



SANTA CRUZ SHAKESPEARE

EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Taming of the Shrew - Week 4: Katherina's Speech

Katherina's last speech has long been considered problematic for directors and critics alike. The end of *The Taming of The Shrew* resembles a trial in which Katherina expresses views that could be found in contemporary religious texts. Scholars have pointed out that parts of her speech feel very similar to the book of Common Prayer and the *Homily of the State of Matrimony*, which both outline that marriage is a social contract. However, some critics argue that having Katherina expressing these views was progressive: normally this would be done in Church at the wedding ceremony by a man, not by the bride.

- Read over Katherina's speech in *The Taming of the Shrew* and make a list of the main points she is expressing.

Shakespeare's *Taming of The Shrew*:

KATHARINA

Fie, fie! unknit that threatening unkind brow,
And dart not scornful glances from those eyes,
To wound thy lord, thy king, thy governor:
It blots thy beauty as frosts do bite the meads,
Confounds thy fame as whirlwinds shake fair buds,

And in no sense is meet or amiable.
A woman moved is like a fountain troubled,
Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty;
And while it is so, none so dry or thirsty
Will deign to sip or touch one drop of it.
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;
Too little payment for so great a debt.
Such duty as the subject owes the prince
Even such a woman oweth to her husband;
And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
And not obedient to his honest will,
What is she but a foul contending rebel
And graceless traitor to her loving lord?
I am ashamed that women are so simple
To offer war where they should kneel for peace;
Or seek for rule, supremacy and sway,
When they are bound to serve, love and obey.
Why are our bodies soft and weak and smooth,
Unapt to toil and trouble in the world,
But that our soft conditions and our hearts
Should well agree with our external parts?
Come, come, you froward and unable worms!
My mind hath been as big as one of yours,
My heart as great, my reason haply more,
To bandy word for word and frown for frown;
But now I see our lances are but straws,
Our strength as weak, our weakness past compare,
That seeming to be most which we indeed least are.
Then vail your stomachs, for it is no boot,
And place your hands below your husband's foot:
In token of which duty, if he please,
My hand is ready; may it do him ease.

- READ! Now read over and compare the equivalent speech from *The Taming of A Shrew*. What are the main differences?



Samantha Spiro as Katherina in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare's Globe, 2012.

→ WRITE!

- 1.) Is there any way that this speech can be argued not to be misogynistic? Having read the version from the earlier play, how might you argue that Shakespeare is being more progressive with his version?
- 2.) Imagine you were the actor delivering this speech. Write a paragraph describing how you would perform it.



SOCIAL JUSTICE!

- Petruchio's plan is possible because he is a man. *Taming of the Shrew* is a play that shows the double standards of its day. It depicts a hierarchical domestic order where women are subordinate to men. When women like Katherina challenge this order, by using physical violence or asserting themselves, it is ok for men to "tame" them by using violence in turn. Are there any double standards like this in today's society?

- How do these two speeches demonstrate that people in Shakespeare's day thought that women's bodies could be controlled, or were secondary to men? Are women's bodies still controlled today? Think of the way they are portrayed in fashion and the media. Is it the same for men's bodies?