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Source: *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Autumn, 1997, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Autumn, 1997), pp. 273-294

Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2871017>

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Civilizing Subordination: Domestic Violence and *The Taming of the Shrew*

EMILY DETMER

FEMINIST AND CULTURAL HISTORIANS HAVE CONVINCINGLY DEMONSTRATED that “rebellious women” were a concern for Englishmen during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Evidence of anxiety about disorderly women, or the “contest for the britches,” as Linda Woodbridge refers to it, can be found at multiple discursive sites such as popular plays, ballads, accounts of domestic crimes, legal treatises, conduct books, and sermons on “proper” interpersonal behavior within the family. The willingness to discipline rebellious women, sometimes brutally, is documented in the accounts of the legal and extralegal “correction” of scolds and shrews as well as itinerant or homeless women, bastard-bearers, whores, and witches.¹ The practice of public communal disciplining, both imagined and enacted, contrasts with the private domestic disciplining that was being debated in prescriptive literature. The same culture that still “felt good” about dunking scolds, whipping whores, or burning witches was, during this period, becoming increasingly sensitive about husbands beating their wives.²

While we have little evidence by which to judge whether men actually became less physically violent in the home, it is clear that prescriptive literature ceased to authorize the specific violence of wife-beating. The vigor of

I am immensely grateful to Frances E. Dolan for her substantial and insightful comments regarding this essay as well as her willingness to share drafts of her edition of *The Taming of the Shrew: Texts and Contexts* and her essay “Household Chastisements: Gender, Authority, and Domestic Violence in *The Taming of the Shrew*.” I would also like to thank Deb Burks, Teresa Lyle, Barbara Mowat, Charles Spinosa, Valerie Wayne, and Shannon Wilson for their generous and constructive criticism.

¹ While the complete legal history of early modern women has yet to be written, much work has been done in the field. For general studies of the early modern period which include insightful explorations of women’s historical experiences of the law, see Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988); Amussen, “‘Being Stirred to Much Unquietness’: Violence and Domestic Violence in Early Modern England,” *Journal of Women’s History* 6.2 (1994): 70–89; Lynda E. Boose, “Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman’s Unruly Member,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (1991): 179–213; Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550–1700* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1994); Martin Ingram, “Riding, Rough Music and the ‘Reform of Popular Culture’ in Early Modern England,” *Past and Present* 105 (1984): 79–113; Jenny Kermode and Garthine Walker, eds., *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1994); David Underdown, “The Taming of the Scold: the Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England,” *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), 116–36; Joy Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women and Female Power in the Street Literature of Early Modern England and Germany* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1992); Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womanhood, 1540–1620* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1984); and Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580–1680* (London: Hutchinson, 1982).

² On a culture’s willingness to use brutal punishments for some transgressions but not others, see Amussen’s discussion of a “moral economy of violence” in “‘Being Stirred,’” 73–74.

public discourse on wife-beating exemplifies a culture at work reformulating permissible and impermissible means for husbands to maintain control over the politics of the family, without, however, questioning that goal. This new boundary was built on notions of class and civil behavior. Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* acts as a comedic roadmap for reconfiguring these emergent modes of "skillful" and civilized dominance for gentlemen, that is, for subordinating a wife without resorting to the "common" man's brute strength. Despite the play's efforts to place Petruchio on the "gentle" side of the new formulation of permissible ways to subordinate a wife, I regard Petruchio's civilized domination as domestic violence nonetheless.³

A feminist model of abuse, which I will discuss in detail below, informs my use of the term *domestic violence* to name Petruchio's civilized domination. Rather than dismiss Petruchio's method as farcical or as a mutual game between two "equal" players, I propose to take Petruchio's "civilized" strategies seriously.⁴ Excavating the cultural assumptions about domestic violence, past and present, complicates the comedy of taming a shrew. To enjoy the comedy of the play, readers and viewers must work to see domestic violence from the point of view of an abuser—that is, they must minimize the violence and, at the same time, justify its use. My critique of Shakespeare's *Taming* reaches beyond calling attention to or sympathizing with Kate's oppressed position; I argue that the play signals a shift toward a "modern" way of managing the subordination of wives by legitimizing domination as long as it is not physical.

I do not mean to suggest that Shakespeare's intended audience would recognize Petruchio's behavior as abusive. On the contrary, I am arguing that many would have seen Petruchio's method of "taming" the rebellious Kate as ingeniously complying with the early modern wife-beating reforms. Historically situating Petruchio's "taming" as a new and improved kind of dominance is important because of the way its representation coincides with the beginning of a modern reform model, a model that, by locating violence only in physical injury, denies the inherent violence of domination itself.

Within these historical and feminist frameworks, I question the assumptions made by twentieth-century critics of the play who applaud Shakespeare's alterations of his shrew-taming sources without interrogating the politics of power and discipline in the play. Praising Petruchio's nonviolent coercive

³ Naming and defining violence, physical or otherwise, is a political act. Groups of people, based on their gender, class, or marital status, are affected by what their culture identifies as "domestic violence." For instance, naming violence has a political impact on both those who use violence and those who are victims of it. As Liz Kelly points out, "the term 'battering' implies actual, and in many women's minds, 'serious,' physical violence . . . which reinforce[s] the public invisibility of . . . the range of abusive behavior men engage in" (*Surviving Sexual Violence* [Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988], 143). Likewise, the term *wife-beating* addresses one method of dominance, whereas a broader term, such as *tyranny* or *abuse*, would include a much wider range of behaviors.

⁴ Robert B. Heilman is the greatest proponent of reading the play as farce; see "The *Taming* Untamed, or, The Return of the Shrew," *Modern Language Quarterly* 27 (1966): 147–61. For examples of readings that interpret the hero's method as a game, "a suppose," or a trick, see John C. Bean, "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: U of Illinois P, 1980), 65–78; Marianne L. Novy, *Love's Argument: Gender Relations in Shakespeare* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984); and Cecil C. Seronsy, "'Supposes' as the Unifying Theme in *The Taming of the Shrew*," *SQ* 14 (1963): 15–30.

behavior as “better,” even though it is no less oppressive, parallels the “re-forming” distinctions being made in early modern conduct books and sermons. Just because Petruchio never hits Katherine, or whips her and wraps her in the salted hide of his favorite horse, does not necessarily mean his treatment is better or less oppressive than if he had.⁵ An examination grounded on a better/worse binary diminishes or totally ignores the harm in the “better” treatment. If readers and teachers fail to take seriously the experience of Petruchio’s abuse, and thus identify more strongly with him than with Kate, they risk complicity with an ideology that authorizes oppression as long as it is achieved without physical violence.

1. “IF YOU STRIKE ME, YOU ARE NO GENTLEMAN”:
THE WIFE-BEATING REFORMS

When Petruchio and Kate first meet, it is only minutes before blows are struck. But not by him. Although he “wings” the ears of Grumio and assaults other men, Petruchio never hits Kate. Throughout the play, Petruchio employs a variety of strategies to “tame” Kate without ever actually beating her. I want to suggest that this is not in response to some age-old cultural dictate that men should not hit women, but rather that the refusal to use “stripes or strokes” to subordinate a disorderly wife is something relatively new. As many critics have amply proven, the connection between Shakespeare’s play and the history of shrew-taming (the punishment of “unruly” women) is crucial to understanding the dynamics of Petruchio’s treatment of Kate.⁶ At the same time, the historical acceptability of wife-beating also plays a role.

While, from the beginning of the early modern period, the dominant culture was fundamentally patriarchal, it also placed limits, even some new ones, on men’s use of violence in the household. Physical correction of wives was widely regarded as an appropriate means for ruling the household, provided the correction stopped short of lethal force. Susan Amussen points out that, although a patriarchal culture authorized limited violence, the community intervened when life-threatening injury seemed likely.⁷ In records such as depositions given in the church courts and petitions submitted to a community’s Justice of the Peace, Amussen finds that “some violence on the part of a husband towards his wife was usually accepted. . . . However, . . . [the community] expected it, like other forms of violence, to be limited. A woman’s life should not be endangered, and correction should be appropriate to the offense.”⁸ Permissible violence in the household was interpreted as discipline

⁵ A husband “cures” his wife’s shrewishness in this manner in “A Merry Jest,” one of the generally accepted sources for *Taming*; see “A Merry Jest of a Shrewd and Curst Wife Lapped in Morel’s Skin, for Her Good Behavior,” reprinted in *The Taming of the Shrew: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Frances E. Dolan (Boston and New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 254–88. Several of the other primary texts I discuss in this article are also reprinted in Dolan’s *Texts and Contexts*. Woodbridge makes a point similar to mine (207).

⁶ On the tradition of shrew-taming, see Boose; Karen Newman, “Renaissance Family Politics and Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 16 (1986): 86–100; Underdown; Valerie Wayne, “Refashioning the Shrew,” *Shakespeare Studies* 17 (1985): 159–87; Wiltenburg; and Woodbridge.

⁷ Amussen, “‘Being Stirred,’” 84.

⁸ Amussen, “‘Being Stirred,’” 77–78. For the most detailed studies of early modern domestic violence in England, see Amussen, “‘Being Stirred,’” Boose; Anna Clark, “Humanity or justice? Wifebeating and the law in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” in *Regulating womanhood: Historical essays on marriage, motherhood, and sexuality*, Carol Smart, ed. (London and New York:

and understood as a superior's responsibility.⁹ As Margaret Hunt argues, men in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries "seldom bothered to deny that they beat their wives; rather they focused on their spouse's disobedience since that 'justified' the discipline."¹⁰ Restricting and monitoring "appropriate" spousal violence was a community responsibility, and, as Amussen argues, patriarchal culture consolidated its power by bridling its own most abusive aspects: "Patriarchy legitimated itself by claiming that its power was benign; it demonstrated this by accepting intervention in cases where domestic power was abused."¹¹ Thus a husband's domination of his wife was "natural," needing to be checked only when it overstepped recognized boundaries.

Although the community got involved when it felt abuse was taking place, the culture did not enact laws that clearly distinguished between permissible and nonpermissible violence. In the earliest existing treatise to address women's legal status at length, *The Lawes' Resolutions of Women's Rights* (1632), the author/editor, known only as "T.E.," grudgingly admits that women might have some legal right to be free from violence.¹² Under the declarative subject

Routledge, 1992), 87–206; Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*; Dolan, "Household Chastisements: Gender, Authority, and Domestic Violence in *The Taming of the Shrew*" in *Everyday Life in Early Modern Europe*, Patricia Fumerton and Simon Hunt, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke UP, forthcoming); Margaret Hunt, "Wife Beating, Domesticity and Women's Independence in Eighteenth-Century London," *Gender & History* 4 (1992): 10–33; and Wiltenburg. For an insightful discussion of domestic violence in colonial America, see Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of Social Policy Against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987). While discussions of wife-beating can be found in ancient and medieval sources, several historians note a dramatic increase in discourse on wife-beating beginning in the mid-sixteenth century; see, for example, Roderick Phillips, *Putting asunder: a history of divorce in Western society* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988); and Kathleen M. Davies, "Continuity and Change in Literary Advice on Marriage" in *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage*, R. B. Outhwaite, ed. (London: Europa Publications, 1981), 58–80. As Amussen points out, however, in "'Being Stirred,'" idealizations of or prescriptions for behavior should not be confused with actual practice (76 and 84).

⁹ In early modern popular discourses wife-beating is almost always discussed as punishment and as a "correction" for something the wife did or said. In contrast, twentieth-century studies argue that domestic violence is systematic. While the outburst of violence occurs in response to something the woman did, its overall effect is to create an environment in which a woman begins to subordinate her wishes, ideas, and actions in order to stave off the next outburst. It often develops into a cycle of violence that is used to maintain positions of dominance and submission. See Lenore Walker, *The Battered Woman Syndrome* (New York: Springer, 1984); Lee Ann Hoff, *Battered women as survivors* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990); and Dee L. R. Graham, Edna Rawlings, and Nelly Rimini, "Survivors of Terror: Battered Women, Hostages and the Stockholm Syndrome" in *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse*, Kersti Yllö and Michele Bograd, eds. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988), 217–33.

¹⁰ Hunt, 18.

¹¹ Amussen, "'Being Stirred,'" 84.

¹² I say "grudgingly" because T.E.'s vague coverage of wife-beating may have been added due to outside pressure. Apparently the bulk of the *Lawes' Resolutions* may have been available before 1632, when T.E. edited and published the text. He explains in the preface that he has "amended, and . . . added many reasons, opinions, cases and resolutions of cases to the [original] author's store" (quoted here from an excerpt reprinted in *Daughters, Wives and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England, 1500–1640*, Joan Larsen Klein, ed. [Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1992], 31). In his own tract on wife-beating, entitled *An Apologie for Women. Or, an opposition to Mr. Dr. G[ager] his assertion. Who held in the Act of Oxforde, Anno. 1608. That it was lawful for husbands to beate their wives* (London, 1609), William Heale complains about those "who though they have writ ten whole tractes and large volumes concerning the estate of wives, of their dowries, of their inheritances, . . . Yet have not a word of this question . . ." (30). It seems possible that Heale's complaint, or others like it, fostered T.E.'s somewhat limited coverage of the issue.

heading “The Baron may beat his Wife,” T.E. concedes that, “if a woman be threatned by her husband to bee beaten, mischieved, or slain, . . . she may sue out of Chancery to compell him to find surety of honest behaviour.”¹³ T.E. makes the ground for intervention the threat of lethal violence and “bodily damage” resulting from acts “otherwise then appertaines to the office of a Husband for lawfull and reasonable correction.”¹⁴ The ambiguity in T.E.’s discourse on wife-beating reflects the cultural reluctance to force husbands to stop using violence. Rather than establish laws that would “take the weapon out of the husband’s hand,” as one reformer put it, various authors of sermons and conduct books “advised” against beating.¹⁵

While the law was unwilling to penalize men for using violence in their households, wife-beating reforms succeeded in changing the cultural meaning of such violence. The issue of wife-beating was taken up by many Puritan preachers and other Protestant moralists.¹⁶ As Frances Dolan has shown, a variety of texts, including such sermons as “An Homily of the State of Matrimony” and numerous conduct books (often derived from sermons such as those in William Gouge’s *Of Domesticall Duties* [1634] and William Whately’s *A Bride-Bush* [1617]), all insist that “husbands should rule by policy rather than by blows.”¹⁷ The reforms argued for subordination through policy based on civility; “policy was preferable to violence, not because it was humane but because it was more effective.”¹⁸ In *A Bride-Bush*, for example, Whately argues that, while violence might work in the short term, there are better strategies to subordinate a wife: “Things are also best done when the will is allured, rather than the body compelled. . . . [I]f obedience comes not from the heart, can it last long?”¹⁹ As if illustrating these reformers’ arguments, Petruchio

Most sixteenth- and seventeenth-century reformers never imagine that women have a *right* to be free from violence. The text of “An Homily of the State of Matrimony” in *The Seconde Tome of Homilies* (London, 1563, fols. 253–263), for example, says that men should not use violence under any circumstances. Yet, if a husband does beat his wife, the sermon does not authorize her to escape; nor does it support her right to live free of violence. Instead, “An Homily” advises that the woman can only patiently endure it and be rewarded in heaven (fol. 260).

¹³ T.E., 128.

¹⁴ T.E., 128.

¹⁵ John Wing, *The Crown Conjugall* (London, 1620), 136. The campaign against wife-beating intensified throughout the seventeenth century, although legal reform did not begin until the nineteenth century. For historical overviews of legal reform, see Phillips and Hunt.

¹⁶ There is not space here to pursue in any depth why attitudes toward physical violence changed in this period, but the reasons would certainly be many. Most frequently critics have argued in favor of the Protestant companionate-marriage ideology (see, e.g., Margaret Mikesell, “‘Love Wrought These Miracles’: Marriage and Genre in *The Taming of the Shrew*,” *Renaissance Drama* n.s. 20 [1989]: 141–67, esp. 163) and humanism (see, e.g., Wayne). Hunt points to Foucault’s theories about punishment and discipline, which argue that internalized, self-inflicted discipline replaced corporal punishments and overt displays of power against the offender (see Hunt, 11 and 15; and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan [New York: Vintage Books, 1979]).

¹⁷ Dolan, ed., *Texts and Contexts*, 1–38, esp. 14. For discussion of wife-beating in the conduct-book material, see Amussen, *An Ordered Society*; Davies; R. Valerie Lucas, “Puritan Preaching and the Politics of the Family” in *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon*, Anne M. Haselkorn and Betty S. Travitsky, eds. (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1990), 224–40; and Wiltenburg.

¹⁸ Dolan, ed., *Texts and Contexts*, 15.

¹⁹ William Whately, *A Bride-Bush* (London, 1623), 162.

makes Kate “stoop” not by beating her but by “alluring” her in the same way that he would train a falcon. His rule by policy (“Thus have I politicly begun my reign” [4.1.159]) works better than blows.²⁰ William Heale, whose lengthy tract strongly opposes wife-beating, also relies on this rationale: “Pollicy goeth beyond force in marital actions; . . . far safer is the obedience yeelded up on faire termes, then that which is constrained on foule conditions.”²¹ While the argument from efficacy shows up in one of the earliest calls for reform, “An Homily of the State of Matrimony,” this text also relies heavily on issues of class and masculinity to challenge men’s attitudes about using violence. “An Homily” argues that only the “common sort” use “fist and staff” to rule a wife.²² Thus a notion of civility recasts physical violence as weak and, at the same time, brutal. Amussen argues that a reformed ideal for male behavior was located in the Christian man’s ability to achieve the goals of “manhood” (independence, and protection of his own honor and his family’s honor) without violence, which should be “replaced by self-restraint and the recourse to law.”²³ Husbands who rely on physical strength rather than reason come to be regarded as less manly and less human: “fierceness in manner” makes men more like “brute beasts than . . . reasonable creatures.”²⁴ Although these reformers create new standards for masculinity and “gentleness,” they never call for legal reform or for criminalizing wife-beating; rather, the sermons and prescriptive conduct literature express the hope that men will internalize the new reforms and discipline themselves.

Whether they focus on lawfulness, efficacy, or civility, reformers are careful to construct their arguments against wife-beating without questioning the wife’s subordinate position. Male authors rely rhetorically on notions of women’s worth and rights without actually promoting either equality or legal reform. Valerie Wayne demonstrates, in her discussion of Erasmus, Vives, and Edmund Tilney’s *Flower of Friendship*, that, while humanists will grant women spiritual and rational equality, they refuse to assert a wife’s equality with her husband in terms of power and resources. Wayne shows that “equality” in marriage was not only valued largely in terms of social status and age, as Kathleen Davis argues, but also with respect to reciprocal virtue and mutual duties.²⁵ Even so, Wayne establishes that this was not an equality of power; a wife had power over her subordinates but remained subject to her husband.

In *The Crown Conjugal*, John Wing makes clear that the argument to persuade men against wife-beating is not an argument to treat women as equals;

²⁰ Quotations from *The Taming of the Shrew* follow the New Cambridge text edited by Ann Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984).

²¹ Heale, 37.

²² “An Homily of the State of Matrimony,” fol. 255. For how wife-beating becomes “a mark of the inferiority and animality of the poor,” see Hunt, 27; see also Boose, “*The Taming of the Shrew*, Good Husbandry, and Enclosure” in *Shakespeare Reread: The Texts in New Contexts*, Russ McDonald, ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1994), 193–225; Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 106; Dolan, ed., *Texts and Contexts*, 23; and Wiltenburg, 128.

²³ Amussen, “‘The part of a Christian man’: the cultural politics of manhood in early modern England” in *Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Early Modern England: Essays presented to David Underdown*, Susan D. Amussen and Mark A. Kishlansky, eds. (Manchester, UK: Manchester UP, 1995), 227.

²⁴ “An Homily of the State of Matrimony,” fol. 256. Status or class distinctions that, arguably, first appeared during the mid-sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries clouded reform strategies; Hunt argues that the “cult of civility” led to a “collective blindness” in legal reform (27 and 28). See also note 33.

²⁵ Valerie Wayne, ed., *The Flower of Friendship: A Renaissance Dialogue Contesting Marriage*, Edmund Tilney (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1992), 62–63.

women “may, & must be *subjected*.”²⁶ Wing dissuades men from using violence by citing the biblical commandment that men are to honor their wives. But women should not be honored too much, he cautions; they must be understood as only “*a little lower*” than the man himself.²⁷ Wing asserts that violence and honor cannot “both be *well bestowed* on one party. Stripes (where we may give them) doe argue inferiority without honour.”²⁸ While the physical correction of servants or children is just, wives fall into a different category; hence, men’s behavior must change accordingly.²⁹ Wing claims that the honor due to wives makes battery undesirable—battery but not subordination. Wing shifts the issue away from women’s experience of “physical correction” to focus on a discussion of whose “honor” is at issue. Avoiding any possible confusion about women’s equality, Wing carefully defines a woman’s honor as emerging only in relation to her husband, not in and of herself, “not as a *Woman*, . . . you cannot be *even* with vs.”³⁰ Rather than ground his argument against wife-beating on women’s worth or equality, Wing develops an argument based solely on men’s behavior; honorable treatment of women is for the sake of men’s honor.

The popular discourse on wife-beating reform attempted to change men’s attitudes about their use of physical violence without discussing women’s experience of subordination. Reformers were interested not in bettering women’s situation but rather in enhancing men’s ability to subordinate. Wing’s explicit concern that wife-beating reforms might be interpreted as advocating gender equality, a notion he takes great pains to denounce, brings into relief the ways that women’s experience of violence was taken into account only when it served the reformers’ purposes. The reformers ceased to authorize a single type of domination (wife-beating); and if they addressed masculine domination at all, it was to reaffirm it. For the most part, the reformers focused on the meaning of men’s violence *for the men themselves*; according to the prescriptions for domestic rule, the use of physical violence compromised the husband’s authority.

Shakespeare’s “shrew” is tamed in a manner that would have made the wife-beating reformers proud; Petruchio’s taming “policy” dramatizes how abstention from physical violence works better—for men. The play encourages its audience not only to pay close attention to Petruchio’s method but also to judge and enjoy the method’s permissibility because of the absence of blows and the harmonious outcome. While Petruchio uses physical violence with other males, he adheres closely to the early modern reformer’s model and controls and dominates Kate through other means. Gouge, in 1634, allows that “other forceable meanes may be used besides beating by her husbands hands: shee may be restrained of liberty, denied such things as she most affecteth, be kept up, as it were, in hold.”³¹ As if anticipating Gouge’s prescriptions, Petruchio isolates Kate, denies her food and sleep, and wears her down until she submits.

²⁶ Wing, 136.

²⁷ Wing, 135.

²⁸ Wing, 136.

²⁹ For discussion of the “double position” of the wife and the use of physical “correction” for servants and children, see especially Dolan, “Household Chastisements.”

³⁰ Wing, 140 and 142.

³¹ William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties: Eight Treatises* (London, 1634), 397.

The “thing” that feeds their fire and “their fury” is Kate’s proud mind—that is, her will or her sense of self. Subordinating Kate so that she “yields” is of paramount importance to the success of their marriage. Petruchio’s manly desire for domination must “blow out” her fire. Yet, Petruchio’s method, which is “extreme,” “rough,” and manly (“not like a babe”), doesn’t include beating; his method is effective and reasonable without resorting to blows.

Petruchio proves his manliness by embracing what other men fear (marrying a shrew) but also by working alone. In many of the shrew-taming ballads and plays, men use the assistance of friends to help bring about the rebellious woman’s subordination. For example, in the anonymous play *Tom Tyler and his Wife* the husband fears his wife, who beats him regularly. He has a friend disguise himself as Tyler; the friend beats Tyler’s wife unconscious. The friend returns triumphantly to report that the husband’s problem is solved: “She is so well beaten, she dare not once threaten . . . for I struck till she fainted.”³⁴ In “A Caution for Scolds” the husband brings in a doctor who ties the wife to a bed, bleeds her, shaves her head, and threatens to cut out her tongue and bleed her for “a gallon” until she begs pardon.³⁵ In “The Scolding Wife” a husband and his friends “break” the wife by tying her up and making her appear mad—fit for “Bedlam,” to which he threatens to commit her.³⁶ We have other evidence of cooperation among two or more men to control one unruly woman. When T.E. discusses a wife’s right to sue in Chancery, he includes as pertinent not only the husband’s violent actions but also any help the husband might “procure”: “[the husband] shall neither doe nor procure to be done to her.”³⁷ While neither ballads, plays, nor legal treatises describe an “actual” incident, they can be seen as participating in a tradition that implies the culture’s recognition of male solidarity and support waged against a rebellious woman, a tradition that can also be linked to community action seen in the public shaming rituals documented by Underdown, Ingram, and Boose and described in the popular ballad “The cucking of a scold.”³⁸ That Shakespeare’s shrew-tamer works alone bears further witness to Petruchio’s

³⁴ *Tom Tyler and His Wife* (c. 1551), ed. John S. Farmer (London: Early English Drama Society, 1908), 44. As in *Taming of the Shrew*, the tamer in *Tom Tyler* uses the image of taming a horse; for commentary on this and other literary examples of taming, see Woodbridge, 204–5. See also Joan Hartwig, “Horses and Women in *The Taming of the Shrew*,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 45 (1982): 285–94.

³⁵ “A Caution for Scolds” in *The Roxburghe Ballads*, ed. William Chappell (Vols. 1–3) and J. Woodfall Ebsworth (Vols. 4–9), 9 vols. (Hertford, UK: Ballad Society, 1872–99; rpt. New York: AMS, 1966), 3:508; hereafter cited as *RB*. Dating ballads is difficult due to the ephemerality of the single-sheet form and the limited, often nonexistent publication information on ballads. For example, the above ballad is dated c. 1685–88, determined in part by the initials “R.P.,” which have been attributed to the licenser Richard Pocock. An earlier edition of an identical or similar version could have existed and not have survived.

³⁶ “The Scolding Wife” (c. 1672–94), *RB*, 7:192.

³⁷ T.E., 128.

³⁸ “The cucking of a scold” (c. 1615–30) in *A Pepysian Garland: Black-letter Broadside Ballads of the Years 1595–1639*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins (Cambridge and London: The University Press, 1922), 72–77. On public shaming rituals, see note 1, above. My interest in these and similar texts is not because of their influence on Shakespeare; I consider all of them, including *Taming*, as participating in a “cultural conversation.” Yet, since we are still reading and teaching the play, Shakespeare’s version can be considered a rather prominent participant in that conversation.

manliness as it also evokes the private, domestic, and often isolated site of discipline that concerned reformers.³⁹

Thus far I have suggested that Petruchio's method lines up with the cultural reforms that advocated subordination without physical beating. Early modern reformers were clear that their focus was on battery and not on domination. However, a twentieth-century reading of their reforms raises new questions. For instance, did such reforms improve women's daily lives? Rather than assuming that "anything is better than being hit," I want to examine this question. While I do not mean to discount the harm of physical violence or the experience of injury from such violence, I would argue for the significance of other forms of violence, a range of harms that the focus on battery/injury can obscure. Making battery the focus assumes that subordination without hitting is better. But we should ask "Better for whom?" The judgment seems to be based on anything but women's experience. The early modern reformers, who argue against violence as uncivil and inefficient, are more invested in the aggressor's behavior than in the victim's experience of it.⁴⁰

Returning to the scene in which Kate strikes Petruchio provides an opportunity to reconsider the significance of Petruchio's "better" behavior. Instead of responding to Kate's blows with a counterassault, Petruchio does two things. First, he threatens to return the blow if she hits him again. Second, he uses an alternative means of force: he physically holds her for the next twenty-seven lines. It's tempting to see Petruchio's sustained possession of Kate's body as a more "civilized" response than if he were to act on his threat to hit her. But by focusing on Petruchio's response as better, we can easily overlook the fact that Kate is momentarily held prisoner. Taming by policy often relies on bondage and threats.⁴¹ However, my point is not just that taming by policy can be violent but also that the wife-beating reformers' emphasis on "blows" makes other coercive and threatening behavior appear to be outside the model for what counts as domestic violence. It obscures the violence of the "politic" means of enforcing discipline, making any action except beating permissible, even praiseworthy. In this way Petruchio's actions do not qualify as domestic violence, and his holding Kate hostage is acceptable. What concerns me about this model is that I find twentieth-century critics still using it.

For the past twenty-five years battered women and human-rights activists have worked together to reformulate what constitutes domestic violence; they

³⁹ Amussen argues that the shift from a communal discipline of unruly couples to a husband's private domination increased instances of domestic violence ("'Being Stirred,'" 81). In the former, the husband, too, was subject to scrutiny and punishment because the household and its relations were public knowledge. In the latter, the wife was more vulnerable because she was cut off from any potential community intervention.

⁴⁰ As Dolan points out, the early modern reformers saw that violence might "promote rather than defeat resistance in the wife" ("Household Chastisements"). Bringing together Antonio Gramsci's analysis of hegemony and Hannah Arendt's assessment of the relationship between power and force, Liz Kelly argues: "Violence is used only when other methods of control have failed, as its usage makes coercive power explicit and, therefore, increases the possibility of resistance" (22). Sociological studies also confirm that force is used when power is most in jeopardy and that the more power one has, the less one needs to resort to physical violence. For an overview of diverse sociological "explanations for family violence," see Robert L. Burgess and Patricia Draper, "The Explanation of Family Violence: The Role of Biological, Behavioral, and Cultural Selection" in *Family Violence*, Lloyd Ohlin and Michael Tonry, eds. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989), 59–116.

⁴¹ See Dolan, ed., *Texts and Contexts*, 17.

identify physical violence as only one of many tactics abusers use to control and subordinate their victims.⁴² From this perspective domestic violence is any act of coercion that aims to nullify a person's will or desire in order for the abuser to gain dominance. Instead of limiting the definition of domestic violence to a certain kind of behavior, such as physical battery, this model places controlling behavior on a continuum of oppression. Many feminist activists insist that domestic violence is not exclusively defined as hitting a woman/wife; it encompasses a range of behaviors that includes intimidation, isolation, threats, emotional abuse, economic manipulation, and sexual assault. Ironically, the early modern reform movement, with its emphasis on replacing beating with other controlling behaviors, put in place the very model that many twentieth-century feminists are working to dismantle.

Petruchio's methods of taming Kate, which can be read as participating in the early modern wife-beating reform movement, can also be read as abusive through the lens of twentieth-century feminist work on domestic violence. The cultural meaning of Petruchio's violence is not the same now as it was in its original context. But when we "historicize" the play—for ourselves or our students—we should not only account for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century notions of domestic violence; we need to consider twentieth-century notions of violence as well.⁴³ For the remainder of this essay, I will explore Petruchio's method not in relation to early modern reforms but in terms of twentieth-century feminist notions of domestic violence and what is known as the Stockholm syndrome in particular. My intention is neither to find nor to confirm a diagnosis of abuse; Petruchio and Kate are not real people, after all. Yet the Stockholm syndrome provides a useful contrast to the falcon-training model so often used to understand the taming. More importantly, it provides a lens through which to scrutinize a kind of interpersonal violence within heterosexual relations which the play's comedy seeks to romanticize.

While some may find this approach to Shakespeare's text ahistorical, I would argue that a "strategically anachronistic" practice of reading, as Kim Hall so aptly puts it, has great value because it allows us to think about our positions as readers, teachers, and critics.⁴⁴ By juxtaposing the present with the past in this essay, I hope to foreground certain ideas about violence which I believe our own culture is still trying to understand and critique. The meaning of violence is variously overdetermined and rarely, if ever, "clear-cut." If we are to continue to read, perform, and teach Shakespeare's play, we gain by trying to understand our own ways of making meaning out of violence.

2. BONDING WITH THE ABUSER: MANNING THE HAGGARD

Examining the history of scold bridles and community rituals aimed at women who resist subordination and silence, Lynda Boose argues that Shake-

⁴² For an analysis of the differences between feminist models of domestic violence and other concepts of "family violence," see Kersti A. Yllö, "Through a Feminist Lens: Gender, Power, and Violence" in *Current Controversies on Family Violence*, Richard J. Gelles and Donileen R. Loseke, eds. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993).

⁴³ A study of the early modern model can inform a critique of contemporary theories by reminding us of the pitfalls of fighting domestic violence simply on the grounds of tactics (hitting) or gender-appropriate behavior ("real" men don't hit women). Establishing these kinds of connections between current feminist projects and historical inquiry can show how the project of "doing women's history" participates in feminist activism.

⁴⁴ See Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1995), 261.

speare's "zesty comedy" romanticizes the cruel history of punishing shrews.⁴⁵ But where Boose exposes and laments the actual violence hidden behind and mitigated in the comedy of the play, I want to emphasize the harm inherent in Petruchio's new and improved method of taming. Instead of critiquing the offstage history of violence against women, as Boose does so convincingly, I want to emphasize the violence that is represented onstage and to question why people don't see it.

The controlling and coercive methods Petruchio uses to tame Kate are similar to the actions found in one particular kind of domestic-violence dynamic, known as the Stockholm syndrome.⁴⁶ The name of this syndrome refers to a 1973 bank-robbery/hostage situation in which the hostages bonded with their captors. The syndrome explains why hostages appear to submit to rather than resist their captors; it describes the paradoxical bond, even affection, that arises in many hostage situations. While the Stockholm syndrome was originally identified in relation to the extraordinary event of hostage-taking, it evolved into a diagnostic tool to explain the more frequent situation of the abusive household. Feminist sociologists found a correlation in the survival behaviors of both hostages and victims of domestic violence. Both the abuser and the hostage-taker assert complete control over the victim's thoughts and actions through fear and intimidation. The Stockholm syndrome occurs when: 1) a person threatens another's survival and is perceived by the other as able and willing to carry out his/her threat; 2) the threatening person shows the other kindness; 3) the victim is unable to escape from the threatening person; and 4) the victim is isolated from outsiders.⁴⁷

Shakespeare's Petruchio is, in terms of Stockholm-syndrome categories, the quintessential abuser: he isolates Kate from those who could intervene on her behalf, and he threatens her survival "in the name of perfect love" (4.3.12). Kate, like other hostages, finds that the key to survival will be to "actively develop strategies for staying alive."⁴⁸ In Kate's situation these strategies entail denying her sense of reality and speaking as if she sees the world through Petruchio's eyes.

At the heart of violent and coercive behavior is the desire for control. Throughout the play, Petruchio makes clear that he tames Kate in order to make her "conformable" (2.1.267); he wants total control over her thoughts and actions, no matter how trivial.⁴⁹ Even before they meet, Petruchio plans

⁴⁵ Boose, "Scolding Brides," 212; see also Underdown; Newman; and Wayne, "Refashioning."

⁴⁶ The Stockholm syndrome was first described by I. Kuleshnyk in "The Stockholm Syndrome: Toward an Understanding," *Social Action and the Law* 10.2 (1984): 37–42. Graham, Rawlings, and Rimini found the Stockholm syndrome useful to their understanding of what our culture finds more troubling than men beating their wives: namely, why women don't leave abusive husbands. As feminist activists often point out, the more pertinent question might be, why won't husbands let women leave? Feminists note that the most lethal time for a woman caught in a violent relationship is when she tries to escape. Just as the culture assumes that if the abuse was indeed life-threatening, women would leave, readers of *Taming* have assumed that since Kate seems happy in the end, the abuse was not intolerable.

⁴⁷ Adapted from "The Stockholm Syndrome, based on the work of Dee Graham and Edna Rawlings," an in-house training manual for volunteers at the Dove House Battered Persons Shelter (Hamilton, Ohio, 1991). See also Graham et al., 219.

⁴⁸ Graham et al., 224.

⁴⁹ For a persuasive argument regarding a more specific goal in domesticating Kate, see Natasha Korda, "Household Kates: Domesticating Commodities in *The Taming of the Shrew*," *SQ* 47 (1996): 109–31. Korda's analysis usefully shows how Kate is trained to support Petruchio's desires; taming

to interpret the meanings of her words contrary to her intent, thereby staking a claim over her language. Petruchio outlines his method of “woo[ing] by contradiction”;⁵⁰ he will misread the meaning of either her words or her silence:

Say she be mute and will not speak
 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 banns, and when be married.
 (ll. 170–76)

Simply thus contradicting her meaning, however, might leave her confused but not under his control. He therefore issues his first threat at their initial meeting. Although they toss words to each other in a seemingly playful way, by the end of the scene, Petruchio stops playing and lays down his intent in a menacing way: “And will you, nil you, I will marry you” (l. 270).⁵¹ Here Petruchio establishes that, while their mutual wordplay has been fun, he will take her as his wife with or without her consent. When their marriage proves how little her consent matters, Petruchio's power over her language and her person is secured.

Rather than beat Kate into submission, he threatens her in a manner that recalls the Stockholm syndrome, coercing her into internalizing his wishes if she is to eat or sleep or escape isolation: “She ate no meat today, nor none shall eat; / Last night she slept not, nor tonight she shall not” (4.1.168–69). Depriving her of both food and sleep will make her weak and materially dependent on him. Like the method used to train a falcon, he tells the audience, his method to “man” his “haggard” will make her “stoop” and “make her come and know her keeper's call” (ll. 164, 162, 165).⁵² While these are particularly egregious examples, the subtle coercions of the Stockholm syndrome appear throughout the play.

Petruchio demonstrates to Kate that he can carry out even the most outrageous threats. He aggressively pursues the “clapped up” wedding but then does not come at the appointed time. Although she is marrying him “against her heart” (3.2.9), Kate's status now depends on his arrival. Being left standing at the altar is here a kind of violence—even her father pities Kate by saying the “*injury* would vex a saint” (l. 28, emphasis added)—and Petruchio delays long enough to make his arrival seem like a special kindness. When he

does not create a passive victim but one who will actively work to please the abuser in order to stave off further violence.

⁵⁰ I borrow this phrase from Dolan, ed., *Texts and Contexts*, 19.

⁵¹ Shirley Nelson Garner also recognizes this as a particularly troubling moment in the play because of Petruchio's ultimatum and his ability to enforce it; see “*The Taming of the Shrew: Inside or Outside of the Joke?*” in “*Bad Shakespeare: Revaluations of the Shakespeare Canon*,” Maurice Charney, ed. (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1988), 105–19, esp. 113.

⁵² While many critics have commented on the analogy to falconry, I believe that Brian Morris summarizes the tradition best in his introduction to the Arden edition of *Taming* (London: Methuen, 1981), 125–28. See also Martha Andresen-Thom, “Shrew-taming and other rituals of aggression: Baiting and bonding on the stage and in the wild,” *Women's Studies* 9 (1982): 121–43; Hartwig; and Margaret Loftus Ranald, “The Manning of the Haggard; or The Taming of the Shrew,” *Essays in Literature* 1 (1974): 149–65.

does finally appear, he is dressed in ridiculous garb described as “an eyesore” and a “shame to [his] estate” (ll. 90–91). When the wedding guests express outrage, Petruchio claims, “To me she’s married, not unto my clothes” (l. 107). While this scene is often regarded as evidence that Petruchio is a “madcap” fool, it also demonstrates his power to do as he pleases. Tranio alerts the audience to the possibility that Petruchio’s choice of “unreverent robes” (l. 102) is a strategy (“He hath some meaning in his mad attire” [l. 114]) but concludes that the best the men of Padua can hope for is to “persuade” him to change his clothing before going into church (l. 115). Though everyone onstage is aghast at Petruchio’s behavior, none dares interfere. According to Gremio’s report, no one intervenes in Petruchio’s aggression during the wedding either. As Kate “trembled and shook,” Petruchio “stamped and swore” (l. 157) while striking a priest, throwing wine-soaked cake in the sexton’s face, and acting as if he were “carousing with his mates” (l. 161). Although Gremio feels shame at the unseemly behavior (“And I, seeing this, came thence for very shame” [l. 170]), neither he nor anyone else stops it. Obviously this community will not discipline a head of household. This sets up Petruchio’s behavior as threatening and aggressive, even to the bystanders, as well as establishing that in this early modern marriage a husband can carry out any threat against his wife.⁵³

Although none of the men challenge his behavior, Kate stands up to him. She tries several strategies to negotiate a more acceptable response. Trying to persuade him to stay for the customary wedding feast, she first entreats Petruchio through an exchange of affection: “Now, if you love me, stay” (l. 193). But once this fails, she reverts to an earlier strategy of anger and frank speech: “Gentlemen, forward to the bridal dinner./I see a woman may be made a fool / If she had not a spirit to resist” (ll. 208–10). Petruchio establishes his dominance by verbally confirming her command while physically preventing her words from achieving their intent. Urging the others to feast without her because “she must with me. . . . I will be master of what is mine own” (ll. 216, 218), he then transforms his role as “master” into a gesture of kindly protection. Acting as if the wedding guests intend to abduct Kate (“we are beset with thieves” [l. 225]), he draws his sword and threatens her family. While refusing Kate her wedding feast, a simple pleasure she regards as her due, he converts her forced removal into a rescue: “Fear not, sweet wench, they shall not touch thee, Kate” (l. 227). Petruchio’s mock rescue combines kindness with aggression and confuses Kate’s sense of his domination. Kate will later complain that Petruchio “rails and swears and rates” all through their wedding night, and yet he calls it love (4.1.155). When they have arrived at Petruchio’s own residence, he orders a dress and cap made for Kate but then refuses to allow her to accept them: “When you are gentle you shall have one too, / And not till then” (4.3.71–72). He repeatedly alternates kindness with aggression, and that which at first appears an act of kindness and provision becomes another chance to deprive her and thus confirms his control of her environment. As researchers have found, in a situation that is totally violent, victims soon give up trying to please. When, however, abusers show kindness

⁵³ When onstage spectators find amusement in the situation, declaring Kate “madly mated” and that Petruchio is “Kated” (3.2.233–34), Shakespeare dilutes the aggression of this scene for the audience. Rather than register the potential for abuse in this relationship, the audience is given permission to enjoy the coming violence as a legitimate response to Kate’s earlier aggression.

and concern for their victims, it creates an emotional bond; abusers “ease the emotional distress they have created and . . . set the stage for emotional dependency.”⁵⁴ Alternating coercive threats and kindness sets up a situation where victims *actively* look for ways to please rather than upset their captors.

A key factor in the development of the syndrome is isolation and the inability to escape. When Kate is taken to Petruchio’s house, where even the servants refuse to sneak her food, she is isolated from anyone who can help her. Her father, traditionally the person who would protect her, has established that he wishes to be rid of her; she feels as if she has been put up for sale; “is it your will / To make a stale of me?” (1.1.57–58). Even though Baptista has said “love is all,” no one seems to care whether Kate consents to the marriage or not.⁵⁵ At first Gremio notices that her words are words of protest: “Hark, Petruchio, she says she’ll see thee hanged first” (2.1.289). But Tranio silences him, pointing out that paying attention to her wishes will not help their mutual cause. Then Petruchio intervenes and undermines any further verbal refusal on her part by saying that he and she have made a “bargain” between them that “she will still be cursed” in public (l. 295). Since all the men around her conspire to ignore the fact that she does not consent to a marriage to Petruchio, Kate has little hope that they will later intervene on her behalf.

The scenes that take place in Petruchio’s house in Act 4 best exemplify the Stockholm syndrome. Some may question whether Kate’s “survival” was ever really at stake, but from Kate’s point of view, there is no way to know how long this “brawling” might last; she states explicitly her fear that it may lead to a “deadly sickness or else present death” (4.3.14). Food and sleep have been withheld from her for no apparent reason.⁵⁶ While the threat to Kate’s survival is most keen at this point, Petruchio’s repeated use of violence against subordinates also contributes to a state in which she fears for her life, another of the key elements of the syndrome.

Because Kate is completely isolated and convinced that Petruchio could carry out any of his threats, she must bond with her abuser in order to survive. Dee Graham and Edna Rawlings argue that the Stockholm syndrome in abused women follows this pattern:

The abuser traumatizes the victim (who cannot escape) with threat to survival. The traumatized victim needs nurturance and protection. Being isolated from outsiders, the victim must turn to the abuser for nurturance and protection, as she denies her rage. If the abuser shows the victim some small kindness, the victim bonds to the positive side of abuse. . . . The victim works to see the world from the abuser’s perspective so that she will know what will keep the abuser happy.⁵⁷

Petruchio’s and Kate’s actions at his house and on the road back to Padua match this description. Kate learns that to survive she must see (or at least claim to see) the world from his perspective, just as she learns to bond with this side of his abuse.

⁵⁴ Graham et al., 225.

⁵⁵ Unlike the contemporary play titled *The Taming of a Shrew*, Shakespeare’s version lacks Kate’s verbal consent.

⁵⁶ While some readers point out that Petruchio also goes without food and sleep, he knows he could stop this process at any point. He consents and he is in control; neither is true for Kate.

⁵⁷ “Stockholm Syndrome, based on the work of Dee Graham and Edna Rawlings”; see also Graham et al., 219.

It takes repeated effort for Kate before she can learn to “deny her rage.” She struggles against Petruchio’s systematic destruction of her will by demanding to be heard:

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.
(4.3.77–80)

This eloquent speech about her vital need to speak is the last one the audience hears in which Kate has a substantial sense of self and autonomy. Petruchio denies her language (and her sense of self) by pretending to hear in her words merely a comment on a cap: “Why, thou say’s true, it is a paltry cap. . . . I love thee well in that thou lik’st it not” (ll. 81–83). Again combining kindness with aggression, he performs his absolute power and control over her without touching her. He tests her tendency “to cross” him until she submits, that is, until she “incorporates the world view of the aggressor.”⁵⁸

Petruchio offers her a bit of kindness and an escape from her isolation with a visit to her father’s house. But he threatens to retract the offer if she does not second his perverse reading of time and space. When he asserts that the present time is seven, Kate corrects him. He demands:

It shall be seven ere I go to horse.
Look what I speak, or do, or think to do,
You are still crossing it. Sirs, let ’t alone,
I will not go today, and ere I go,
It shall be what o’clock I say it is.
(ll. 185–89)

Petruchio has the power to say what time it is against any authority (such as the sun). What is at stake is Kate’s willingness to “cross” him. His assertion must be sovereign, even if it is absurd or contrary to everything Kate knows. His goal is complete power and control over her thoughts and actions. In one of the most widely discussed scenes of the play, Hortensio urges Kate to speak against her own knowledge: “Say as he says, or we shall never go” (4.5.11). Petruchio again offers his test, “I say it is the moon that shines so bright” (l. 4), and Kate responds out of her own knowledge: “I know it is the sun that shines so bright” (l. 5). But when Petruchio threatens to take her back to the isolation of his home, Kate begins to “see” the world—that is, the sun and the moon—through Petruchio’s eyes. She shifts her strategies and, when he repeats his “I say it is the moon,” responds as he wished all along: “I know it is the moon” (l. 17). Her language of “know[ing]” here underscores Petruchio’s gesture as an effort to change her source of knowledge.

From Petruchio’s point of view, Kate’s resistance has been about crossing him: “Ever more crossed and crossed, nothing but crossed” (l. 10). When she finally goes along with Petruchio’s claims about the sun and the moon and later about Vincentio, Hortensio announces that the war is over. Defeated, Kate has surrendered herself as hostage: “The field is won” (l. 23). While the field is not bloody and her body is not black and blue, the process that Kate

⁵⁸ Graham et al., 219.

has undergone is nonetheless abusive because it signifies Petruchio's domination over her speech and actions.

A model of domestic violence that includes tactics other than physical violence gives readers a way in which to understand Kate's romanticized surrender at the end of the play as something other than consensual, as, in fact, a typical response to abuse. Although Kate's final speech is her longest, it does not necessarily reflect her own thoughts, desires, and wishes. Like a victim of the Stockholm syndrome, she denies her own feelings in order to bond with her abuser. Her surrender and obedience signify her emotional bondage as a survival strategy; she aims to please because her life depends on it. Knowing how the Stockholm syndrome works can help us to see that whatever "subjectivity" might be achieved is created out of domination and a coercive bonding.

The heterosexual romance plot of the play encourages readers to see this bonding as "love" and to disregard the violence of taming. Even though the play's spectators witness a husband attaining a coercive emotional bond with his wife through systematic abuse, the violence is easily discounted because there are no physical blows. While we have little sympathy with women who stay with (and continue to "love") a physically abusive husband, we still seem to follow the model put forth in the play. If the victim's injuries are physical, our culture doesn't see the accompanying coercive bonds as romantic; if the injuries are invisible, our culture, like the early modern, tolerates them. *The Taming of the Shrew* participates in a cultural tradition that accepts coercive bonding and oppression as long as they are free of physical violence.

The Taming of the Shrew reproduces cultural desires for masculine domination as well as assures its audience that Kate pleases herself when she finally learns to please Petruchio. The harmony reached at the end allows readers and audiences to find the method worthy, even if they judge it harsh at times, because Kate seems happy at the end. By displaying these practices as laughable and Kate's affectionate bondage as harmless, the play does the cultural work of figuring a husband's control over his wife as artful, heroic, and pleasurable for both.

3. READING CRITICS' READINGS OF A CIVILIZED SHREW-TAMER

In order to enjoy *The Taming of the Shrew*, many twentieth-century scholars seem to decide they will "indulge" in the fantasy of masculine domination (including seeing Kate's emotional bondage as "falling in love").⁵⁹ Surveying the criticism of *Taming* gives us a kind of cultural history of the attitudes about acceptable and less-acceptable ways for a husband to establish dominance over his wife. Even within recent criticism, certain assumptions about coercion and violence within intimate relationships go unchallenged. Critics often refuse to see the violence of taming because Petruchio's actions do not injure Kate's body. When critics do examine Petruchio's method, many shift the focus by arguing that his method is an improvement compared to the shrew-taming tradition in which it participates. In many ways these claims ask read-

⁵⁹ For an examination of the sadistic dynamics on which the play depends, see Barbara Hodgdon, "Katherina Bound; or, Play(K)ating the Strictures of Everyday Life," *PMLA* 107 (1992): 538–53.

ers to position themselves in a way that more closely reflects an abuser's, rather than a victim's, ideas about acceptable behavior.

In her study of sexual and domestic violence in the late twentieth century, Liz Kelly found two "common-sense" cultural beliefs that distinguish acceptable from unacceptable violence. Until recently, abusers (along with the police and the court system) believed that the severity of domestic violence should be determined by the extent of *physical* injury. Thus, where there is little evidence of injury, abusers are less likely to define their actions as violence. Kelly also found that violent acts were deemed acceptable if perceived as "legitimate"; if, for example, a woman's personality or behavior seem to provoke it or "ask for it."⁶⁰ The most often cited examples of provocative conduct are acts that evoke sexual jealousy, that involve "talking back," or that entail the woman's unacceptable performance of household tasks.⁶¹ In strikingly similar ways the history of scholarship on the play often operates out of the same cultural assumptions. Most readings of the play depend on the assumption that Kate's behavior and personality are in need of transformation. Likewise, since *Taming* minimizes the physical injury done to Kate, most scholarly readings often fail to register the abusive aspect of Petruchio's actions.⁶²

Robert Heilman's 1966 essay provides an example of these cultural assumptions at work; by insisting on the farcical nature of the play, he minimizes the "injury" and oppression. He advocates a "traditional" reading in which Petruchio's assertion of mastery over an insufferable shrew is merely part of the genre's "boisterousness and rowdiness," and he claims that, since the "spirit of farce" lies behind the relationship between tamer and shrew, no one's sensibilities should be offended.⁶³ In farce, he insists, no one "gets really hurt," and the "pleasure in conquest is never undercut by the guilt of inflicting injury."⁶⁴ Heilman argues that a revisionist reading wrongly imports into an early modern text a modern "sensibility" toward women.⁶⁵ He contends that a traditional reading of farce is enjoyable because it allows readers to ignore every character's sensibilities, all negative consequences of aggression; farce allows readers to indulge in feeling "superior to the diminished men and women in the plot; perhaps we harmlessly work off aggressions (since verbal and physical assaults are frequent in farce)."⁶⁶ In other words, reading through the conventions of farce allows readers like Heilman the "pleasure" of reading in the position of an abuser without the "guilt" of taking into account the victim's viewpoint.

Interestingly, Heilman argues that what makes Shakespeare's use of farce special is that Kate is not "only a shrew"; she has "hurt feelings" and "suffers

⁶⁰ Kelly, 68–69. In addition to violence being "legitimate" if women provoke it, Kelly also notes physical abuse is less likely to be defined as domestic violence if it occurs in economically stressed households (69).

⁶¹ Kelly, 131.

⁶² The logic of shrew-taming has been considered so acceptable that critics argue that no one in Shakespeare's audience would empathize with a shrew's feelings; the audience would be "pre-conditioned" . . . to enjoy the spectacle of the taming of one on whom they would not expect to waste a moment's sympathy" (The Oxford Shakespeare *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. H. J. Oliver [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982], 50).

⁶³ Heilman, 151.

⁶⁴ Heilman, 152.

⁶⁵ Heilman, 148.

⁶⁶ Heilman, 152.

real anguish.”⁶⁷ While he insists that readers should not consider the shrew’s feelings because this would diminish the fun of watching the taming, at other points, when it serves the purpose of characterization, Heilman highlights Kate’s inwardness. For instance, he depicts Kate as a good sport to legitimize her taming: “instead of not catching on or simply sulking, Kate has the dash and verve to join in the fun.”⁶⁸ Readers are not to “undercut” the fun of taming by considering Kate’s experience of starvation, sleep deprivation, isolation, or subordination, even though the “fun” depends on the fact that she is starved and silenced. As Kate McLuskie rightly notes, “the consistency of the play’s tone requires that we find Petruchio’s systematic destruction of Katherine’s will no less funny than his puns.”⁶⁹ Readers are to identify with Petruchio and are to consider Kate’s inwardness when it justifies or rewards his taming methods but not when it diminishes the fun of taming itself.

Insisting on the farcical nature of the play is one way to make it less problematic for readers. Heilman is right: sympathizing with Kate does take the fun out of the play. But that is my point. To read or teach the play “traditionally” requires that the reader become complicit with its politics. Shirley Garner explains that *Taming*

... plays to an audience who shares its patriarchal assumptions: men and also women who internalize patriarchal values. ... [But] I stand outside the community the joke is intended to amuse; I sympathize with those on whom the joke is played.⁷⁰

But sympathizing with the victim of the joke is only part of the critique. The “pleasure” of the play is also undone when we recognize the substance of the joke as part of the history of domestic violence.

While a few feminist or “revisionist” interpretations emphasize the harm done to Kate, overwhelmingly most of these same critics continue to highlight their pleasure in the play’s heterosexual courting ritual no matter how aggressive and coercive it may be. As Boose emphasizes, analyses of the play which rescue Kate from her seemingly joyful “abject” submission by rendering her an equal partner in a game or by reading her final speech as subversively ironic always “begin at the end . . . not so much as a way of undoing Kate’s ventriloquization of male superiority [but] as a way of making it more palatable.”⁷¹ Reminiscent of Kelly’s “common-sense” cultural definitions of violence, these approaches seem to assume that if there is no sign of physical injury (i.e., Kate seems happy at the end), then the treatment must not have been violent or abusive. The “happy” ending of Kate’s transformation legitimates Petruchio’s method and erases the injury of the cruel and oppressive taming.

Another strategy for reading that diminishes the oppressive nature of taming is to notice that it could have been worse. Just as a battered wife could say, “I’m lucky, he never hits me with a fist, only an open hand,” some critics have

⁶⁷ Heilman, 161 and 158.

⁶⁸ Heilman, 159.

⁶⁹ Kate McLuskie, “Feminist Deconstruction: The Example of Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew*,” *Red Letters* 12 (1977): 33–40; quoted here from Mikesell, 163. My reading of the play is indebted to this strong tradition of feminist criticism of *The Taming of the Shrew*.

⁷⁰ Garner, 117.

⁷¹ Boose, “*Taming*,” 193.

highlighted the fact that the shrew-taming tradition was often more brutal than Shakespeare's play. These claims first began to show up when critics compared Petruchio to the shrew-tamer in oral and folkloric tradition. Up until thirty-five years ago, critics interested in source criticism concentrated for the most part on the contemporary play *The Taming of A Shrew*.⁷² However, Jan Harold Brunvand and later Richard Hosley undertook detailed analyses of the sources and discovered that Shakespeare's method is not only unique but also less physically brutal.⁷³ As Anne Barton says in the *Riverside* edition, "By comparison with the husband who binds his erring spouse, [and] beats her, . . . Petruchio—although no Romeo—is almost a model of intelligence and humanity."⁷⁴ Likewise, Brian Morris, editor of the 1981 Arden edition, claims that Shakespeare "modifies his material in the direction of romance, softening the element of physical and sexual confrontation to allow the more tender mysteries of love to be seen through the ritual parades of aggression and courtship."⁷⁵ Moreover, referring to a Restoration adaptation, Morris comments, "it is noteworthy that Lacey rejected the *skill and delicacy* of Shakespeare's 'taming' techniques in favour of something much closer to the brutality of [*A Merry Jest of*] *A Shreude and Curste Wyfe*."⁷⁶ Petruchio's method makes subordination more "civilized" because it achieves total domination without relying on physical violence.

Although many critics agree that Petruchio's method is an improvement, they disagree about the importance of Shakespeare's modifications of the shrew-taming stories. While Morris thinks too much emphasis on the differences is distracting, Valerie Wayne argues that "it would be difficult to over-emphasize Shakespeare's departures from convention in the plot he devises and the character he draws."⁷⁷ Morris grants that, while Petruchio's method is "coercive, . . . he never physically assaults or chastises [Kate] and this distinguishes *The Shrew* from earlier plays on the theme."⁷⁸ Twentieth-century Western culture retains this "modern" appreciation for attaining dominance without physical brutality; neither Wayne nor Morris explores why this difference matters.

A humanist and patriarchal appreciation of reason and language often shores up the strategic emphasis on Shakespeare's civilizing improvements without analyzing the effects of smoothing over the rough edges of subordination. Wayne, for example, emphasizes that Petruchio's methods "are not brutal, but they are decidedly coercive"; hence Shakespeare devises a "more

⁷² Earlier critics did discuss shrew-taming traditions. F. J. Furnivall, for example, mentions "Merry Jest" to support his argument that "no one would be offended by Petruchio's likening of the training of a wife to that of a falcon" (quoted here from *Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. William J. Rolfe [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1886], 24). However, I find it interesting to speculate on how much of a coincidence it is that just when critics began to take into account Kate's experience of taming, scholars proved that Shakespeare's method was more kindly than the tradition. This not only redeems the Bard but, more importantly, shifts the focus away from the violence of Petruchio's method.

⁷³ See Jan Harold Brunvand, "The Folktale Origin of *The Taming of the Shrew*," *SQ* 17 (1966): 345–59; and Richard Hosley, "Sources and Analogues of *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 27 (1964): 289–308.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Thompson, ed., 28.

⁷⁵ Morris, 88.

⁷⁶ Morris, 91, emphasis added.

⁷⁷ Wayne, "Refashioning," 170.

⁷⁸ Morris, 131–132.

humane and artistic way to ‘tame.’ ”⁷⁹ While valuing Wayne’s insights, I question whether Petruchio’s civilized method is actually an improvement for women. My reading argues that men benefit more than women when subordination’s rough edges are softened. The result is not less domination but less unseemly domination.

Reading Shakespeare’s civilized shrew-tamer as enlightened and positively kindly underscores the humanist preference for a nonphysical expression of dominance but ignores the harm inherent in domination. Petruchio’s method may be superior to wife-beating, but it is also more insidious and surely no less oppressive. Therefore, what is significant is not that Shakespeare deploys a less oppressive method but that he highlights a more palatable method for subordinating a wife. All forms of subordination aim at “stealing away” a wife’s “private will.”⁸⁰ If the result of both kinds of shrew-taming is to emotionally “nullify” Kate (“will you, nil you”), I find little to celebrate even when this end is achieved without “brutal” physical violence.

4. “TO KILL A WIFE WITH KINDNESS”

When Petruchio boasts that his method “is a way to kill a wife with kindness” (4.2.179), he relies on several notions of “kindness.” At one level, he means that his haggard-manning method is “kind” in comparison with the beating she might have experienced. Another meaning of “kindness” plays on giving back the same “kind” of shrewishness Kate embodies; they are two of a kind, as several critics have argued. But a third element of “kindness” emerges in the combined threat to “kill” while simultaneously acting “kind.” As the Stockholm syndrome demonstrates, hostages bond with their captors when, at the same time their lives are threatened, they are shown some gestures of kindness.

Just as the meaning of Petruchio’s “kindness” is multiple, domestic violence can be defined in more than one way. If a culture identifies violence by the level of brutality and physical injury, then Petruchio provides a useful method of gaining the wifely subordination that early modern men considered natural and right, without resorting to wife-beating. Under the guise of civility, the early modern reform movement made men’s masculinity and status as gentlemen contingent on achieving and maintaining dominance without brutality. On the other hand, domestic violence can be seen as one point on a continuum of power and control behaviors. Rather than using a simple hierarchy of tactics that would automatically see the physical as worse than other kinds of threatening behavior, a feminist model looks instead at dominance. This definition calls Petruchio’s method abusive because it creates a coercive emotional bond based on fear and intimidation.

⁷⁹ Wayne, “Refashioning,” 171 and 174.

⁸⁰ This quotation is from one of many marriage manuals, Edmund Tilney’s *Flower of Friendship* (1568). Establishing complete power over a wife’s “will” was a standard goal for the early modern husband, necessary in order to govern his household in an orderly fashion. Here Tilney suggests that a husband should be gentle toward his wife and gradually “steale away hir private will, and appetite, so that [instead] of two bodies there may be made one onely hart” (112; see also Wayne, introduction, 62–63). While Tilney advocates “gentle-ness,” his language merges kindness with the violence of theft.

As readers and as teachers of *The Taming of the Shrew*, we benefit from analyzing two different models of domestic violence; without such analysis, we risk either erasing the abusiveness of Petruchio's method or falsely assuming the demise of an older model of domestic violence. Despite feminist reforms, many of us still define domestic violence by the degree of physical injury, sharing the early modern emphasis on "blows" rather than oppression. In other words, we are still very much influenced by the seventeenth-century notion of domestic violence, defined by the husband's use of extreme physical battery, the kind that leaves marks. By recognizing the specific ways in which taming is what some in our culture now define as domestic violence, students can unpack their own assumptions about violence, thus allowing them to question the cultural ideas that have to be in place for a reader to find comedy in the play. Approaching the play in this way avoids assuming that everyone in the classroom, for example, has the same model of domestic violence or domination. As a feminist teacher, I believe we must give students the tools to resist reading as an abuser, to resist minimalizing the violence because it leaves few physical injuries or because it appears provoked and therefore justified. Not to do so risks legitimizing Petruchio's violence when we ask readers to reproduce the violence in order to enjoy the play.