

Critique of Marion Perret's Article, "Petruchio: A Model Wife"

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For centuries now, scholars and students alike have argued over the sincerity and legitimacy of the character Kate's final speech in William Shakespeare's classic, *The Taming of the Shrew*. It is not hard to see this as a controversial issue because the complete and total transformation of a stubborn, shrewish woman in the course of a few days could easily lead to speculation about the authenticity of her speech. In her article, aptly titled "Petruchio: The Model Wife," Marion D. Perret illustrates how the character Petruchio attempts to create a model wife out of Kate by comically acting out the part of a dutiful wife himself. However, he only succeeds in his efforts once Kate realizes what he wants and willingly makes the change herself. Perret uses etiquette books from the time Shakespeare was writing in order to illustrate to the modern reader the humor in Petruchio's methods, which were quite unheard of during the Renaissance.

Perret meticulously goes through the entire play and, using quotes, demonstrates how Kate is changed by her husband's example, although it does not happen quickly or easily. She goes on to argue that while some authors suspect that Kate's change is merely an act, they do not realize that it is actually genuine and that it occurs subtly during the second part of the play while Petruchio has Kate at his estate (223). Perret believes that it is Petruchio's role-playing games that ultimately show Kate the part she is supposed to play and tame her shrewish ways.

Perret is generally successful in persuading her readers how Petruchio's unorthodox performance as a model wife eventually leads to the transformation of Kate. She gives detailed

examples from the play to illustrate her points. She also manages to cite works written during the Renaissance, such as Edmund Tilney's *A briefe and pleasant discourse of duties in Mariage, called the Flower of Friendshippe and Xenophons treatise of householde*, to further demonstrate the significance of Petruchio's performance and Kate's response. She quotes these articles and novels written about domestic life in the Elizabethan era in order to establish historical significance to the action in the play, such as how it was very unusual that Petruchio decides to serve Kate her breakfast because that was a task commonly performed by the wife (228). He also provides a feminine model for her to emulate by taking on the role of cook and dietician (226). Throughout the article, the reader watches Kate's transformation chronologically—an effective technique utilized by Perret in order to show the stages of Kate's progress in Petruchio's "taming school" (229).

Although her references, quotes, and writing style are effective, there are a few notable problems in Perret's article. For instance, when Perret cites etiquette books from the Renaissance, she does so using the original Elizabethan text, which is very accurate but sometimes difficult to interpret. Also, while she does make note of opposing arguments in her opening statements, she fails to mention them again for comparison until near the end of the article. This leaves the reader with a distant sense of another point of view, but not enough to make the comparison significant.

In spite of these issues, it is my personal opinion that Perret does a good job in persuading her readers that Petruchio's "model wife" act is the catalyst in taming Kate. She manages to clarify the historical relevance of the exchanges between Petruchio and Kate, which I did not fully understand until I read this article. For example, I did not realize that husbands and

wives had specific roles in marriage at that time and that Petruchio was actually performing wifely tasks. I found this fascinating and incredibly helpful in analyzing the play.

One of the main points in her article is proving that Kate's final speech as the devoted wife is not an act. When I had finished reading the play and first picked up this article, I did not agree with this theory; however, through reading Perret's article, I found myself beginning to relate to this theory. Subsequently, she began to illustrate how, although Petruchio's role-playing is paramount to Kate's change, it is Kate who decides to finally change once she learns, through trial and error, what her husband wants. Finally, Perret provides examples suggesting that, although Petruchio's actions are unusual, he is no less of a man because of his handling of Kate and the husband's role. This point is valid and incredibly important to her argument because without it, the reader could misinterpret this and possibly question Petruchio's masculinity.

While there have been numerous articles written about the legitimacy and validity of Kate's attitude and how her relationship to Petruchio grows throughout the play, I truly believe that in her article, Marion Perret does an excellent job in persuading the reader of her view of the situation. Perret's ability to gather facts and concepts positively held five hundred years ago allowed me to relate to issues within the play that, otherwise, I would not truly have understood.

Works Cited

Perret, Marion D. "Petruchio: The Model Wife." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 23.2 (1983): 223-235. *JSTOR* 19 January 2007 <<http://www.jstor.org/search>>.