1. **Taming: performing the Kate-Petruccio resolution**

☞ What's the best way of performing Kate's speech of submission to Petruccio (5.2.140-183) -- and thereby of interpreting her final, seeming submission to him?

"No speech in the play has been more variously interpreted than Kate's final speech," writes Karen Newman, in an article we’re reading† She summarizes three interpretations and offers a more elaborate one of her own. Which of these — she calls the first two "revisionist" and "anti-revisionist," to which we can add "romantic" (for John Bean's view, cited there) and "mimeticist" (for her own view) — do you think is truest to the logic and structure of the Kate-Petruccio relationship as it develops, or doesn't develop, throughout the play? Or can you propose yet another that overcomes the disadvantages of the competitors? In discussing this question, consider at least one solution other than the one you prefer, and argue for yours with evidence, attention to the history of the relationship, and some sense of the consequences of your view. (For example, what kind of play most suits your preferred interpretation? If you're an anti-revisionist, you are likely to see *Taming* as a violent farce; if you're a revisionist, you may incline to think of it as an arch comedy of manners; if you're a "romantic," . . . well, you can go on.) For orientation's sake, you can cite and discuss the way *Kiss Me Kate* performs the scene and construes the relationship, but your main emphasis should be on Shakespeare's text, of which you should cite and discuss a lot. You should feel free to propose a concrete way of staging this scene and playing out the last stage Kate-Petruccio relationship that corresponds to the interpretation you prefer.

2. **Taming, Kiss Me Kate, metatheatre**

What’s “metatheatre”? Wikipedia knows. Unfortunately, Wiki will quote any jackass, so go the fuller definition and description at [http://courses.cit.cornell.edu/engl3270/327.meta.html](http://courses.cit.cornell.edu/engl3270/327.meta.html).

In formal terms, *Taming* is probably the most metatheatrical Shakespeare play there is next to *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The two main plots overlap and frame each other in the cross-cutting; there is conspicuous disguise and identity-confusion at work; the main play ends with a public performance; and the whole is framed by the Christopher Sly device. (We'll talk a little in class about what to make of the Sly business recovered from *Taming of a Shrew* printed on Norton 1, 227-28 and where that text comes from.)

*Kiss Me Kate*, for its part, being a show about a performance of a production of a show that is both based on and about *Taming*, is also highly stage-conscious, calling attention to its theatricality at every turn. Yet the impression persists that "metatheatre" is being used very differently in the two works (*TS* and *KMK*).

☞ Write an essay in which you compare the ways the two plays use metatheatre — keeping in mind that some of the metatheatre in *Kate* is inspired by *Taming* but also transforms it. One of the following questions may help you focus such an essay.

- Which play, through its metatheatrical devices, makes social roles and relationships look more or less artificial (less or more natural) than the other?

• Kate appears to condense a double-plotted comedy into a single-plotted one. Which plot becomes dominant and which subordinate or invisible, and with what “framing” effects?
• Is it possible, as one critic seems to suggest,* that the Sly frame in Taming inspired the role of the two gunmen and their song in Kate? Does the gunmen's "show-stopper" play a function equivalent to the Sly business? What light might the likenesses and differences between these features of the plays shed upon their treatment of social class and gender?
• Metatheatre inspires and thrives on "frame-breaking," crossovers between the embedded or adjacent frames built into metatheatrical plays. How do the two works use moments of frame-breaking and with what effects (comic, satiric, critical, serious)?

3. Carnival, New Comedy, and the double plot

What are the two main love-plots doing side-by-side in Taming of the Shrew, and what values are reflected in the way they converge at the end? Explore this question with the help of some twentieth-century remarks on comedy as a genre.

Comedy is noted for its almost utopian promise of social renewal — and for its remarkably conservative outcomes, and that's a paradox. Comedy is closely allied to "carnival" considered both as a social episode and a kind of discourse by the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin. In his view, carnival features the inversion of social and political relationships, the upsurge of body images, "a strong element of play," and frank criticism of official reality. Historically,

carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed.**

Northrop Frye's "The Argument of Comedy" (in our coursepack) SEEMS to ascribe to what he calls New Comedy a comparable liberatory force: "The essential comic resolution," he writes, "is an individual release which is also a social resolution"; it delivers a "new social integration" that "may be called, first, a kind of moral norm and, second, the pattern of a free society."§

But of course carnival is temporary, and the new social integration can come to look remarkably like the old one.

Use one or both of these remarks to explore in detail the way the Bianca plot and the Taming plot work with and against each other in Shrew. Are there comparable devices of inversion, of release, of liberation in both — and comparable outcomes? Or do the two tell radically different stories about the way society is structured and can change? And again, what about Christopher Sly?

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* "Kate reworks Shakespeare as sadistic bard through two Sly-surrogate hoodlums, whose advice — 'Brush up your Shakespeare, and they'll all kow-tow' — brushes in the tangled links between Shakespeare's titular erotics and mid-twentieth century misogyny . . ." -- Barbara Hodgdon, "Play(ing) the Strictures of Everyday Life," Shakespeare on Film, ed. Robert Shaughnessy (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), 169.