

# FILM ADAPTATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE'S THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

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*Filmske adaptacije Shakespeareove Ukroćene Goropadnice*

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University of Split  
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*Film adaptations of Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew*

BA Thesis

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## Contents

I.	Introduction.....	1
II.	Film adaptations .....	6
1.	1908 <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> .....	6
2.	1967 <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> .....	8
3.	1999 <i>10 Things I Hate About You</i> .....	13
III.	General discussion.....	19
IV.	Conclusion .....	21
V.	Works cited .....	23
VI.	Abstract.....	25
VII.	Sažetak.....	25

## **I. Introduction**

This paper analyzes depictions of Katharina and Bianca in three film adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew*. It considers the implications of these depictions with regard to patriarchy and the idea of feminine resistance to patriarchy. Bianca has been often sidelined when discussing the play, as critics have been more inclined to observe the play's gender relations, feminist/antifeminist readings and the differences that adaptations of the play bring into that discourse by observing Katharina and Petruchio, such as Lynda E. Boose, Diane Henderson and Graham Holderness. The lack of Bianca analysis in the adaptations themselves could be due to the fact that most adaptations tend to minimize the Bianca-Lucentio side plot, focusing more on the main plotline of the "taming". Some critics, however, such as Christopher Bertucci and Kelly A. Rivers, have tried to delve into Bianca's character more in order to analyze the play's adaptations from a different angle, Bertucci by observing the relationship between the sisters in order to understand feminist dynamics and Rivers dealing with Bianca's pretense. This work has inspired me to observe issues of Bianca and feminist issues in three different cinematic adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew* in order to examine the presence of Bianca and her different characterization in every adaptation. It is my general claim that shifts in the presentation of Bianca, no matter how slight, open Katharina for different readings of her character, while also giving the entire adaptation a new undertone. To elaborate, the way Bianca (who was from the start meant to be the antithesis of Katharina) is depicted in these adaptations affects the relationship between the two sisters and their relationship to the patriarchal standards they are held up to. Their relationships in the films provide (or do not provide) an interpretation which implies feminine resistance and possible strategies a woman can use to resist the patriarchy and their effectiveness.

In my opinion, Katharina's character relies heavily on her relationship with Bianca, and in that way relies on Bianca's character as well, as in Shakespeare's text they are supposed to be two sides of the same coin while the films, metaphorically speaking, depict that same coin bent or nonexistent. The coin metaphor might be more fitting here than it seems, as they are treated as commodities to be traded with as their lords see fit. The questions that this paper is posing are: How does Bianca's character in the adaptations shift from Shakespeare's text? How do these changes affect Katharina's character? And how does this all affect their relationship with the patriarchal values of the times (Shakespeare's text's time and the time of the adaptations)?

Firstly, we have to establish what cinematic adaptations are and how they relate to the play in question. Cinematic adaptation refers to film versions of novels, videogames, (in this papers case specifically) plays, etc. Adaptations have had different uses depending on the film-makers motivations, and for these reasons adaptations were made from carefully picked works. While any of these types of work can have their film adaptation in theory, not everything is going to be a successful film adaptation, depending on the popularity of the original work, the execution of the adaptation itself and the relevance of the work. Shakespeare's works are a prime example of this as they have been given a lot of attention since the birth of cinema, adaptation-wise, with some adaptations being more popular than others. That is one of the reasons this paper deals with film adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Interestingly enough, when observing the release years of these films, as Diana Henderson claims (152), they seem to be released in times of antifeminist backlash, which does not seem coincidental.

Secondly, it also needs to be established on what basis the two sisters are characterized as good and bad, and what the criteria would be for this in order to analyze them and their relationship. Taking a look at how Shakespeare wrote the characters, Bianca is of "beauteous

modesty" (I, 2, 808), "fair and virtuous" (II, 1, 931) and Katharina is "curst" (I, 1, 471), a "labour" for "great Hercules" (I, 2, 810). All of these attributes are given to them by the male characters in the play, who are more inclined to dislike and berate Katharina as they are to adore and commend Bianca. Katharina is looked upon as an obstacle to Bianca and herself for that matter by the citizens of Padua, as her sharp tongue prevents her from finding a husband and getting along with people (but first and foremost men) at all. She is a headstrong outspoken woman in a society where women were supposed to be submissive, which grants her no favors. As Boose describes, "For Tudor-Stuart England, in village and town, an obsessive energy was invested in exerting control over the unruly woman-the woman who was exercising either her sexuality or her tongue under her own control rather than under the rule of man" (Boose 1991: 195). This obsessive energy can be seen throughout the entirety of the play as it is focused on Katharina's taming. However, the lack of stage directions in this text has opened it to many possibilities, and with that discussions on whether or not the play was supposed to subvert or reinforce the patriarchal norms of the time. To elaborate, there is a notable lack of male physical violence towards women and "classic" punishments for shrews, although there are threats of a "cuff" (II, 2, 1070) and "carting"<sup>1</sup> (I, 1, 351) which are never fulfilled. In the same way, considering the fact that John Fletcher wrote *The Woman's Prize or the Tamer Tamed* in 1610 in which the "tamer-tamed" roles are reversed, considered to be an apology of sorts for Shakespeare's misogyny (Brockett & Hildy 115), the ambiguity between reinforcing and subverting the patriarchal norms has remained an open subject to this day. This is one of the reasons that *Taming of the Shrew* has been adapted so many times, as the ambiguity still leaves some open-ended possibilities for the directors to remain original while redoing a classic.

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<sup>1</sup> "Carting" refers to either the "cucking stool" which originated as a dung cart and was one of the usual punishments for shrews, or to an actual cart in which prostitutes were driven around town as punishment (Boose, 1991)

Due to Katharina's unruly nature, she is shown as incapable of finding a husband and undeserving of one at that, as Hortensio says: "No mates for you, /Unless you were of gentler, milder mould." (I, 1, 355). So, in order to achieve marriage, considered by societal standards of the time to be a young woman's main goal in life, she (forcibly) undergoes a transformation. The societal standards here can be read as patriarchal standards, as Capp claims: "Throughout Europe, early modern society can be described as PATRIARCHAL, with male authority underpinned within the family and in society at large by a web of laws, regulations and custom" (Capp 2018: 26). This was due to the cultural, traditional and physical differences between men and women, and the already established male position of power in society. As mentioned before, women were akin to commodities under "the rule of man", so unruly women, such as Katharina, need to be transformed into manageable women.

However, she is not the only one who is transformed by the end of the play, or the films. Bianca, the "good sister" goes through a change of her own, from the obedient, virtuous, quiet young lady to a wife who refuses to come to her husband's side. Throughout the play the two sisters are shown as polar opposites and end up where they started: at the opposite sides of the spectrum. So, as Katharina becomes the "good" daughter and wife, Bianca becomes the "bad" daughter and wife, keeping the balance of the play intact. Therefore, the questions of this paper are: What is the ideal image of a woman that these films suggest, how does it differ between the versions of the story and how do the two sisters deal with the "good girl-bad girl" roles they were given?

Firstly, to examine this subject we need to look to Shakespeare's characters in question. As mentioned before, Bianca, whose name means "white" in Italian, is a stereotypical good girl. She obeys her father every step of the way, loves her sister and cares for her even if the feeling is not mutual. She suggests ideal femininity from the point-of-view of patriarchal early modernity: beautiful but modest, intelligent but obedient. She doesn't seem to mind her



father's prohibition of marriage as she says "My books and instruments shall be my company" (I, 1, 378), so even her time away from her suitors won't be an empty experience, nor does she take offense to her sister's treatment of her as Bianca is worried that her sister will "wrong herself" as well as Bianca, and is willing to forgo any suitor in favor of her sister. Bianca seems to be the perfect daughter, sister and wife. The reason why she only *seems* to be one is because she is thought to be, in fact, pretending. Character authenticity is always in question in Shakespeare's plays, whether they are disguised by costume or by behavior, with disguises being a very often motif in his plays. Here, I would argue that we have the latter as there are some scenes where we can see Bianca behaving in a way not suited to her ideal representation. For example, her flirting with Lucentio (disguised as Cambio), her toying with Hortensio (disguised as Licio), and her statement after Petruchio takes Katharina away from her wedding feast: "That, being mad herself, she's madly mated". This contradicts her chaste, obedient and respectful image. Before, even while Katharina was hitting her, Bianca had not said anything against her sister; however, as she sees she is now free and well on her way to be married she allows herself some leeway. This is furthered by her eloping and the final scene where she refuses to come to her husband when Lucentio called for her. Not only that, but calling him a fool for betting on her and losing: "The more fool you for laying on my duty" (V, 2, 2637). As mentioned before, the ambiguity of the play can be seen in scenes like this; Bianca, despite her disobedience, is not punished here, and Lucentio, the man, is taught a lesson on blindly believing in her obedience. The adaptations, however, either take their stance and remove the ambiguity, or simply show it in different ways, which can be seen in Bianca's and Katharina's characters.

## II. Film adaptations

### 1. 1908 *The Taming of the Shrew*

Bianca in Shakespeare's text either changes into a shrew of her own or merely stops pretending she is not one. This ambiguity opened up some space for interpretation amongst critics and filmmakers, which can be seen in the adaptations analyzed. However, it should be noted that not all differences among these films are due to different creative visions, but also due to technical capabilities. Namely, the 1908 adaptation is dialogue-free and the whole subplot of Lucentio-Bianca courtship was cut, making the film much shorter than the other ones with its running time being a mere 17 minutes. The lack of this storyline still provides for certain points of observation, as we can observe, to put it explicitly, the quantity and quality of Bianca and how it affects Katharina.

To start off, in the 1908 silent film *The Taming of the Shrew* directed by D.W. Griffith, starring Florence Lawrence as Katharina and Arthur V. Johnson as Petruchio, Bianca is seen in 3 scenes altogether: the opening scene, the wedding scene and the wedding feast scene. The first scene of the film offers most for her character, as she enters and carries herself modestly and timidly. Now, as mentioned before, the film has no dialogue as it is a silent film, and as such has to convey what it wants to by other ways. This is done with mime, which was used in this era and actually had a set of rules, a certain standard for which body position, facial expression and movement depicts which emotion. There were several books regarding mime that were used as guides, learning material for aspiring actors and actresses, with numbered positions and descriptions of the positions and their meaning, one of them being Charles Aubert's *The Art of Pantomime*. For example, when Bianca enters the scene, she does so slowly and gently, standing in Aubert's figure 8, standing straight, heels together, arms held beside the body, which signifies humility, modesty and timidity. She then proceeds to sit as depicted in Aubert's figure 22, which signifies the same thing, on occasion turning

her face away from her suitors and placing both hands on her cheeks, which signifies the same things as the aforementioned two. On the other hand, Katharina enters the room violently and abruptly, wildly swinging her arms and, in every way, doing the opposite of her sister in order to show that she is, in fact, a shrew. Through their entrances the films sets the basic “good girl-bad girl” dichotomy which it does not build upon. Bianca is simply shown as the good sister, and then acts as an observer in the next few scenes in which she appears in. Katharina (in this film called Katherina) does not show any significant development either. Throughout the film, Katharina depicts various emotions with her movements, such as anger through stomping her foot (Aubert 33), being perplexed at how she will rid herself of Petruchio (Aubert 46), despair by grasping her head with both her hands (Aubert 47), etc. She behaves the same way from start to finish, with the only exception being two scenes, one where she begs the cook for some food (after being starved by Petruchio) in which she acts milder, but as soon as she gets what she wants she returns to her old self. The second one is the end scene, which shows a very sudden change of heart; after telling her father what she has been through, he draws his sword to forcefully bring Katharina home. However, as Petruchio sees this, he calls out to her and she simply falls into his arms, with Baptista rolling his eyes and leaving, and the next scene showing the couple in love.

While the lack of character depth can be attributed to the films’ short duration, the lack of Bianca in this film seems to amplify the notion of taming: there should be no difference between women, all should be as the tamed Katharina. It leaves out the contrast between “good girl” and “bad girl” and the corrupting of the “good girl”, making the scenario of “good girl gone bad” seem either impossible or impermissible. This leaves Katharina as an exaggerated version of herself, making her fall flat as a character, serving only as a “before-after” model. This makes her feel like a very static and clichéd character, with no motivation given for her behavior and no reasoning given for her wish to stay with Petruchio. It simply

comes down to her wanting to be tamed because she will be better off for it and it is just the way it should be. Her father comes to rescue her and bring her back to her home where she could enjoy whatever sort of food she wished for, instead of going hungry, and could be in peace not wondering when someone will get beaten in front of her or fearing that she might get beaten. Nevertheless, she decides to stay with Petruchio, because she herself wanted to be tamed and with that, the film obviously takes the patriarchal stance on Shakespeare's text. The lack of Bianca as counterweight or support to Katharina's behavior and rival causes a visible lack in Katharina's own character, but the true lack is shown to be Katharina not being the best as she can, with the best she can be shown as being submissive and obedient to Petruchio, per the (patriarchal) "natural order" of things: men ruling, women obeying.

## 2. 1967 *The Taming of the Shrew*

The next film this paper deals with is the 1967 American-Italian romantic-comedy *The Taming of the Shrew* directed by Franco Zeffirelli, starring Elizabeth Taylor as Katharina, Richard Burton as Petruchio, Michael York as Lucentio and Natasha Pyne as Bianca. This film focuses a bit more on the Lucentio-Bianca love plotline, and takes some liberties with Bianca's character. To elaborate, Bianca, as Shakespeare's text depicts her, was always the perfect daughter and woman, which is one of the reasons why Katharina behaves the way she does towards her sister. However, this film provides us with a new reading, suggesting that the sibling rivalry is also fueled by Katharina's resentment for Bianca's machinations. Firstly, the film starts with a different kind of induction scene than Shakespeare's text does<sup>2</sup>. While in Shakespeare's text we have an induction in the form of a play within a play, in Zeffirelli's adaptation, we have a scene in which Lucentio and Tranio are riding through the city of

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<sup>2</sup> An induction in a play is an explanatory scene, summary or other text that stands outside and apart from the main action with the intent to comment on it, moralize about it or to summarize the plot or underscore what is afoot. Taken from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Induction\\_\(play\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Induction_(play)) 2020

Padua, where a man can be seen in a cage marked “drunkard”, alluding to Christopher Sly in Shakespeare’s text. During this induction, the films’ credits roll while Lucentio and Tranio are reaching their destination where they become engrossed in the saturnalia style parade which is happening in the city. During this scene, Bianca is seen running through the streets, laughing and watching the happenings when she catches Lucentio’s eye. Lucentio is stunned when he first notices Bianca and her beauty, running after her to get a closer look, which he gets as she is surrounded by a group of young men, presumably actors. This scene provides some evidence to my claim that her machinations are the reason she is targeted by her sister’s harassment, as Bianca is enjoying the whole experience, even the parts of it that a young virtuous girl should not be so bold to enjoy, such as the actors’ song, which alludes to sex: “If true it be, take pity and give me leave/To do for thee all that Adam did for Eve”. She instead giggles in a way that indicates pleasant surprise, which contrasts her “good girl” image, as Rivers’ argues:

She allows herself to be “caught”, but her laughter and enjoyment clashes with her “ideal” woman image. This contrast is further heightened when the rowdy young men surround her. She does not seem frightened or appalled as a virtuous young woman should be. Instead, she allows them to lift her veil—a not so-subtle allusion to her skirt—and flirts with all of them. As the veil is lifted, she giggles (a nonverbal cue of acceptance) and the young men gasp. (Rivers 2010: 143)

Her (nonverbal) acceptance is considered shameful and her willingness to participate in this game (we can see this in the way she stops acting this way when her chaperone finds her) and she is also not appalled as a young virtuous woman should be when she hears the actors’ song. Her purity is also questioned in the scene where Biondello is keeping a lookout for Lucentio and Bianca as they are in a lover’s embrace (this happening before they are married). There are several scenes where we can see her pretense, for example, Bianca in the

film delivers the line “Sister, content you in my discontent.”(I, 1, 376) in a way that sounds more like: “Oh sister! Content you in my discontent!”, screamed with anger and resentment in her voice. However, when she notices Lucentio watching, she gasps with a surprised look on her face and returns to her quiet and humble behavior, presenting her façade for her suitors once more: “She is aware of her appeal to men and knows how to capitalize on that knowledge. So skilled at her pretense is she that she is able to convince all of her suitors that her demure and modest demeanor is in fact her real self” (Rivers 2010: 145). This can also be seen in the fact that although Lucentio sees her rage, he does not acknowledge it, as if he was charmed into seeing only the good in Bianca.

This would in a way legitimize Katharina’s rage towards her sister, her suitors and her father as Bianca is manipulating them while they are, in a way, allowing to be manipulated and Katharina resents them for this. Katharina, who resists the advances of men and in doing so resist her submission to them, uses her tongue as her main weapon. While she can be physically violent, the main threat that she poses to the men of Padua is with her speech. However, once met with Petruchio who uses her main strength against her, practically rendering her way of resisting moot, she realizes she needs to adjust it. That would provide for a reason why this film’s Katharina is made more observant through camera usage, as she is aware of quite a few things that she should or should not have been aware of, as Diane Henderson claims: “Zeffirelli allows these camera shots to establish Kate as the movie’s silent thinker.” (Henderson 2005: 163). In her first appearance in the film, she is shown as just an eye watching her sister on the street, later on we can see her peeking through a window at the men celebrating her betrothal, and after the wedding she sees the transaction; money changing hands and the handshake between her father and husband sealing the deal. Here Zeffirelli’s camerawork allows the spectator to drift between the explicit and the disguised, as Cartmell points out: “Zeffirelli’s films invariably juxtapose the public with the

private, or the spectacular with the intimate.” (Cartmell 2000: 216). Katharina is regularly shown in the film by her lonesome, deep in thought while the other characters scheme together, which isolates Katharina further from them to accentuate her position as “the silent thinker”. In this way it can be observed how she is ever vigilant for an opportunity to challenge her sister, her father and the other representatives of the taming agenda she despises. She is characterized as resentful of her sister’s schemes, however, she is also observant enough to realize that her sharp and direct manner will not be enough to keep her from under someone’s heel, and the realization coming to her can be seen in a few scenes throughout the film where she is alone with her thoughts. What she is left to do is play her sister’s game, she ultimately realizes, manipulating Petruchio the way Bianca manipulates others in order to keep at least some of her independence.

She is, in fact, thankful for the lesson she learned, which can be seen in two scenes, in both of which she kisses Bianca. The first one is before the wedding, as Katharina descends down the stairs and walks among the guests. She seems concerned, and seeing Bianca jolts her out of her thought and Katharina kisses her on the cheek hesitantly as if unsure how to behave in this situation. She then looks to the crowd again with the same concerned look on her face, looks back at Bianca as if to tell her she is concerned and in need of help, and then walks off. This also shows some degree of connection and affection between the sisters, as Katharina gives her sister a warm smile, as if even though they have their differences, she is glad to see her there. Bianca can also be seen in the next frame for a split-second, following her sister with the same warm smile, bearing no pretense this time. It shows genuine care of the sisters for one another, and seems natural, despite their sibling rivalry; in every family with two or more children, sibling rivalry is a common occurrence which can leave permanent damage on the relationships of the children: “By “sibling rivalry” we mean the antagonism or hostility between brothers and/or sisters which manifests itself in circumstances such as in the

common children's family fights (...) to much more serious cases such as the permanent enmity between adult siblings” (Boyle 1999). However, this does not mean that their enmity is permanent, as we can see in this film: “family relationships are in constant flux, affected by the development of individual family members, the family unit as a whole, and the ever - changing larger social ecology in which the family is embedded.” (East 2009: 44). This can be seen in this adaptation and Junger’s adaptation, as the sisters’ relationship evolves throughout the films’ duration.

The second kiss happens after Katharina delivers her speech<sup>3</sup> as Petruchio is busy proclaiming his victory. Katharina lifts Bianca to her feet and kisses her on the cheek, with Bianca smiling to her sister, and then looking towards the ground with a thoughtful expression. The kiss scene was also analyzed by Christopher Bertucci, who claims that this “quick exchange between sisters, no more than a few seconds, becomes a less-obvious revision of Pickford’s very direct wink in Sam Taylor’s *Shrew*” (Bertucci 2014: 417) and that it shows how “The sisters momentarily connect, showing that they share in their struggle” (ibid) against men. I would argue this claim while partially agreeing with it, while it does show a level of connection, it seems to also be a challenge; now that Katharina knows the rules of the game, Katharina is telling Bianca that she should not yet be done playing it and to keep pretending. Despite her initial disapproval of these schemes, she adopts them as her means of surviving a “mad” husband and tells Bianca to keep doing the same. Through feigned submission women can maybe not live in patriarchy, but in the least survive without being completely crushed. In order to do that however, the film suggests that they should stick together, as Katharina lifts her sister from the ground, and in return Bianca and the other women stand in the way of Petruchio while he is chasing after Katharina. In that way, the

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<sup>3</sup> To everyone’s surprise, Elizabeth Taylor delivered the speech without the by then established wink as a means of signifying irony, as it was delivered by Mary Pickford in Sam Taylor’s 1929 adaptation of *Taming of the Shrew* (Henderson 159)



presence of a more openly manipulating and lascivious Bianca causes Katharina to be represented as more chaste and more manipulative in turn, and their relationship is made into a competition of sorts, a more genuine form of sibling rivalry and sisterhood where they will, despite their differences, stand one for the other against a common threat. The “ideal” woman, in the patriarchal sense, is shown to be non-existent: Bianca drops her pretense and shows her normal “shrewish” side while Katharina unwillingly adopts the fake “ideal” image. Neither of them is truly being the “ideal” woman, they only take their turn with the role as the film progresses.

### 3. 1999 *10 Things I Hate About You*

As for the next adaptation *10 Things I Hate About You*, a 1999 American teen rom-com film directed by Gil Junger, starring Julia Stiles as Katarina Stratford, Heath Ledger as Patrick Verona, Joseph Gordon-Levitt as Cameron James, and Larisa Oleynik as Bianca Stratford. The screenplay was written by Karen McCullah Lutz and Kirsten Smith. In this adaptation, Bianca and her relationship with Kat are more deeply explored. Here, Bianca and Kat are an almost parodied version of their counterparts from Shakespeare’s text. Bianca is “vapid” and “conceited”, she is the typical popular girl stereotype who is also her “daddy’s little princess” while Kat is depicted as a “stereotyped version of the second-wave feminist” (Friedman 2004: 47). One of the most notable differences from the other films is the difference in taming; namely, Patrick Verona (this version’s Petruchio) is more of a passive helper to her taming than an active tamer that his play counterpart was. What is most important regarding the taming of this film is how Bianca and Kat, who in the previously mentioned adaptations switch places and remain on the opposite sides of the “good girl-bad girl” spectrum (or at least seem to), in this version bridge the gap between them and meet in the middle.

To elaborate, the two sisters are constantly taunting each other; Bianca taunts Kat for being unsociable, uptight and “a loser”, while Kat taunts Bianca for leading a “meaningless, consumer-driven life” and lacking any real sense of self. In a way, Kat represents the feminist who resents the willful submission of other women, and Bianca represents the “regular” (submissive, trophy-wife type) woman’s stance on the radical feminist. Bianca is shown to be shallow at first, as the first impression we get of her is through her slow-motion appearance on screen and the first thing she says is “Yup, see, there’s a difference between “like” and “love”. Because I like my Sketchers, but I love my Prada backpack.”, so right off the bat we get a very materialistic view of the world from her. However, she is, like the Bianca from the previous adaptation, playing a part. She is solely focused on gaining popularity and she “happens to like being adored”. She is also interested in the most popular guy in the school, Joey Donner (a combination of Hortensio and Gremio from Shakespeare’s text; however, the question arises whether she is vying for popularity in order to date him or is dating him a way to achieve popularity.

It seems to be a little bit of both, as he is a stereotypical cool senior who is the dream of every teenage girl, but Bianca is also in a teen stage of her life where being “uncool” or a “loser” is the equivalent of death. So, in order to avoid that and achieve her goal of dating Joey, she “has to go” to a party and she “needs” to look pretty if she wishes to climb the social ladder: “In such a manner comedies frequently establish high school clique boundaries as analogous to class divisions within society at large, particularly those of the sort explored by Shakespeare in *The Taming of the Shrew* through the master/servant identity exchange between Lucentio and Tranio.” (Friedman 2004: 47). So by establishing these cliques as something more serious, the simple quest for popularity and acceptance is rendered more serious itself, akin to a “beginning of the rest of their lives”, as status in a clique equals status in society. And the film suggests that a woman’s way of climbing the social hierarchy is by

reaching for a man who is high enough on the ladder in hopes of him pulling her up. However, this does not happen, as once she starts realizing the shallowness and boredom of Joey Donner and everybody's reactions to her sister's table dance, she becomes disenchanted with the popularity fad and starts to turn around, seeing that her sister had a point in her resistance after all. Her first act of this is kissing Cameron when he drives her home, an act which is supposed to represent her choosing love over status, but still denies Bianca her independence as she has to find a man per teen rom-com rules.

Like her, her sister Kat starts her transformation on that party as well. However, the lead up to the party is, obviously enough, completely the opposite to her sister's. She is the castrating (figuratively and literally) "heinous bitch" of the school. Kat, who is depicted as a radical feminist, is infamous throughout their school for her negative attitude towards almost all other students (except Mandella, her only friend), their activities and lifestyles. She is aggressive when provoked and physically violent, as can be seen through her talk with Ms. Perky at the beginning of the film. However, her way of behaving is justified through her backstory; she was one of the cool kids when she was Bianca's age (about the time their mother left them) and she was dating Joey Donner. Peer pressure and the pain she felt from her mother abandoning her led her to have sex with Joey, which she was not ready for. After she told him she did not want to do that again, Joey broke up with her and she "swore she'd never do anything just because "everyone else" was doing it". This led to her becoming the "shrew" that she is.

She reads books such as *The Bell Jar* and *Feminine Mystique*, she criticizes the education system for not giving enough of female writers' work for class reading, she boycotts the prom as to her it is an "antiquated mating ritual". As mentioned before, she is a radical feminist with an outdated mindset. To explain, her focus on female authors such as Sylvia Platt, Charlotte Bronte, Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan along with her constant criticism of

the patriarchal standards for young women would place her in the second wave mindset: “It (second-wave feminism) was a movement that was focused on critiquing the patriarchal, or male-dominated, institutions, and cultural practices throughout society.”<sup>4</sup> However, her unnecessary aggressiveness, physical violence and overall hostility towards men are what make her a shrew. This is of course due to the creative director’s and screenplay writers decisions, as they probably concluded that that would be the best way to translate the “shrew” to modern times and provides all the more evidence for Diane Henderson’s claim of *The Taming of the Shrew* films being tied to times of antifeminist backlash. Before the party scene, she is the fear of the entire Padua High, as she “castrated”<sup>5</sup> Bobby Ridgeway via kick-in-the-genitals, verbally assaults anyone who crosses her path and destroys other people’s work and possessions (prom posters, Joey’s car).

During the beginning of her relationship with Patrick, probably due to the prospect of finding someone similar to her, she starts to have more honest conversations with her sister and starts to understand her position, although still not agreeing with it. Even though Kat had very little to no intention to go to Bogey’s party (which serves as the symbol of everything the teenager’s care about, and a turning point for the sisters), after Bianca honestly pleads with her by saying: “Can you, for just one night, forget that you’re completely wretched and be my sister? Please? Please?! C’mon, Kat, please do this for me.” Kat decides to “make an appearance” in order to make her sister happy. At the party, after being provoked by Joey, the man who used her, and after being berated by her sister, Kat proceeds to spitefully do what everyone else was supposed to do at a party, getting “trashed, man” and dancing on the table for everyone to see. This sexualization of the shrew of this film, while serving as a short “fan service” scene to the viewer, also shows the stances the observers on what they see. Joey and Patrick see her from below, in a way looking up to her as she has become what the whole

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<sup>4</sup> Taken from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second-wave\\_feminism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second-wave_feminism) 2020.

<sup>5</sup> This anecdote ties into the “femi-nazi” stereotype as this sort of feminist is often described as “castrating.”

school wanted her to be, while Bianca sees her from the first floor. This is supposed to represent Bianca looking down upon her sister, this being after she realized the emptiness of Joey's company and character, as Bianca now knew that way not the way she wanted to be seen. After Kat falls from the table and is caught by Pat, to represent him saving her from "falling from grace," she has an honest talk with him on her ride home, as well as a failed kiss attempt, after which she too starts her transformation.

The party is a turning point for both of them, as at the party they start to realize that there is some truth in what the other one was saying. Both sisters reach an epiphany in a car, somewhere around the same time; Kat understands that Patrick is "not as vile as she thought he was", and Bianca answers the question of whether or not has she always been this selfish with a sad, realizing "yes". It is not just through the agency of the male characters that they reach their final transformed personas, but it is also through them mediating in each other's lives.

While Bianca learns to stand up for herself and not just go with the flow, Kat learns to relax and take down some of her walls that she erected as a defensive mechanism. She learns to be vulnerable again through her relationship with Patrick, even though she once considered him and all the other boys in the school not worthy of her time, affection or trust. As Friedman claims:

Over the course of the film, Kat changes from a second-wave man-hater trapped in a dogmatic and outdated posture to a more contemporary version of the feminist who embraces the contradiction of maintaining her political opposition to patriarchy while participating in those aspects of the social structure, like normative heterosexuality, that bring her pleasure. (Friedman 2004: 54)

To support this claim, Kat is shown as a feminist with an outdated way of thinking which is challenged by her professor, Mr. Morgan. After Kat's previously mentioned speech on female authors and the lack of the same in the class, Mr. Morgan tells her to "ask them (the PTA) why they can't buy a book written by a black man!". To explain, one of the main critiques of the second wave was its focus on the experiences of upper middle class white women, so by challenging her on this the film insinuates her having an outdated and parodied second wave mindset. However, her changing from this mindset to a "more contemporary version of the feminist" seems like a long shot. I would argue that since her resistance to the societal values which her sister subscribed to came about because of her abandonment issues and regretful sexual experience, and the fact that towards the end of the film she is "loosening up" with her values (going to the prom, not physically hurting Patrick after he forces a kiss, writing a poem which speaks of her love for Patrick despite his ill treatment of her), Kat does not become contemporary version of the feminist and becomes a character that is neither here nor there. In a way, she becomes a part of the "consumer driven society" she has been criticizing the whole film: "In feminism's place, consumer culture offers post-feminist substitutes that sell "personal choice" and "empowerment" while reinscribing a limited range of freedom and disarming serious interest in many still pressing feminist concerns such as the pay-gap between men and women" (Bertucci 2014: 424). This can be further seen from the comparison between Kat and Bianca, as they start seeing eye to eye and as I mentioned before, meet in the middle of the spectrum, which combines Kat's radical resistance with Bianca's extreme conformism, leaving them both floating somewhere in between.

At first Kat does not want to participate in any of her peers' classic high school activities, such as partying, dating, and dressing up. However, she does try to convince Bianca that her way of thinking is not the best, in the form of "you don't always have to be who they want you to be" after Bianca tries to convince her that Kat "could have some definite potential

buried underneath all the hostility”. Both sisters seem to be attempting to change the other one’s behavior, however, Kat wants to do it to protect Bianca from the things Kat went through; Bianca resents this as she wishes to make her own mistakes and learn for herself. Bianca on the other hand just wants her sister to be “normal”, like her. While Kat pictures the “normal teenage girl things” her sister speaks of as the “normal femininity” Friedan defines in her *The Feminine Mystique* as being: “achieved, however, only insofar as the woman finally renounces all active goals of her own, all her own “originality,” to identify and fulfill herself through the activities and goals of husband, or son.” (Friedan 1974: 113), she still strives to it by the end of the film. The prom scene is a prime example of this, as she wears an elegant blue dress complete with her mother’s pearls around the neck, implicating that despite criticizing “normal” femininity, she still aspires to and has been suppressing it for a while. However, even Bianca, who shows to be willing to stand up for herself at the prom shows this same level of “normal femininity” as she goes sailing with Cameron simply because he wanted to, despite earlier in the film saying that she never wanted to go sailing at all.

Unlike in the two formerly mentioned adaptations, here we have a sense of the sisters’ wish to better the other one, while keeping the sibling rivalry in the film. However, their resistance to and refusal of societal values seems inconsistent and selective, with the film’s message seeming to be “do not go for the bad boys, settle for nice guys” and “just say no to premarital sex”, in a sense only reinforcing the values that the sisters are supposed to be resisting.

### **III. General discussion**

To summarize, the “ideal” femininity suggested in these films seems to be remarkably similar between the films and Shakespeare’s text, with the Bianca of every version being a stereotyped “good girl”. However, the “shrewishness” seems to be depicted differently, as in

Shakespeare's text, Griffith's and Zeffirelli's adaptation the "shrew" is the way she is due to presumed struggles of women in the respective ages of these films, in terms of jealousy of her sister and anger towards a constricting society. However, in Junger's version, there is a motive, a cause behind Kat's "shrewishness" (in this version depicted as outdated feminism) which in a way humanizes her, but serves only as a warning message from the writers: say no to teenage sex. This point is driven further by Kat's father being a doctor who is "up to his elbows in placenta all day long" instead of a wealthy merchant or a modernized version of such.

Griffith's version shows no possibility for female togetherness or resistance, as resistance itself is a negative thing, since submission is shown to be the true road to happiness for women, since they are "bound to serve, love, and obey" (V, 2, 2672), as in Shakespeare's text. The lack of Bianca furthers this message, as her revealing herself to be a shrew herself would defeat the film's purpose, and that is to show that there is no place for a woman who challenges patriarchal authority; she can be saved only through the power of patriarchal authority, whether it be her father's or Petruchio's. Contrary to Griffith's adaptation, Zeffirelli's adaptation shows that women can be powerful through subterfuge, such as Bianca, who pretends to be the ideal woman (by patriarchal standards) in order to get what she wants, and Katharina, who sees and knows more than she lets on. However, even here open resistance is shown to be futile, yet once the sisters let go of their enmity and focus on helping each other, they have a fighting chance. Both of them are "bad girls" in the eyes of men, but in order to stay one step ahead of them, like Katharina is shown to be in the ending chase scene, they need to pretend to be "good girls" and stick together like true sisters, leaving the competition and arguing to men.

As for Junger's adaptation, there is no "good" nor "bad" girl in the same sense of the previously mentioned adaptations. It is shown that the obedient and meek "good" girl Bianca



is not ideal as well as it is shown that the shrewish feminist “bad” girl Kat is not always in the wrong. Both characters serve to prove a point that neither complete submission nor opposition to patriarchy is the way to go, which ironically reinforces the film’s patriarchal values. To elaborate, the film maintains that love is a compromise and should be balanced, with no dominant or submissive party. However, through Kat’s regretful sexual experience, Bianca being objectified and sought after by Joey for being a virgin and their father’s lessons, the “just say no” message regarding teenage sexuality comes through very clearly<sup>6</sup>. While the sisters are shown bridging the gap between them and defying the “good girl- bad girl” dichotomy and reaching true sisterhood and resistance to men throughout the film, they end up reinforcing the same dichotomy. They both represent the patriarchal idea of a chaste “good” girl, as they end up listening to their father’s advice, making their resistance doubtful and meaningless as they decide “we won’t obey blindly, we will do the right thing of our own volition”, making them seem like mere puppets.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

To conclude, while Bianca’s and Katharina’s characters vary between these cinematic adaptations and the original, the concept of the “good” and the “bad” girl remains more or less intact, as do patriarchal notions of Shakespeare’s text, such as the father’s unquestionable authority, the necessity of heteronormative behavior and the idea of an outspoken non-conforming woman requiring rehabilitation. Patriarchal authority, even when challenged, remains strong and ever-present, with the only difference being whether or not the female protagonists are aware of this fact and their ability and will to resist it. The differences between Shakespeare’s play and the films on this issue are due to the ambiguity of the former

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<sup>6</sup> In the scene where Kat reads her poem, a banner can be seen which read “What is popular is not always right, what is right is not always popular” which reinforces the anti-teen sex message of the film even further

and the lack of ambiguity in the latter, however, the films seem to work with the same side of the ambiguity. The final speech Elizabeth Taylor delivers in Zeffirelli's adaptation was played straight, without a trace of irony, the arrival of Baptista to Petruchio's home in Griffith's adaptation shows Katharina's powerlessness without a man and the "just say no" message of Junger's adaptation all imply a patriarchal stance. They seem to reinforce the patriarchal norms by accentuating the sexual attraction of the "tamer" and the "tamed", making the "taming" seem like foreplay of sorts, a game in which they both win each other. This may be due to the genre of the films themselves, as romantic comedies are usually meant as a simpler kind of entertainment. However, the transition from the Shakespeare's play's "comedy" genre to the films' specifically "romantic comedy" genre speaks volumes about the gender relation problematic in Shakespeare's play and the attempt to downplay the same in the films. This could also be due to the high budget production of these films and their aim for global appeal which causes them to downplay these issues in order to achieve that appeal. However, the popularity of Shakespeare and his work indicates that there will be more adaptations of his work made, and as there have been theatre productions of *The Taming of the Shrew* with characters' genders swapped, it is safe to assume that these adaptations will offer interesting contributions for feminist analysis. The reason why this is necessary is simple: by downplaying or removing the problematic aspects of texts, especially Shakespeare's (due to his status and relevance in literature), a part of history is removed, altered and in a way denied. And in order to critically observe and comment on these issues or any issues for that matter, they need to be acknowledged and their presence in history made known. Just like a person would not be able to understand a film if he walked into the cinema mid-projection, a person would not be able to understand the feminist struggles of today without knowing the history of the same struggles.

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## VI. Abstract

This paper analyzes depictions of Katharina and Bianca in three film adaptations of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*: Griffith's 1908 *The Taming of the Shrew*, Zeffirelli's 1967 *The Taming of the Shrew* and Junger's 1999 *10 Things I hate about you*. The paper observes their usage of the original text's ambiguity in term of feminist/anti-feminist readings. It considers the implications of these depictions with regard to patriarchy and the idea of feminine resistance to patriarchy. The main thesis of the paper is that shifts in Bianca's character create a shift in Katharina's character while giving the whole adaptation a new undertone. Despite the time discrepancy between these films, the patriarchal connotations of these films are surprisingly similar. This is explained through 3 main sources, Christopher Bertucci's essay "*Rethinking Binaries by Recovering Bianca in '10 Things I Hate About You' and Zeffirelli's 'The Taming of the Shrew'*", Diane E. Henderson's essay "*A Shrew for the Times*" and Kelly A. Rivers' essay "*Not for an age, but for all time*".

## VII. Sažetak

Ovaj rad analizira prikaze Katharine i Biance u tri filmske adaptacije Shakespeareove *Ukroćene Goropadnice*: Griffithovu *Ukroćenu Goropadnicu* iz 1908., Zeffirellijevu *Ukroćenu Goropadnicu* iz 1967. i Jungerovu *10 stvari koje mržim kod tebe*. Ovaj rad proučava njihovu upotrebu dvosmislenosti originalnog teksta u smislu feminističkog/antifeminističkog čitanja. Rad razmatra implikacije ovih prikaza na patrijarhiju i ideju ženskog otpora patrijarhiji. Glavna teza rada je da pomaci u Biancinom liku stvaraju pomak u Katharininom liku, a cijeloj adaptaciji daju novi prizvuk. Unatoč razlici u dobu između ovih filmova, patrijarhalne konotacije tih filmova iznenađujuće su slične. To se objašnjava pomoću 3 glavna izvora, esej Christophera Bertuccija „Preispitivanje binarnih

opozicija oporavkom Biance u „10 stvari koje mrzim kod tebe“ i Zeffirellijeve „Ukroćene Goropadnice“, esej Diane E. Henderson „Goropadnica za sva vremena“ i esej Kelly A. Rivers „„Ne za dob, već za sva vremena“: Shakespeareove romantične komedije na filmu“.

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