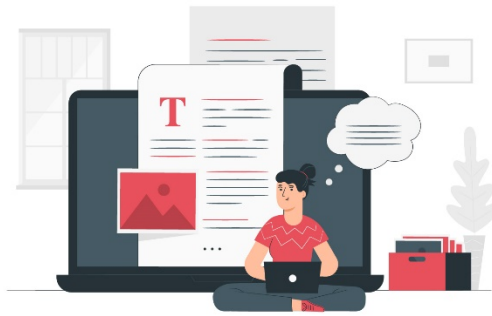


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## The Shrew in Shakespeare: A Feminist Perspective

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### **Abstract:**

This paper examines the contribution of feminist scholarship to Shakespeare Criticism. A reading of Feminist criticism of canonical drama texts, enables us to reckon with feminism as a critical, methodological tool. Critical insights from New-historicist, Cultural Studies, Psychoanalysis, Deconstruction and Marxist standpoints are marshalled by Feminist scholars to analyse the co-relation of gender stereotypes in drama and contemporary social constructs. The paper studies the representation of the shrew in five of Shakespeare's plays, across genres and juxtaposes it to the critical readings by feminist scholars in the 1980s. Breaking away from the school of New Criticism, Feminist readings examine the text and context, social stereotypes and performative subversions, literary conventions and re-configurations in the domain of representation of gender relations. The paper studies how Shakespeare's representation of the shrew offers empowering possibilities for women of his society to bargain a space within the social matrix. The development of the shrew from a scold to a counsellor, from *The Comedy of Errors* to *The Winter's Tale* is examined from the critical perspective of Feminist scholarship on Shakespeare.

**Keywords: Shrew, Shakespeare, Feminism, Gender relations, Stereotypes, role-play, Patriarchy.**

Feminist criticism of Shakespeare foregrounds important aspects of his plays that have been either ignored or inadequately examined by traditional criticism. Its focus is on women characters and the roles allotted to them by the society within and indirectly outside the play world. It examines the position of women and their relation to men in a patriarchal society. An examination of the female stereotypes in Shakespeare's plays and analysis of the playwright's attitude to women is a significant feminist re-reading of canonical drama. Does Shakespeare reflect a sexist bias in his portrayal of women? Does Shakespeare allow his women characters to emerge out of the confines of stereotypes or does he bind them to a patriarchal order? Such questions are repeatedly raised by feminist critics. While a few feminist critics are unable to

resist enlisting Shakespeare under the feminist banner, some others have been more sceptical of such a perspective.

Juliet Dusinberre is an instance of the of the former band of critics. In her book, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, she notes, “Shakespeare’s modernity in his treatment of women”. She argues that his drama is “feminist in sympathy” (Dusinberre, 1975: 5). Coppelia Kahn in *Man’s Estate Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* highlights how working within a patriarchal culture, Shakespeare provides an ironic perspective on patriarchal conventions. While stating that Shakespeare “never abandoned belief in male legitimacy or horror at female sexuality”, Marilyn French concedes that his work “represents a lifelong effort to harmonise and synthesize opposing or opposed states and qualities” (French, 1982: 17). Linda Bamber adopts a less enthusiastic stand in her book, *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare*. She proposes to interpret the plays by examining gender stereotypes and probe whether and how they undermine themselves. She categorically states, “I am in reaction against a tendency of feminist critics to interpret Shakespeare as if his work directly supports and develops feminist ideas.” (Bamber, 1982: 1). She insists on Shakespeare’s independence of and distance from the system of feminist thought. She also refrains from using her feminist perspective as a rigid grid to impose on Shakespeare’s plays.

All the critics mentioned above are engaged in a study of female roles in the patriarchal society of the Shakespearean play world. The question, does Shakespeare acquiesce in patriarchal stereotypes, constantly troubles them but also provokes some of their sharpest insights on the plays. Feminist critics use different critical approaches and share the assumptions of diverse critical traditions. Juliet Dusinberre examines Shakespeare in the historical context, stressing the importance of the puritan, bourgeois background in the conception of Shakespeare’s heroines. Coppelia Kahn adopts the insights of post-Freudian ego psychologists in her study of the formations of masculine identity in Shakespeare. Her examination of sex roles and the patriarchal institutions instituting them makes significant contribution to contemporary cultural criticism. Her fusion of psychoanalytical methodology, historical perspectives and feminist thought is quite interesting.

Both Linda Bamber and Marilyn French have evolved fresh terminology in their interpretation of gender relations in the plays of Shakespeare. Commenting on the masculine perception of the feminine as either mother Madonna or the whore, Marilyn French divides the feminine into two principles into two principles, the in-law feminine principle and the out-law

feminine principle. According to her, the in-law feminine principle is “an expression of the benevolent manifestation of nature (it is) founded on the ability to give birth.... requires volitional subordination... each quality (is) supportive of a quality in the masculine principle, but always as subordinate”. In contrast to this, the out-law feminine principle is “subversive, ... associated with flesh ..., magic, ... (with) sex as abandonment, ... (and) no goal beyond the pleasure of being.” (French,1982: 23-24). Marilyn French uses the above formulations of the feminine principle to interpret character and themes as well as structure and plot construction in Shakespeare’s plays. However, her reading of the plays offers no fresh insights. She rigidly applies the categorisation of the feminine into the in-law and the out-law principles to the structure and characterisation of the plays. Marilyn French’s book *Shakespeare’s Division of Experience, 1982* is an instance of a feminist critic’s act of fitting her thesis to Shakespeare’s plays rather than applying it to reveal meanings in them or offer a critical evaluation.

On the other hand, Linda Bamber’s application of her critical formulations to explore gender relations in Shakespeare’s plays is more satisfactory. She views the feminine as “a principle of otherness, something unlike and external to the self, which is male.” (Bamber,1982: 40). She observes that the ‘self’ is privileged in tragedy and the ‘other’ in comedy. Avoiding a mechanical application of the principles of ‘self’ and the ‘other’, Linda Bamber uses them as points of departure to study roles of women in Shakespeare’s plays. She also addresses the difficulty of reconciling the portrayal of women in the tragedies with their portrayal in the comedies.

Whatever be their critical bearings and assumptions, the feminist critics under consideration offer close textual analysis. The technique of New Criticism, it is worth remarking, is useful in unravelling ideological paradigms. The aims of feminist critics are of course vastly different from those of New Critics. Instead of valorising the text and disregarding its ideological implications, as the New Critics invariably do, feminist critics pay close attention to the text in order to explore the position and role of women in the Shakespearean text and social context and to examine cultural, gender related issues concerning the woman question (Lenz & Neely,1980:3-16). They explore not only the nature of the women represented but also the nature of their representation. Are the women characters in Shakespeare’s plays realistically portrayed or are they projections of fears and anxieties of a patriarchal set up? (Kahn, *Man’s Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare*,1981:105) Feminist critics study female stereotypes and probe the reasons for such a conceptualisation.

They also observe the development of the stereotype in subsequent plays and in different genres. One such stereotype that invariably attracts the attention of feminist critics is the shrew.

The role of a shrew was “the oldest and indeed the only native comic role for women”, observes M.C. Bradbrook (Bradbrook,1984:59). Feminist critics analyse Shakespeare’s treatment of the shrew. Examining the treatment meted out to actual shrews and to shrews in literature, they study Shakespeare’s representation of this figure. Does the Shakespearean shrew evolve out of the traditional shrew figure found in early Tudor drama? They also probe Shakespeare’s attitude towards the shrew. Is he sympathetic towards her? Does he invest her with positive aspects? How shrewish are his heroines? Is there a development in the shrewish figure in his later plays? These are some of the questions that the feminist critics engage with.

The feminist perspective on the shrew is valuable in its examination of the societal and literary history of the shrew. Lisa Jardine’s extensive study of the social and intellectual history of the Elizabethan period helps us reach a balanced assessment of the position and power of wives in the period? Her scholarship also aids in reevaluating the portrayal of shrewish women in Shakespeare (Jardine,*Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*,1983). Valarie Wayne provides documentary proof to highlight the harsh treatment meted out to shrewish women in patriarchal societies (Wayne, *Refashioning the Shrew*, 1985).

Both the critics point out that the patriarchal order resents women who can articulate their emotions and opinions. The ideal wife is to be chaste, dutiful and silent. Lisa Jardine comments, “the woman with a sharp tongue breaks the social order: she is strictly disorderly. Discordant, disruptive, unruly, she threatens to sabotage the domestic harmony which depends upon her general submissiveness.” (Jardine,1983: 106). A shrew is a rebellious woman who makes sinful use of her speech. Valarie Wayne defines the shrew thus: “The scold or shrew was a married woman who did talk, in life and in literature especially during the middle ages and the Renaissance... she was known for causing increasing marital discord.” (Wayne,1985: 159). Shrews were “silenced with a bridle” (an iron contraption that covered a woman’s face below her eyes and nose, it had a flat piece of metal that went into her mouth and prevented her from speaking) or she was “publicly shamed.” (1985:159).

Silence was extolled as the domestic ideal for women and wives were allotted a subordinate position in the household: “Looke what kinde of words or behaviour thou wouldst

dislike from thy servant or childe, those must thou not give to thine husband: for thou art equally commanded to be subject.” (Whately, *A Bride Bush* in Jardine, 1983:106)

The tongue was the shrew’s best weapon. However, protestant divines constantly reminded wives to curb their speech and subject themselves to their husband’s will. A husband was deemed manly only when he could command his wife. Hence women’s behaviour was sought to be so fashioned that it served as a measure to validate patriarchal authority. Laurence Stone points out how in a patriarchal set-up, the husband/father as the head of the family lorded over wife/daughters almost “with the quasi-absolute authority of a despot.” (Lawrence Stone, 1967: 271)

In literature, the shrew was a brawling scold, who nagged and reproached her husband constantly, often hurting him physically. The shrew in early Tudor plays was shown as one who exploited her husband as drudge and provider, deprived him of pleasures of the palate but finally was beaten into submission by the husband or his proxy. (Bradbrook, 1984: 59-61). She was tamed in the crudest ways possible that reduced her to the status of an animal. The shrew, when overcome, comments M.C. Bradbrook, “submitted either to high theological argument or to a taste of the stick.” (1984: 59). Noah’s wife in the corpus christ cycle plays is an earthy, memorable and amusing character who voices the woman’s perspective on marital relationship.

The shrew’s challenge of her husband is a direct assault on patriarchy. She disregards the injunction to maintain silence and respect her husband’s authority. She thus precipitates domestic discord and disorder. The cultural texts of the period castigated such women who “can chafe and scold with their husbands, raile upon them (as) staines of woman-kinde, blemishes of their sexe, monsters in natures, botches of humane society, rude graceless, impudent next to harlots, if not the same with them” (Whately in Jardine, 1983:106). The dramatists of the age, however, exploited the shrew’s energy and her sharp tongue to create a lively character, a figure of vitality and wit.

The feminist critics explore the causes and implications of the transformation of the shrew from her traditional representation as a disruptive, discordant woman into a lively, spirited female character in the plays of Shakespeare. The feminist approach, thus, offers a historicised reading of Shakespeare’s texts, placing them in their social and cultural context. Juxtaposing social history and Shakespeare’s representation of the stereotyped shrew enables them to probe the playwright’s attitude to patriarchy. They compare the plays with their sources to illuminate the presence of traditional and innovative elements.

The shrew is most vividly portrayed in Shakespeare's early plays. Adriana in *The Comedy of Errors* and Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew* are popular and attractive Shakespearean shrews. There are fewer shrews in his later works, though Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Emilia in *Othello* and Paulina in *The Winter's Tale* have been recognised and examined as shrews by critics.

Although most Plautine of Shakespeare's comedies, *The Comedy of Errors* is a good instance of his inventiveness and an improvisation on his model, especially in the matter of characterisation. In Plautus' *Menaechmi*, the wife is rather unmanageable and nagging but is put down by her husband. She remains a comic butt inviting a good laugh at her expense. Adriana in *The Comedy of Errors*, on the other hand, is a forceful figure with a case in point. She has a point of view, and an individual perspective that commands attention and merits a serious discussion. Adriana is the earliest of shrewish women and also the most vocal of them. Traditional criticism has failed to grasp the complexity of Adriana's character. E.M.W. Tillyard in his book, *Shakespeare's Early Comedies* views Adriana as "good-natured at bottom" but "in her stupidity and her garrulousness she is comparable to Mrs. Quickly". (Tillyard,1965: 58) H.B. Charlton in *Shakespearean Comedy* does note the husband's insensitivity but dismisses Adriana "as a shrew, virago and vixen to boot" who beats up servants and "garrulously shout(s) her troubles to the street." (Charlton,1938:69-70) The traditional critics, thus overlook the predicament of the shrewish wife as well as the pertinent questions raised by her concerning marital relationship.

Even the Arden editor of the play, Henry Cuninghame merely notes, "the character is an enormous advance" on that of Plautus. Focussing more on Shakespeare's art of characterisation and less on the questions raised by the character or her social context, Cuninghame's comments on Adriana are restricted to a summary description: "Adriana is drawn with considerable individuality, and gives us the impression of a loving and dutiful though jealous, impatient and quick-tempered wife who is something of a shrew withal." (Cunningham ed. *The Comedy of Errors*,1926: XXXVi) The feminist critics' contribution to the body of Shakespeare criticism lies in their focus on the neglected aspects of the play. They throw light on the psychological and social realism of a play that works within the constraints of a Plautine structure. They place the emphasis on Shakespeare's attitude to women. While traditional critics grant Adriana, a marginal significance in the play, feminist critics recognise that she raises important issues concerning marriage, gender relations and a wife's role in the patriarchal set-up, issues that are explored in subsequent plays as well.

Adriana's protest at her husband's negligence has been read as a feminist challenge to sexual hierarchy. Her question, "why should their liberty than ours be more?" (*Errors*, II i: 10), crystallises a central belief of a feminist thought. What is the criterion for the wife's inferior status within the institution marriage?

Adriana refuses to submit silently to the status quo: "there's none but asses will be bridled so!" (*Errors*, I: 14). Linda Bamber observes that although Shakespeare presents Adriana as a spirited, witty woman with a mind of her own, he punctures the feminist challenge posed by her. Abandoning the debate between Adriana and Luciana, Bamber points out how Shakespeare incorporates a long dull sermon on a wife's obedience and her place in the chain of being. Adriana's sister Luciana mouths platitudes in a sonorous and stifled language and snuffles the vitality and liveliness of Adriana's argument. (Bamber, 1982: 32).

Does Shakespeare hesitate to explore the predicament of the shrew? Does he fail to let her present her case impartially? Linda Bamber believes, indeed, that is the case. Although Shakespeare gives Adriana a motive for her behaviour- sexual jealousy and refrains from portraying her as wilfully shrewish, Adriana is blamed for her distress. The Abbess reprimands her, "thy jealous fits/hath scar'd thy husband from the use of wits". (*Errors* V, i: 85-86).

Luciana's answer to Adriana's question not only reflects an uneasy termination of an engrossing debate, it sharply focuses on hierarchy in marriage and the need to maintain the status quo. The speech, Juliet Dusinberre points out is closely modelled on state-authorised homilies. Luciana describes to Adriana "wat the queen wished every subject to know, that subjection to authority is part of divinely appointed order of nature". (Dusinberre, 1975: 80). According to the homilies, wives formed only one of the links in a comprehensive hierarchy of relations: "let women be subject to their husbands as to the Lord; for the husband is the head of the woman as Christ is the head of the church." ('An Homily of the state of Matrimony', *The Two Books of Homilies Appointed to be read in Churches*, ed. J. Griffiths, cited in Kahn, 1981:15) Husbands and wives are in the same order of hierarchy as kings and subjects, priests and laymen or masters and servants. (Dusinberre, 1975:79; Kahn, 1981: 13). If the wife did not obey her husband, chaos was to follow, a chaos analogous to the one following the dislodging of a lawful prince.

The critics' citation of the homilies helps explicate Shakespeare's response to prevalent patriarchal assumptions. By making one of his characters voice the sentiments and dictums of well-known homilies, argues the feminist critic, Shakespeare perpetuates the state authorised



role of women in matrimony. However, the defender of male dominance, in this case, is a woman. Could this be taken as Shakespeare's comment on the alienation of the rebellious female who challenges the status quo? In other words, Linda Bamber's assessment that "in *The Comedy of Errors*, the feminist possibilities of his story provoke the author's partiality for the status quo" (Bamber, 1982: 32), misses the subtlety of Shakespeare's representation of the feminine challenge to patriarchy. Adriana's speeches bring out the idea that she is less a shrew and more a neglected wife who has no one to turn to for sympathy:

*His company must do his minions grace  
While I at home starve for a merry look,  
Are my discourse dull? Barren my wit?  
What ruins are in me that can be found  
by him not ruin'd? ...  
My decayed fair  
A sunny look of his would soon repair.  
... poor I am but his stale.*

(*Errors* II, i: 87-101)

Adriana is partly indulging in self-pity here but what is worth noting is that Shakespeare is investing the shrew with greater psychological realism. She is not merely a stereotype but a woman emotionally dependent upon her husband and when frustrated vexes herself the more.

Unlike the shrew in older literature, Adriana is not seen in the company of female gossips drinking, merry making and turning her husband out of the house. She in fact accepts the patriarchal equation concerning marital relation:

*thou art an elm, my husband, I a vine  
Whose weakness, married to thy stronger state,  
Makes me with thy strength to communicate.*

(*Errors* II, ii, 173-75)

Adriana's orthodoxy, her concern for her husband, her jealousy, her vitality and wit render her a complex 'shrew'. Feminist critics are correct in pointing out that the pertinency of Adriana's question, *why should their liberty than ours be more* is side tracked and that the counsel for upholding degree and endurance is no remedy for her predicament. Luciana's answer is certainly inadequate.

In *The Comedy of Errors*, Shakespeare is exploring marital relationship through the shrewish figure. He definitely raises the question, why is Adriana a shrew? Are her demands on her husband justified? Feminist criticism foregrounds these issues of the play and argues for their relevance in arriving at an overall perspective of *The Comedy of Errors*. Kate, another Shakespearean shrew, plays a principal part in *The Taming of the Shrew*. The play is often dismissed as a farce. Feminist criticism highlights the social commentary implicit in this play. The domestication of the shrewish Kate has pre-occupied audiences and critics alike over the years. Feminist criticism explores the nature and implications of Kate's taming, but more significantly, it highlights the exercise of patriarchal power over the women in the play.

The character of the shrewish Kate is more subtle and complex than that of Adriana's. The shrew in *The Taming of the Shrew*, argue feminist critics, is a product of her patriarchal culture. Baptista, Kate's father is a representative patriarch and acts most authoritatively over his daughters' sexuality. He dictates terms and conditions to their suitors, decides who could woo them at all, and refers the highest bidder among them as the eligible match for his daughters. Coppelia Kahn highlights Baptista's mercantile interest in settling his daughters' marriage. Woman becomes a mere commodity to be bought and sold to the mutual advantage of the father and the suitor.

Kate is trapped in this mercantile world. Her sexual desire for a partner is thwarted by the society and her family who spread the tale of her shrewishness. The dubious parental interest of her father, the coquetry of the apparently conforming but deceptive and manipulating Bianca, her sister, and the mercenary motives of Petruchio, her suitor prompt us to question the title of a shrew bestowed upon her.

It is worth probing whether Kate conforms to the traditional image of the shrew. Traditionally, the shrew is married, a domestic tyrant who causes marital strife. M.C. Bradbrook points out that Kate is "the first shrew to be given a father, the first to be shown as maid and bride. She is not seen merely in relation to a husband." (Bradbrook, 1984: 62). Shakespeare's departure from the convention in his characterisation is a significant comment.

In depicting Kate as an unmarried shrew, Shakespeare strikes at the causes of her shrewishness. She is as Coppelia Kahn observes, “a victim of the marriage market” (Kahn,1981: 105) and becomes shrewish partly to safeguard herself from the covetousness of her society. Her intelligence is never in doubt. Her witty exchange with Petruchio at the time of his preposterous wooing is proof enough that Kate is using her image of the shrew to shield herself from Petruchio’s aggressiveness and uncalled for advances. Germaine Greer in *The Female Eunuch* rightly perceives Kate as “a woman striving for her own existence in a world where she is a stale, a decoy to be bid for against her sister’s higher market value, so she opts out by becoming unmanageable, a scold” (Greer,1971:208)

Feminist critics have commented on the humanisation of the shrew in *The Taming of the Shrew*. J.C. Bean points out how despite the dehumanising plot and the depersonalising farce, Kate emerges as a humanised woman, imaginative and sensitive in character (Bean,1980: 65-78). Not only does Shakespeare portray the shrew realistically, giving her a psychological validity, he is sympathetic to her response of shrewishness against the patriarchal subjection of women. When Kate refuses to conform to the sexist stereotype of a pliant, submissive (and hence) desirable woman, her society, in retaliation casts her into another of its stereotype- the disruptive, rebellious, shrewish woman. Shakespeare reveals the predicament of women caught up in a cluster of roles fashioned by patriarchal society. He further shows how the shrew arising from a patriarchal society and used to affirm its assumptions, also acts as its best critic. Valerie Wayne’s *Refashioning the Shrew* pursues this line of argument most persuasively.

As noted earlier, Shakespeare uses the shrew to discuss issues concerning women and marriage. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Petruchio evokes vividly, patriarchy’s control over women. His flamboyant appropriation of Kate crystallises the position of women in the patriarchal structure of contemporary society:

*I will be master of what is mine own-*

*She is my goods, my chattels, she is my house,*

*My household stuff, my fields, my barn,*

*My horse, my ox, my ass, **my anything*** (*The Taming of the Shrew*,1981 ed. III, ii:227-30,  
emphasis mine)

Feminist critics argue that Petruchio sets about teaching Kate her place in matrimony and tames Kate by becoming ‘shrewish’ himself. He shouts, stamps, denies her wishes,

withholds her comforts and almost bewilders her into submission. Coppelia Kahn comments that Petruchio's use of force is but "a farcical representation of the psychological realities of marriage in Elizabethan England, in which the husband's will of constantly, silently, and invisibly, through custom and conformity, suppressed the wife's." (Kahn,1981:110). Petruchio's mirroring of Kate is not merely a parodic version of the shrew's behaviour aimed at curing her of her shrewishness. Shakespeare suggests that social approval of behaviour is gender based. What is shunned in Kate becomes praiseworthy in Petruchio.

Although Petruchio does not use the stick or tie up Kate and order her to be bled (some of the methods used by his counterparts in shrew-taming tales) his brutality lies in his systematic curbing of Kate's spontaneity. He coerces Kate to give up holding any opinion, in fact, to give up the very act of thinking. Nevertheless, Kate retains her self-awareness even while submitting to her husband's whimsical judgement:

*Forwards, I pray, since we have come so far,*

*And be it moon or sun what you please,*

*And if you please to call it a rush candle,*

*Henceforth, I vow it shall be so for me...*

*But sun it is not, when you say it is not;*

*And **the moon changes even as your mind.***

*(The Shrew IV, v: 12-15, 19-20, emphasis mine)*

Kate definitely compromises but what preoccupies feminist critics is the quality of her capitulation. Coppelia Kahn feels that "she thinks him mad" and is mocking his expectations of submissiveness by her "exuberant declamatory style" (Kahn,1981: 112-13). If Petruchio demands that she recognise Vincentio as a fair maiden, Kate goes further in her burst of poetry-

Young budding virgin, fair and fresh and sweet, ...

Happy the parents of so fair a child

Happy the man whom favourable stars

Allot thee for his lovely bed-fellow.

*(The Shrew, V: 36-40)*

Kate's rhetoric does suggest that she does not believe what Petruchio says to be true, that she cannot be in earnest. Coppelia Kahn sees this as Kate's strategy to maintain "her inner freedom" even while "outwardly denying it". It cannot be designed for her by her husband. This by necessity curbs her inner freedom as well.

Valerie Wayne sees Kate's submission as role-playing, an imaginative, positive means that enables her to "transcend roles and hierarchies that govern her world". (Wayne, 1985: 173). J.C. Bean also argues that Kate learns to enjoy her role playing and that she is tamed rather by the "discovery of her own imagination". He continues, "when she learns to recognise the sun for the moon and the moon for the dazzling sun she is discovering the liberating power of laughter and play." (Bean, 1980: 72). What the critics fail to notice is that enforced role playing cannot possibly be liberating. It cannot be equated with spontaneous, imaginative role playing of the comic heroines- of Rosalind's for instance in *As You Like It*.

Feminist critics throw light on the constraints imposed upon women in a patriarchal set-up. Their insights lead us to view Shakespeare's portrayal of Kate as that of an intelligent, witty, wealthy young woman placed within a male centric society. She cannot be herself; she has to compromise her integrity and surrender her intellectual freedom. She has to present herself as a submissive, ornamental dependent who validates her husband's macho image in the company of his male friends. Patriarchy's valorising of silence as indicative of female virtue or formulating submissiveness as a wifely ideal is so rampant that a woman becomes desirable only when she exhibits such traits. In this context it is worth remarking that Kate's marriage is consummated only at the end of the play, after she publicly proclaims her submission to her husband's will.

Kate's last speech has garnered considerable critical attention from feminist critics. Ingenious justifications have been put forward to extenuate Shakespeare from the charge of complicity with patriarchal discourse. Her speech has led J.C. Bean to hail her as a humanist and a liberal while Linda Bamber points out the sexist, reactionary elements embedded in it. Dusi's reading of Kate's speech is closer to that of Bamber's. Kate lectures to her fellow-brides thus:

*Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,*

*Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee,*

*And for thy maintenance commits his body*

*To painful labour both by sea and land,  
 To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,  
 Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe,  
 And craves no other tribute at thy hands,  
 But love, fair looks, and true obedience*

(The Shrew, V, ii: 145-52)

The speech does not reflect as Bean argues, the principles advocated by humanist marriage reformers which underlines reciprocity of affection and duties unlike what Kate is shown to hold forth in the play. Kate does not dwell on woman's sinfulness or her moral inferiority. Nonetheless, placed in its dramatic context, and in the light of the speaker's characterisation as discussed above, the speech is what Juliet Dusinberre, locates as "particularly disconcerting". (Dusinberre,1975:105) Feminist critics focus firstly, on the implications of Kate's speech and secondly, its consequences to Kate's personality. Lisa Jardine notes that the speech cannot be related to the speaker's predicament as shown in the earlier sections of the play. (Jardine,1983 :59). Kate's speech reflects the inferiority of the feminine. It views the wife as a passive and parasitical partner who lives in comfort 'secure and safe' while the husband braves the harsh world and toils to keep his family happy. The wife can contribute to his happiness only through such sexist virtues as 'fair looks' and beauty seasoned with 'obedience'. It does not recognise the wife as an equal and an active partner in matrimony who can share her husband's responsibilities or ease his burden.

Kate's female companions find her state humiliating. Petruchio makes her tread on her fine cap, because he likes it not, employs her as a messenger, and reduces her to an object by setting a wager on her. The widow finds Kate's compliance rather 'silly', and Bianca mocks at her obedience. Kate is thus humiliated in company. However, as feminist critics quickly point out, in a patriarchal society, women's humiliation/subjection is an essential validation of masculine authority. (Jardine1983: CH 2; Kahn,1981: Introduction)

Linda Bamber points out that "the battle of sexes as a theme for comedy is inherently sexist." (Bamber,1982: 35). However, despite the sexist biases of the sources and the cultural norms within which he wrote, Shakespeare treats the shrew with sympathy and humanises her. He leaves the question of Kate's taming rather open-ended. Although in the play Bianca is

admired and preferred for her moderate speech and Kate shunned for her noisy tongue, Kate at her most submissive moment is at her eloquent best. Coppelia Kahn emphasises this point to underline that Kate is not as tamed as her audience believes her to be. She dominates her audience while preaching subservience, she steals the show, while advocating self-effacement. She is as vocal, vivacious and dominating as she was at the beginning of the play.

Kate's speech has been read as a joke upon her audience in collaboration with Petruchio, a piece of brilliant theatrical performance. (Kahn, 1981:114-16; Wayne, 1985: 172-73). The series of transformation in the play, beginning with Sly's transformation from a tinker to a lord have prompted feminist critics to view Kate's transformation from a shrew to a submissive wife with suspicion. Could not Kate's transformation be a projection of male fantasy? Juliet Dusinberre warns the reader from taking Kate's speech at face value (Dusinberre, 1975: 105-06). The above interpretations of Kate's last speech are sensitive to the complexity of Shakespeare's presentation of the shrew.

Both *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Taming of the Shrew* are cast in the farcical mode. Notwithstanding Shakespeare's humanising of the shrew, both Adriana and Kate are unable to fully emerge out of the confines of the comic stereotype. While the pressure of social realism comes through most vividly through the shrews in the plays, they still operate within a world of farce. In this context, a brief look at Shakespeare's representation of the shrew in other genres in the plays of the mature period would illuminate the development of the shrewish figure.

Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* is an unceasing talker. She is called Lady Tongue by Benedick (18). She "mocks all her wooers out of suit" (*Much Ado*, 1981 ed. II, i: 311). It is interesting to observe Shakespeare's representation of the shrewish heroine in this play. Every male character of the play openly acknowledges Beatrice's intelligence. However, she is also seen as a serious threat to the masculine world. Her frequent references to cuckoldry and horns underline the primitive fear that lurks in the minds of men. Beatrice's shrewish speeches foregrounds this fear and scares Benedick away. Her verbal drubbing substitutes the physical blows that a shrew resorts to in other plays.

Leonato berates Beatrice for her sharp tongue:

Leonato       by my troth, thou wilt never get thee a husband if thou be so shrewd of the  
                  tongue

- Antonio           in faith, she's too curst.
- Beatrice           too curst is more than curst. I shall lessen God's sending that way; for it is said  
                          'God sends a curst cow short horns'; but to a cow too curst he sends none.
- Leonato           so, by being too curst, God will send you no horns.
- Beatrice           just, if he send me no husband; for the which blessing I am at him upon my  
                          knees every morning and evening.

(*Much Ado*, 1981ed., II, i: 17-25)

Lisa Jardine comments, 'It is Beatrice's shrewishness which guarantees that her menfolk would either be emasculated or cuckolded.' (Jardine,1983:112). Beatrice the shrew, clearly reflects men's anxieties concerning their honour. "The willingness of women" observes Coppelia Kahn, "to be married to husbands of their fathers' choice, and to be sexually faithful to their husbands in bearing legitimate male heirs-- in both ways serving the continuation of patriarchy-- is the invisible heart of the whole structure". (Kahn,1981: 13). Beatrice declares that she would do neither. Beatrice as a shrew thus becomes in men's eyes, a disruptive force that seeks to subvert patriarchy. Shakespeare uses Beatrice's shrewishness to call into question men's notion of honour.

In the play, Claudio chooses to rely on male evidence of Hero's chastity. He humiliates his bride in public and denounces her in bitter terms. His outrage at Hero's alleged sexual misdemeanour leads him to gang up with male friends, break the heart of Hero and insult Leonato. He then nonchalantly returns to his male world of honour and comradeship. Beatrice challenges precisely this valorisation of male friendship, questions the notion of honour and absence of trust towards women/loved.

Beatrice's affection for her kinswoman prompts her to seek revenge against Claudio's cruelty. Her command to Benedick, "Kill Claudio" (*Much Ado*, IV, i : 283) to avenge Hero and to prove his love for Beatrice, is a serious challenge to bonds of male honour. She spiritedly questions the male assumption that women's loyalty be only towards their menfolk. "Is 'a not approved in the height a villain, that both slandered, scorned, dishonoured my kinswoman?... I would eat his heart in the market place." (*Much Ado*, IV, i: 297-98, 302).

The shrew in *Much Ado* does threaten the male world but she is merely a disruptive force. She counters male notions of honour and fellowship with a humane code that recognises



love, empathy, filial bond and female friendship. If one talks about Beatrice's capitulation, one cannot overlook Benedick's domestication either. Both of them recognise and accept love as a necessary value in life and enter into a mature, companionate relationship.

Lisa Jardine observes, "But the literary shrew's moment of triumph is short lived. Beatrice is forced to acknowledge that her tongue has no real power when her 'Kill Claudio' is registered as mere words, as not a command by Benedick" (Jardine,1983:113). However, Beatrice's "Kill Claudio" is the most powerful speech in the play for it is a direct challenge to male friendship and its code of honour. Benedick is appalled: "Ha! Not for the wide world!" (*Much Ado*, 1981, IV i: 284). Benedick however decides to honour love, "Think you in your soul the count Claudio hath wronged Hero?... Enough, I am engaged. I will challenge him" (IV i: 319). The shrew's tongue has managed to affirm positive values of love, care and solidarity towards one's women friends in distress and following the dictates of the heart instead of a hollow code of ethics.

Emilia in *Othello* is yet another shrewish woman who challenges male notions of honour and valour. She questions the morality of patriarchal control of wives. Is the wife bound to honour her husband and show obedience to him even when he is proved a villain? Iago, Emilia's husband is discovered to have caused discord in Othello's marriage, precipitating the murder of Desdemona at her husband's hands. On learning this, Emilia refuses to obey her husband's command for the first time in the play. She declares, "I will not charm my tongue; I am bound to speak." (*Othello*,1965 ed., V ii: 184) Further, she asserts her right to speak and justifies her shrewish tongue:

... *I peace?*

*No, I will speak as liberal as the north:*

*Let heaven and men and devils, let them all,*

*All, all cry shame against me, yet I'll speak*

(*Othello*, V, ii: 219-22)

Valerie Wayne remarks "These lines might serve as a shrew's motto." (Wayne,1985: 178). Emilia's moral courage is viewed as shrewishness by her husband. But Emilia is strong enough to speak out the truth. Shakespeare uses Emilia as a shrew rather briefly, only in the concluding section of the play. Emilia as Valerie Wayne notes is almost "driven out into that

role by her malicious husband” (Wayne, 1985: 179). As a shrew, Emilia exposes her husband’s Villainy and Othello’s brand of love for his wife. She calls Othello a ‘dull moor’ a ‘murderous coxcomb’ (1965 ed., V, ii: 225, 233). Her exclamation “what should such a fool do with so good a wife?” (V, ii: 233-34), debunks Othello who has believed himself to be an ardent lover. The brave hero is dismissed by Emilia as a ‘fool’, ‘a coxcomb’. Her speech forces us to review Othello’s heroism. The incompetence of the great general as he fails to see through intrigues and flattery and the inadequacy of the passionate lover are underlined by Emilia’s shrewish outbursts.

The tragic vigour of Emilia’s world cannot be surmounted by her shrewishness. Unlike the other shrews, Emilia’s shrewishness is unable to spread the air of freshness or infuse vivacity in her world. Yet it performs an important task. The shrew’s debunking of Othello’s heroism places masculine assumptions on female chastity in perspective. Shakespeare’s use of the shrewish woman in a tragedy illuminates the potential of this stereotype to offer a critique on the tragic hero. It also underlines a development in the Shakespearean shrew and indicates her place in a tragic world. Shakespeare presents her in a positive light as a truth teller who sets our accepted notions of conduct as well as of people in perspective. Emilia’s chastising of Othello, Lisa Jardine remarks, “bears the mark of the scold’s privilege” (Jardine, 1983: 118)

The shrew’s privilege is exercised in *Othello* rather too late to avert the tragedy. However, Paulina in *The Winter’s Tale* is able to deploy her shrewishness to ensure happiness and harmony. She is portrayed as a plain speaker who dares to utter truths and challenge the King’s judgement. Unable to accept Paulina’s truths Leontes calls her “audacious lady”, later labels her “a mankind witch... A most intelligent bawd!” (*The Winter’s Tale*, 1969; 1980 ed., II iii: 43, 66-67). He accuses Antigonus, Paulina’s husband of being unable to rule her. Paulina’s retort is “From all dishonesty he can” (*The Winter’s Tale* II iii: 47). Unmoved by the King’s threats Paulina continues to use her tongue to force the king to recognise his cruelty towards his chaste wife.

The shrew in *The Winter’s Tale* is presented in an altogether different light. Unlike the earlier shrews, she is not a young maid or a wife. She is a mature woman and lives on to become an old, lonely woman crusading for the vindication of a chaste queen. The shrew Paulina is a further development over the stereotype. She is portrayed as the good counsellor to the king who professes:

*Myself your loyal servant, your physician,*

*Your most obedient counsellor*

*(The Winter's Tale, II iii :55-57)*

The shrew as a counsellor is a striking development/transformation of the Shakespearean shrew who began as a jealous wife, clamouring for attention and love from her husband. Misuse of authority, feels Paulina, justifies shrewish behaviour and disobedience of authority. The king charges her with being a 'callet', 'a scold', 'of boundless tongue, who late hath beat her husband and now baits me!' (*The Winter's Tale* II iii :91-93). Paulina does not get intimidated or stop talking for she knows she has the truth on her side.

When Hermione 'dies' Paulina rails against Leontes' tyranny in a long speech (*The Winter's Tale*, III, ii: 172-200). She openly calls the king, 'a fool inconstant', 'damnable ingrateful' and a jealous tyrant. Leontes is 'touched / to th' noble heart' (*The Winter's Tale*, III, ii: 210-20). Paulina's shrewish railing at last begins to have a cathartic effect on Leontes. Leontes now encourages her speech to find release from his guilt. Valerie Wayne rightly recognises the "purgative function" of Paulina's shrewish speeches. She keeps Hermione's memory alive in Leontes' mind and finally restores the queen to the king.

In the final section of the play, Paulina is repeatedly associated with the artist figure, a wizard who can perform miracles. The shrew's creative and restorative powers are fully recognised by her society. The shrew Paulina, in this play, uses shrewishness for benevolent reasons and ultimately for regenerative ends. Valerie Wayne emphasises the creative energy of the shrew. (Wayne,1985: 181-82). Paulina's shrewishness ultimately ensures familial happiness for Leontes and regeneration for his barren kingdom.

In tracing the development of the shrew, feminist criticism probes Shakespeare's attitude towards a patriarchal stereotype. He uses the shrew to discuss important issues revolving around the women placed in a patriarchal culture. He does not blindly endorse the traditional, prevailing culture. He does not blindly endorse the contemporary perspective or conservative attitudes.

While exploring the power of female speech to challenge and even subvert male assumptions, Shakespeare also stresses the powerlessness of women in a male world. In the exclusively male world of the history plays, even queen Margret, a model of female valour, is reduced to a carping, cursing scold. The only power of the shrewish, cursing woman is to

dismay her audience through verbal abuse but is herself reduced to a pathetic state of one who can accomplish nothing.

Shakespeare, thus, provides a balanced, realistic picture of the power of shrewish woman in different contexts. Feminist critics note the complexity of his response to patriarchal structure. They affirm that Shakespeare is not consistently pro-feminine but also that he is never anti-feminine. Feminist criticism provides fresh insights into the text by illuminating the relation of the text to its cultural context. It brings together historical perspective, textual analysis and reader's response to literature. It foregrounds the female reader's response to established texts. What difference does it make to the text if the reader is a woman? It also probes the playwright's representation of male values and the relation between sex and power, individuality and hierarchy. The greater challenge that the feminist approach takes up is an exploration of the male playwright's attitude towards his female characters. Shakespeare does not always emerge unscathed but feminist critics do concede that Shakespeare's interest in the feminine is central to his work. He provides no alternative to patriarchy but within its paradigms, he questions what Coppelia Kahn terms, "extreme polarisation of sex roles and the contradiction underlying it." (Kahn,1981:12). Feminist critics do not go all the way with earlier critics who hailed Shakespeare's androgynous sensibility or the universality of his plays. Feminist critics admit the inevitable, inescapable, interrelation of an author and his historical context. Shakespeare cannot transcend his gendered context, ignore social constructs or the literary conventions that he inherited.

Feminist readings explicate that a male author naturally writes from a masculine view point and Shakespeare is no exception. (Bamber,1982: 4-5 ) The readings are, however, sensitive to Shakespeare's probing of gender roles and codifications governing gender relations. Feminist critics would not quarrel with Juliet Dusinberre's assessment that "Shakespeare... is more liberal than" other dramatists of the period but also that his plays are not always free from "reactionary comments". (Dusinberre,1975:105). The contribution of feminist approach to Shakespeare criticism lies precisely in its revisionist view of Shakespeare's texts. This is made possible by emphasising the neglected aspects of his plays. The feminist emphasis on the female characters and issues relating to women does not make their criticism feminocentric. It only helps restore a critical balance and reorient our response to the issues explored in Shakespeare's plays. Another significant contribution of feminist studies on Shakespeare is the insistence on probing rather than foreclosing the meanings in the play. Feminist critics provide no predetermined answers and encourage a debate on the

questions that interest them. Feminist thought is used by the critics as a critical tool, a methodology to explore signification in the texts rather than impose meanings on them. The feminist approach to Shakespeare is a successful instance of revising a literary canon. A sustained focus on the shrews in Shakespeare's dramatic career, through a reading of his comedies, problem plays, tragedies, romances and a brief glance at the histories, foregrounds critical concerns in the domain of gender relations, power dynamics as reflected in a patriarchal social structure and strategies of subversion, survival and re-configurations of women's role in society. The label of a shrew donned by the women posits a range of possibilities and the paper has mapped the trajectory in the representation of shrews from Adriana to Paulina to indicate positive ruptures and (re)constructs in Shakespeare's negotiations of a gendered social rubric.

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