stare, nor fret;
I will be master of what is mine own.
She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house,
My household stuff, my field, my barn,
My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything. [Act 3, Sc. 2] [3]*

Katherina is reduced to an object that Petruchio owns: as his wife, she is his property, as are his possessions and movables. At first Katherina tries to fight for her opinion, for her freedom, for her place in the relationship

KATHERINA

*Why, sir, I trust I may have leave to speak,
And speak I will. I am no child, no babe.*

[...]

*My tongue will tell the anger of my heart,
Or else my heart, concealing it, will break,
And, rather than it shall, I will be free
Even to the uttermost, as I please, in words. [Act 4, Sc. 3] [3]*

Ultimately, she loses. She is perversely invalidated; Petruchio’s strategies are consistently and consciously employed by him. He refuses to give her food under the pretext of health concerns, he rejects the clothes she ordered earlier as, in his opinion, not beautiful enough for her. This happens in the face of Katherina’s impotent opposition, unsuccessfully demanding the right to decide for herself. Although she recognizes the game her husband is playing against her, she finds no way to challenge it.

*The more my wrong, the more his spite appears.
What, did he marry me to famish me?*

[...]

*Am starved for meat, giddy for lack of sleep,
With oaths kept waking and with brawling fed.
And that which spites me more than all these wants,
He does it under name of perfect love,*

*As who should say, if I should sleep or eat
'Twere deadly sickness or else present death. [Act 4, Sc. 3] [3]*

There is no doubt that Katarzyna experiences psychological violence in various areas of her life. We observe a process of “becoming a victim”, a gradual adaptation, a search for survival strategies in this situation. Ultimately she “chooses” total submission, even when it defies common sense, as illustrated by the following conversation between the couple:

*PETRUCHIO
I say it is the moon.
KATHERINA
I know it is the moon.
PETRUCHIO
Nay, then you lie. It is the blessed sun.
KATHERINA
Then God be blest, it is the blessed sun.
But sun it is not, when you say it is not,
And the moon changes even as your mind.
What you will have it names, even that it is,
And so it shall be so for Katherine.*

[...]

*Forward, I pray, since we have come so far,
And be it moon, or sun, or what you please.
And if you please to call it a rush candle,
Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me. [Act 4, Sc. 5] [3]*

This is a watershed moment illustrating Katherina’s disappearance, her abandonment of herself, her own opinion, her own assessment of reality in favour of her husband’s whims. One could say that a process of subjugation has taken place, which is further emphasized in one of the play’s final scenes: the contest for the most obedient wife is won by Katherina, who also praises the status quo.

The title of the play, *Taming of the Shrew*, is worth a moment’s pause. The use of the word taming to describe the process of training animals is not accidental; indeed, the play may seem a specific training instruction how to make a woman an obedient wife.

Petruchio is precise about this:

*Thus have I politicly begun my Reign,
And 'tis my hope to end successfully.*

[...]

*She ate no meat today, nor none shall eat.
Last night she slept not, nor tonight she shall not.
As with the meat, some undeserved fault
I'll find about the making of the bed,
And here I'll fling the pillow, there the bolster;*

*This way the coverlet, another way the sheets.
Ay, and amid this hurly I intend
That all is done in reverend care of her.
And, in conclusion, sha shall watch all night,
And, is she chance to nod, I'll rail and brawl,
And with the clamor keep her still awake.
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,
Not let him speak; 'tis charity to shew. [Act 4, Sc.1] [3]*

It is difficult not to see a training full of humiliation, derogation and breaking in the above description.

Petruchio's practice and Katherina's behavior in response to it are clearly performative: we observe the process of creating the identity of an obedient wife. Judith Butler (2008) [7], analyzing the process of gender formation, put forward the thesis that the identity of a subject is created through repetition, through acting out behaviors considered appropriate for a given gender (performance), which co-constructs the subject and at the same time is one of the basic mechanisms that sustain the current discourses and reproduce a given social order.

Female anger

It is no coincidence that Shakespeare identified the expression of anger and insubordination as the most controversial and unacceptable traits of female behavior (““Katherine the curst,” A title for a maid, of all titles the worst “ [Act 1, Sc.2]). The expectation of submission and obedience by women, central to patriarchy, has a very long tradition, hence the specific relationship to the feelings of anger, frustration, or rage expressed by women.

In this context it is worth recalling Jane Ussher's text [9] *Diagnosing difficult women and pathologising femininity: Gender bias in psychiatric nosology*, in which the author analyses the history of pathologising femininity and controlling “difficult” women by referring to psychiatric categories², of which diagnosing hysteria was a flagship practice. The researcher, referring also to the works of other authors, points out that nowadays hysteria has been replaced by borderline personality diagnosis, significantly more often diagnosed in women compared to men. Becker [10, 11] describes it as a “feminized” psychiatric diagnosis, due to large differences in the frequency of diagnosis of the disorder (at the ratio of 3:1 to 7:1). Symptoms such as emotional lability, depressed mood, impulsivity, insecurity, and unstable self-image, which are stereotypically considered “feminine traits,” are indicated. What significantly differentiates the two disorders (hysteria and borderline personality disorder), and what is also an important diagnostic criterion, is the experience of “intense anger” [11]. Jimenez [1997] points out that although both diagnostic categories adopt gender stereotypes

²⁾ This issue is extensively presented by Lisa Appignanesi in her book “Mad, Bad, and Sad. A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the present” [12].

in positioning specific women as “crazy,” there has been an important shift in the perception of their behavior: “if the hysterical woman was a wronged woman, then the woman with a borderline personality is dangerous” [13, s. 163]. The researcher indicates that similar behaviors and emotions in women are described as pathological and in men as justified. This is supported by the research of Lisa Feldman Barrett and Eliza Bliss-Moreau [14], who showed that men’s sadness and anger were linked to situational factors, while women’s sadness or anger was linked to their characteristics and “emotionality.” Dana Becker points out that female patients who express anger elicit the strongest countertransference reactions from psychotherapists, and that the diagnosis of borderline personality disorder represents “the most pejorative of personality labels” [11, s. 423]. This is despite the fact that there is a wealth of research pointing to these women’s traumatic experiences of violence and sexual abuse [15], justifying their experiencing strong emotions, including anger.

It is hard to disagree that the process of diagnosis reflects cultural discourses associated with traditional definitions of femininity/masculinity, making it difficult to understand women’s emotions arising from their position in society, in the family, and in intimate relationships. It is also difficult not to see that sharing cultural stereotypes is part of maintaining the cultural status quo. Despite the development of scientific medical discourse, the perception of women as beings close to nature, determined by their reproductive functions, acting under the influence of “hormones and thus deprived of self-control and rationality of action” is still well established [16, s. 178]. Buczkowski (2005), referring to the work of Foucault, puts it this way: The concept of a woman as a subject under the control of her own body and in need of medical care and maintenance of stability functioned as an idea supporting the concept of an autonomous, not influenced by biology, transforming bodily impulses into rationalized thought, independent and autonomous man [16, p. 178]. Failure to recognize that men’s behavior is also determined by hormones, the intensity of which changes with the rhythm of the day and the course of life, allowed for the maintenance of a dichotomous separation between the two sexes and the treatment of man as belonging to culture, in opposition to woman, who represented nature³.

Dressed in a historical costume, *The Taming of the Shrew* may seem anachronistic and outdated, yet it is almost a one-to-one description of the situation of women in many cultures. One can cite, for example, the dramatic position of women in Afghanistan under the Taliban rule, or the so-called honour killings of young girls or women that occur in the Muslim world. What is painful, it also becomes unexpectedly relevant in the Polish context, if we consider a woman’s right to decide for herself and to have freedom of choice as one of the main themes of the play. The socio-political events of last autumn, known as the Women’s Strike, triggered by the introduction of legal regulations prohibiting abortion in the case of irreversible damage to the foetus, provoked enormous anger and rage among women. They were expressed in various ways, including the use of vulgar words, including the now symbolic “wy*****ć [“f**k off”] [17]. Public sphere and media outlets were quickly filled with edifying comments about inappropriate, unfeminine forms of expression, forms that stood in stark contrast to the “true nature of femininity” [18].

³) It is interesting that the stereotype assuming stability, logic, and rationality of men as a permanent feature persists despite the examples of their impulsive actions present in the social space.

Family relations

The Taming of the Shrew is also a text about family relations in a specific phase of the family life cycle and in a family with a specific structure. For we have a father living with his two adult daughters in sharp conflict, and even with a situation in which Bianca seems to be Katherina’s victim.

We know nothing about Baptist’s wife, the mother of Katherina and Bianca. She probably died. When? We don’t know. Knowing this would be very important to understanding the dynamics of the relationship between the sisters and their relationship with their father. If she died giving birth to the younger Bianca, and death in childbirth was relatively common in the past, the older daughter’s anger towards her sister, blaming her for the loss of her mother and also for being emotionally abandoned by the grieving father would be understandable. If the mother’s death had occurred later, we might have asked about the process of the illness, hypothesized about the sisters’ unresolved positively rivalry for their parents’ affection, position in the family, and relationship with their mother and father. There is no doubt that Katherina is jealous of her father’s relationship with Bianca and has a sense of rejection:

KATHERINA

*What, will you not suffer me? Nay, now I see
She is your treasure, she must have a husband,
I must dance barefoot on her wedding day
And, for your love to her, lead apes in hell.
Talk not to me. I will go sit and weep
Till I can find occasion of revenge. [Act 2, Sc. 1] [3]*

When we get to know the sisters, the subject of the dispute, not explicitly voiced by Katherina, seems to also be jealousy of Bianca’s popularity and her many suitors:

KATHERINA

*Of all thy suitors here I charge thee tell
Whom thou lov’st best. See thou dissemble not.*

BIANKA

*Believe me, sister, of all the men alive
I never yet beheld that special face
Which I could fancy more than any other.*

KATHERINA

Minion, thou liest. Is ‘t not Hortensio?

BIANKA

Is it for him you do envy me so? [Act 2, Sc. 1] [3]

It seems that the younger sister’s popularity is experienced by Katherina in the context of the family experience as a confirmation of inferiority, a confirmation of rejection.

Without information about family history, we are left in the realm of fantasy, hypothesis, and questions. We can wonder about Katherina’s bond with her mother, about the possible course of the grieving process. Did she experience closeness, understanding of her feelings, was she supported? One wonders about the fixed narrative of Katherina as difficult, fractious,

and sharp-tongued. What is the history of this narrative? Did these descriptions emerge in childhood or later, who formulated them, under what circumstances, in response to what events? Are we dealing with early projections of parents, of those around us, resulting in a dichotomous differentiation between the sisters: the devilish Katherina and the angelic Bianca? Were Katherina's cockiness and intolerance her way of attracting attention? Whose: her ailing mother, her grieving father? Was obnoxiousness a strategy to be in the center or a necessity to be heard and included? We are left without these answers, but there is no doubt that the way Katherina is perceived and called by others, and the way she presents herself, shows that "being mean" became her autobiographical story, a dominant story in which she was trapped, but which she sustained, as did those around her. It prevented from seeing other traits of Katherina's character, her needs, and her plans. The change in her behavior that came about as the result of her husband's violent strategies, which elicited praise from men and criticism from women, including her sister Bianca, was not of her own choosing. In this sense, the new narrative remained an enslavement that did not allow for the full expression of Katherina's experience.

Identity Games

Shakespeare's play can also be viewed from the perspective of identity issues, as it is extremely common for its characters to pretend to be someone other than they really are or to be mistaken for someone else. Disguising oneself is, among other things, an important aspect of the men's strategies to achieve their goal, which in this case was to marry Bianca. It introduces the misunderstandings and tensions necessary for comedy, while at the same time illustrating in a caricatured way the cultural pattern of courtship, the socially limited opportunities for young people to get to know each other, and in fact touches on the freedom of choice of spouse.

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, these strategies are successful, the intrigue is rewarded, Lucentio, one of the suitors, fortunately for him wins Bianca. He makes an effort to repair family relations by explaining the motives of his actions and asking for forgiveness:

*Love wrought these miracles. Bianca's love
Made me exchange my state with Tranio,
While he did bear my countenance in the town,
And happily I have arrived at the last
Unto the wished haven of my bliss.
What Tranio did, myself enforced him to.
Then pardon him, sweet father, for my sake. [Act 5, Sc. 1] [3]*

Pretending to be someone else also takes the form of a particular role reversal, because here the master disguises himself as the servant, and the servant as the master. This procedure breaks the rigid, unchangeable social stratification. Already in the prologue, the drunken boiler-maker Sly is disguised as the owner of the manor, thanks to which he experiences for a moment a different, comfortable life, previously inaccessible to him, only to be thrown back into the rut of his own fate. All this for a moment of cruel amusement by the owner of the mansion:

LORD

O monstrous beast, how like a swine he lies!

Grim death, how foul and loathsome is thine image!

Sirs, I will practice on this drunken man.

What think you, if he were conveyed to bed,

Wrapped in sweet clothes, rings put upon his fingers [...] [Ind. Sc.1] [3]

What is the purpose of this play? To experience power? Being able to view another's life as in a mirror? Pushing away the fear of a fall, illness and death? This aspect of the dress-up game, in which anything is possible, at the same time shows impassable barriers, confronts with what from a social and cultural perspective is unattainable and impossible to really change.

Concluding remarks

The question arises whether Shakespeare in *The Taming of the Shrew* affirms the socio-cultural subordination of women to men and the patriarchal order as the only way to enable the harmonious coexistence of both sexes (“love, peace at home, the husband's seriousness, the wife's obedience, in a word everything blissful and sweet”) and in this context shows the process of training for the role of the wife as the acquisition of the “proper” identity through the “liberation” from the role of the unaccepted and ridiculed shrew? This question is heatedly debated and its resolution determines the forms of theatrical productions. It is not by chance that Anna Świrszczyńska (1973) [19] in her poem *Shakespeare: The Taming of the Shrew* commented on the performance she was watching:

A Renaissance actor

swinging a whip

chases a girl around the stage,

who has rebelled

against the fate

of the girl.

The men of the 20th century

applaud.

In the disputes about the author's intentions and the interpretation of the play, often there is an option suggesting Shakespeare's critical attitude towards the dominant culture of his time, pointing out that the process of Katherina's taming shown in such an ironic, grotesque form, exposing the oppression of women, has in fact a subversive potential: by showing the relations of power between the sexes, it exposes violence and thus deconstructs the shown social arrangement and femininity defined in terms of subordination [2]. In this sense, the play would be an example of a pre-feminist condemnation of patriarchal domination and an argument for contemporary “feminine freedom.” Such views are represented, for example, by Conall Morrison, the director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, who writes: “I find it gobsmacking that some people see the play as misogynistic. I believe that it is a moral tale. I believe that it is saying – “do not be like this” and “do not do this.”

“These people are objectionable.” [...] And they’re betting on the women as though they are dogs in a race or horses. It’s reduced to that. And it’s all about money and the level of power. [...] It is so self-evidently repellent that I don’t believe for a second that Shakespeare is espousing this. And I don’t believe [...] [he] would have some misogynist aberration. It’s very obviously a satire on this male behaviour and a cautionary tale [...] That’s not how he views women and relationships, as demonstrated by the rest of the plays. This is him investigating misogyny, exploring it and animating it and obviously damning it” [20].

The argument for this thesis includes the construction of the play described earlier: a theatre within a theatre within a theatre. Freedman [citing: 2] suggests that Shakespeare overrides stage reality in this way, and by doing so it seems to question author’s identification with the views of the play’s characters. Taking this point of view, we could argue that he questions the literalness of the reading in favour of a critical view of the reality presented in the play and interpretations that question the presented social order, the position of women in an intimate relationship, in the family, in culture. But wouldn’t opting for this optimistic interpretation be just some wishful thinking, reinforced by a sense of embarrassment or guilt? The epilogue is unequivocal, depriving us of any illusions, because in this final fragment we return once again to our boiler-man Sly, who, after leaving the court, inspired by the play, proclaims his praise of training and his readiness to practice it on his wife. With this gesture by the author, violent relationships are symbolically sustained. Shakespeare, despite his dramatic genius, was not ahead of his time.

Reading *The Taming of the Shrew* nowadays, we can see and sense the caricatured nature of the depicted events. Although we move away from thinking about the relationship between a woman and a man in terms of power, obedience, violence, we are at the same time painfully aware that we are still in a process that requires deep reflection and changes in the socio-cultural space.

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e-mail address: barbara.jozefik@uj.edu.pl