Disability and the Characterization of Katherine in The Taming of the Shrew

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**Abstract**

Despite numerous studies of the origins and meanings of Katherine's shrewishness in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, no scholar has analyzed the role of disability in Katherine's feelings of alienation and her ultimate transformation. In the wooing scene, we learn by indirection that Katherine has a limp through the references to the way she walks. This article analyzes the references to Katherine's limp in adaptations of the play during the 17th and 18th centuries, considering the significance of retaining these references even when stage productions of the plays have not included representation of a disabled Katherine. The article then discusses the ways that visual representation of a disabled Katherine in performance might affect interpretations of the meaning of the play, including attention to a 2008 production of the play in which the actress playing Katherine performed the role with a limp.

In 2008 in Stratford, Canada, Peter Hinton directed Irene Poole to limp as part of her performance of Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Critical response suggests the discomfort that Katherine's limp elicited in many audience members. Critic Richard Ouzounian of the *Toronto Star* mocks the decision:

> On the strength of one line in the text ("Why does the world report that Kate does limp?") which most scholars usually accept as a joke inspired by some physical business (a kicked leg, a broken shoe), Hinton has decided that Katherine has an actual physical deformity
and has her hobbling across the festival stage as though she were Richard III instead of Katherine I.

Writing for the *National Post*, Brad Frenette maintains a more even tone while in general agreeing with the dismissal of the importance of Katherine's limp, calling it "a very literal reading of a line of Petruchio's that's probably meant as a joke, but it gives her a source of resentment to add to the usual ones of an unsympathetic father and spoiled younger sister." Over and over again, reviewers refer to the limp as based on a single line and argue that Hinton has taken seriously what Shakespeare clearly intended as a joke (for other examples of this almost universal assessment of the decision, see Garebian; Hoile; Millman).

This nearly unanimous disparagement of Hinton's decision suggests a profound discomfort with the idea that a heroine in a romantic comedy could have a disability, and many of the statements reviewers make to support their arguments for an able-bodied Katherine are simply wrong: directors often make staging decisions based on a single line, Shakespeare devotes many more than one line to the issue of Katherine's limp, and there is no textual evidence for or against reading it as "a joke inspired by some physical business." Five lines in the play refer to Katherine's limp either directly or indirectly. When Petruccio woos Katherine by speaking false flattery, he asks,

*Why does the world report that Kate doth limp?*
*O sland'rous world! Kate like the hazel twig*
*Is straight and slender …*

*O let me see thee walk. Thou dost not halt. (2.1.245-49)*

A few lines later, he refers to her "princely gait" (252). Many theatrical traditions of Shakespearean characterization and stage business (Petruccio's famous whip comes to mind) enjoy considerably less textual support than Katherine's limp. So why is Hinton the first director to exploit the dramatic and psychological possibilities of a disabled heroine? And why did that performance have such an unsettling effect upon reviewers?
By referring to Katherine's limp, Shakespeare accomplishes two ends, explaining her shrewishness and exploring women's marriageability. Shakespeare's references to Katherine's limp create the possibility of interpreting her shrewishness as a disability-inflected gender performance; in other words, her atypical way of performing feminine gender arises in part from the ways that her disability has rendered her a social outsider. From this perspective, because her marriage to Petruccio renders her disability non-disabling in terms of social standing, Katherine's gender performance becomes more normative by the end of the play when she repeatedly performs obedience, a key marker of stereotypical femininity at this time. The limp thus plays a role in creating a more compelling etiology of Katherine's shrewishness; this link between the social stigma of disability and Katherine's refusal to perform cultural ideals of femininity will be clearer if a performer embodies this disability on stage, because such representation will encourage viewers to recognize their own emotional and social responses to encounters with disabled bodies, which may mirror those of the characters in the play.

Even in the absence of a visually represented disability on stage, verbal references to disability as part of a constellation of traits perceived as undesirable in a woman — shrewishness, ugliness, disability — are important to the play's consideration of the limits of the mercenary marriage market. Conflations of disability with ugliness persist across centuries of adaptations of the play, and this lack of distinction between concepts of ugliness and of disability is part of the broader culture of early modern England, not idiosyncratic to this play. Verbal references to physical disability as an extreme on a continuum of female appearance serve to interrogate the limits of the extent to which a woman's wealth and normative gender performances can mitigate the effects of physical unattractiveness and disability in the early modern marriage market.

**Theorizing Disabled Gender Performance**

Critical responses to *The Taming of the Shrew* have paid nearly obsessive attention to analyzing what messages about gender the play communicates or endorses, with "anti-revisionists" and "revisionists" debating the play's gender ideology. Robert Heilman's influential 1966 article introduces these terms, summing up prior discussion of the controversy and sparking a renewed
energy for addressing the topic. Heilman argues that his "anti-revisionist" stance — that the play fits within the generic tradition of farce and that Katherine is a shrew who needs taming — characterizes much criticism of the play for the first 350 years and is in fact a "straight" reading that seems a plausible fit with early modern performers' and audiences' likely response to the play. Even as early as 1966, however, Heilman acknowledges numerous efforts of "revisionists" to find more palatable messages on gender relations in the play, and those efforts intensified as feminist criticism developed during the 1970s and 1980s. "Revisionist" readings find Katherine feminist to the end and tend to downplay Katherine's commitment to the ideas she espouses in her final speech (e.g., Kahn; Newman). In recent decades, scholars have attempted to move away from this binary by offering readings that find a middle ground between these two possibilities. However, the tendency to treat gender as the sole important identity marker for Katherine ignores the significance of the opposition of disability/ability to an understanding of Katherine's character. Specifically, the conflation of the concepts disability and ugliness, with the word "deformity" often used to refer to both concepts in early modern England, means that in the cultural imaginary, a disabled woman is always already an ugly woman as well. The importance of beauty to ideas and ideals of femininity suggests the possibility that a woman who is in some sense "by definition" unattractive will perform female gender differently than will a woman unmarked by disability.

Many gender-focused readings of Katherine treat her status as woman as the most important part of her identity, ignoring other possible identity markers that may contribute both to her sense of self and to her gender self-expression. Such an approach to Katherine's sexual and gender identity is typical of second-wave feminist scholarship, which tended to see female identity as monolithic (see Spelman for critique of feminist essentializing of women) and to dichotomize sex and gender in ways now seen as problematic. Gender theorists such as Judith Butler and Anne Fausto-Sterling have laid to rest the analogy sex:gender::nature:culture (sex is to gender as nature is to culture), arguing against the "naturalness" of either sex or gender by insisting that both exist only discursively. There is thus no pre-discursive, natural sex, and no gender apart from specific performances of it. This does not mean, however, that some sort of free play of gender performance is possible;
rather, we can, following Katherine Pauly Morgan, view gender as a Foucauldian "apparatus" with policing both formal and informal, internal and external:

Normal members of the community are expected to display their [gender] dimorphism through specifically gendered speech patterns, norms of appearance, facial and bodily hair, eating and drinking patterns and preferences, degree and kind of musculature, their hands and fingernails, their preferred movement modalities, their postures, their odors and scents, their height and body size, their erotic assertiveness or coyness, their vocabulary, their modes of cognition, and through the kinds and degrees of their emotional expressiveness. (304)

The specific details of expected gender performances will differ across time and across cultures, of course, and scholars differ in their interpretations of how early modern English people understood sex and gender. Thomas Laqueur influentially argues that early modern Europe imagined a "one-sex" body, in which variations in the balance of heat and fluids caused maleness and femaleness, which existed along a continuum of morphological possibilities for the human body. Stephen Greenblatt makes a similar argument, with specific reference to Shakespearean drama, in an analysis of the ideas about sex and gender in *Twelfth Night*. However, feminist scholars have criticized the one-sex model, which they assert depends too much upon early modern medical and scientific texts and may not represent mainstream experiences and beliefs, and have found competing evidence of a binary model of sexual difference in early modern England.3

Whatever etiological model of sexual difference might have prevailed in the cultural imagination of early modern England, gender roles were understood as binary and were policed as such. Early modern English culture had a number of well-established social and judicial rituals designed to punish transgressions of expected gender performances, which served as well to reinscribe for participants and observers the importance of correct gender displays. The skimmington ride, rough music, the cucking or ducking stool,
carting — all responded to perceived breaches of gender norms, especially women dominating their husbands (Ingram, "Ri

dings"; Thompson). Specific judicial punishments also attempted to keep women’s behavior within the expectations for female gender performance. Women found guilty of whoredom or other unruliness were sentenced to be carried in a cart through the streets (Gowing), and Tudor and Stuart legal commentaries decreed that "scolds are to be ducked over head and ears into the water in a ducking-stool" (qtd. in Ingram, "Scolding Women" 59). As Lynda Boose argues, within this culture, Katherine’s failure to perform the approved version of femininity had real risks, alluded to by Gremio’s joke that he would rather "cart her" than court her (1.1.55) and Petruccio’s claim that he will "curb her mad and headstrong humour" (4.1.190), in which Boose finds an allusion to the "scolds' bridles" used in the early modern period to silence and shame insubordinate women. Emily Detmer also finds echoes of cultural violence in the play, arguing that "reading Shakespeare’s civilized shrew-tamer as enlightened and positively kindly underscores the humanist preference for a nonphysical expression of dominance but ignores the harm inherent in domination" of men over women (293).

The tremendous amount of energy expended by early modern English culture on ensuring that women engaged in socially approved, normative displays of femininity raises the question of what might prompt a woman to go against the female code of chastity, silence, and obedience (Hull). I argue that for Katherine, the conflation of disability with ugliness renders her less marriageable and therefore less motivated to engage in normative gender displays. Analysis of Hortensio’s descriptions of Katherine illuminates the ways that concepts cluster together in The Taming of the Shrew to illustrate connections between attractive and unattractive qualities in a woman. In a single conversation with Petruccio, Hortensio describes Katherine both as "ill-favoured" (1.2.57) and as "beauteous" (82). In Hortensio’s comments, we can see the rigidity with which certain ideas are connected in the cultural imaginary: she will be "a shrewd, ill-favoured wife" (57), or she will be "a wife / With wealth enough, and young and beauteous" (81-82). The concepts, though strictly incompatible with one another, fit and indeed are required by the concepts with which they are more closely proximate: shrewish = ugly, but wealthy = beautiful.
This blurring of the conceptual boundaries between shrewishness and ugliness is important to understanding Katherine's position in the Paduan marriage market, but the interchangeability of ugliness and disability provides an even more important link. Many authors have commented on the early modern conflation of ugliness and physical disability. Roger Lund notes that "for modern readers there are clear and significant distinctions between disability or crippling, which implies loss of ability, and deformity, which implies noticeable disfigurement" (94). The early modern imagination, however, saw no such distinction: ugliness and disability were linked imaginatively as part of what made a human monstrous. According to Martin Weinrich, in *De ortu monstrorum* (1595), "All that is imperfect is ugly, and monsters are full of imperfections" (qtd. in Daston and Park 203). Especially by means of the word "deformity," used in early modern England to refer to both ugliness and disability, these two concepts are imaginatively linked in the early modern mind, with both often interpreted as visible markers for defects of character. Significantly, however, both concepts also connect to the meaning of gendered bodies. In the analysis of Hortensio's comments above, I argue that for Hortensio, shrewish = ugly. But the conflation between ugliness and disability means that we can write a different imaginary Paduan equation, one that asserts a causal link: disability > ugliness > shrewishness. In other words, Katherine's limp means that she is always already ugly, which means that she is always already a shrew. In this way, physical disability creates gendered meanings for Katherine, providing a rationale for the way that she performs gender.

These interpretations of the interactions of Katherine's disability with gender should be considered in light of research on the ways that disability affects gender identity and performance, although most of the research that exists focuses on the present day. Presumably because of the more obvious conceptual conflicts between cultural ideas of masculinity and stereotypes of disability as weakening and emasculating, much of the work that has been done has focused on men (see, e.g., Gerschick; Gerschick and Miller; Shuttleworth, "Defusing" and "Disabled"; Wilson). Judith Butler's ideas on gender have been especially fruitful for these researchers. Shuttleworth, focusing specifically on romantic/sexual contexts, notes that "Men with impairments … may not be able to, in Butler's terms, effect a normative
masculine performance ... that is, the macho swagger, asking someone out on a date, initiating a kiss, and so forth" ("Disabled" 167).

Research on disabled women's sexuality has been less influenced by trends in gender theory, with work tending to focus on disabled women's exclusion from normative ideals of femininity and the cultural perception that disabled women are asexual (see, e.g., Fine and Asch; Gill; and Rousso). However, a few scholars have examined the ways that disability affects the gender performance of women. Kafer and Guldin discuss some ways that real disabled women perform gender, which are less stereotypical in terms of expectations for gender and sexuality of disabled women but more stereotypical in terms of ideals of femininity. Kafer focuses on the ways that women with amputations or paralysis perform femininity in relation to the "devotees" who fetishize their disability; and Guldin, in a study of the gender performances of a small group of disabled men and women, discusses Phoebe, who considers her performance of the female "slut" to have been an empowering phase in her sexual self-definition. Moving from the experiences of real people to the analysis of cultural symbols, Garland-Thomson analyzes the gender meanings of disability in the cultural imagination with reference to Barbie's disabled doll friend Becky, who wears sensible shoes and comfortable clothes in her wheelchair: "The paradox of Barbie and Becky, of course, is that the ultra-feminized Barbie is a target for sexual appropriation both by men and beauty practices while the disabled Becky escapes such sexual objectification at the potential cost of losing her sense of identity as a feminine sexual being" (266).

Although certainly the creators of Becky had laudable goals of inclusion and representation, Garland-Thomson's identification of a fundamental sexlessness in the doll illustrates a cultural devaluation of the sexuality of disabled people, and this view goes back centuries. The tendency to conflate female disability with ugliness and non-normative gender displays (i.e., shrewishness) appears in the title of a 1679 work by John Dean: "The Dutch-miller, and new invented wind-miller, or, An exact description of a rare artist newly come into England who undertake[s] to grind all sorts of women; whether old, decriped, wrinckled, blear-eyed, long nosed, blind, lame, scold, []alous, angry, poor, or all others whatsoever: he'l ingage they shall come out
of his mill, young, active, pleasant, handsome, wise, modest, loving, kind and rich, without any defect, or deformity, and just suitable to their husbands humours." The interactions of those qualities imply an index of female attractiveness, and Katherine Minola — lame, scold, jealous, and angry — has only wealth to increase her attractiveness.

**Staging The Taming and Its Adaptations: The Enduring Verbal Presence of Katherine's Limp**

Given that productions of *The Taming of the Shrew* and its adaptations in the play's first 400 years did not, as far as we know, visually represent Katherine as having a limp, it seems odd that the lines referring to the limp were not excised in the many abridgements of the play produced over the centuries. John Lacy's *Sauny the Scott, or The Taming of the Shrew* (first performed 1667; published 1698) was a popular adaptation during the second half of the seventeenth century, James Worsdale's *A Cure for a Scold* (1735) in the first half of the eighteenth century, and David Garrick's *Catharine and Petruchio* (1754) from that time until nearly the end of the nineteenth century, when it became fashionable to stage Shakespeare's play as he wrote it. Shakespeare's words, ideas, and plots were by no means sacred to these adapters, and they certainly would have excised references to Katherine's disability were they so inclined. Examining how these revisions alter or retain the original Shakespearean references to Katherine's limp can provide insight into the play's adapters' ideas about the effect of disability on a woman's marriageability.

Keeping the references to disability allows the adapters to retain the original play's consideration of the limits of the mercenary marriage market. Many, many literary works in the early modern period, including *The Taming of the Shrew*, include comic plot elements of a young man marrying an older widow for her money. Ugliness is also presented as a female defect easily remedied with money (just as poverty is a defect easily remedied by beauty and obedience in, for example, the Griselda story). *The Taming of the Shrew* raises the question of whether marrying a deformed or disabled woman for her money is just another stage on the continuum of marrying for money or something of a different moral order altogether.
In early modern English literature, oldness, ugliness, and shrewishness seem uncontroversial as traits that can be mitigated with money, but the possibility of disability and deformity becoming marriageable with enough money appears more morally dubious, based on how early adapters of *The Taming of the Shrew* address the issue. Lacy’s *Sauny the Scott* provides explicit motivation for Petruchio’s willingness to marry a disabled woman. Whereas Shakespeare has Petruchio express his willingness to marry a woman who is "foul," "old," "curst," or "shrewd" if she have money enough (1.2.66-67), Lacy makes his Petruchio perhaps shockingly mercenary by having him state, "If she be Rich, I care not if she want a Nose or an Eye, any thing with Money" (Lacy 5). This statement of course goes well beyond the mercenary statements of Shakespeare’s Petruchio, and it apparently goes too far for James Worsdale’s comfort. In 1735, Worsdale revises *Sauny the Scott* into *A Cure for a Scold*, and he deletes the line about wanting a nose or an eye (7). However, safely outside the plot, Worsdale mentions this pecuniary motivation in one of the airs included as interludes in the play: "A Woman tho' never so ugly and old, / So crooked, so curst, and so crabbed a Scold: / Finds Plenty of Lovers, for Plenty of Gold" (7). As with the Lacy version’s reference to facial deformity, Worsdale goes beyond the unattractive qualities mentioned in Shakespeare’s play with the addition of "crooked." Garrick’s *Catハrine and Petruchio*, which eclipsed Shakespeare’s play in performance for the next century and a half, emphasizes Petruchio’s gentlemanliness and downplays his financial motives for marriage. Garrick shortens Shakespeare’s Petruchio’s speech about money making up for a bride who is foul, old, curst, and shrewd, retaining only "Be she as curst as Socrates' Zantippe" of the catalog of unattractive traits (4).

These explanations of the financial motives that would induce a man to marry an unattractive woman set up the audience for Petruchio, through false praise, to provide an indirect catalog of Katherine’s unattractiveness, including the references to her physical disability. In the false praise of the wooing scene, we see the first example of Petruchio using language to reshape reality (see, e.g., Baumlin; Rebhorn); significantly, though, the references to both beauty and physical ability serve to connect Petruchio rhetorically to the numerous sixteenth- and seventeenth-century examples of poems in praise of "deformed mistresses." Analyzing the mock encomia to Mopsa in Philip Sidney’s *The
Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (published posthumously in 1590) and to Dipsas in John Lyly's Endymion (1591), as well as in the seventeenth-century iterations of the type, Naomi Baker argues that this fashion celebrates masculine creativity at the expense of the (ugly) female body. Far from being given new recognition and acceptance in these modes of writing, the ugly woman is effectively silenced through being re-located within the bounds of literary descriptions of the beautiful. Through presenting the ugly woman as an object of desire, these texts appear to reject dominant aesthetic norms. They nevertheless reproduce the literary and cultural models of beauty and ugliness that they seem to interrogate, revealing the extent to which beauty is a masculine construct, imposed on a "naturally" ugly female body. (87)

In the texts Baker analyzes, as in early modern English culture in general, disability and ugliness go together conceptually, and Petruccio's rhetorical strategy in the wooing scene aligns with the rhetorically powerful male speakers of these other poems. As in Shakespeare's original, the early abridgements and adaptations of the play maintain the focus on Petruccio as powerful rhetorician by retaining his references to Katherine's beauty and her smooth and beautiful way of walking.

Lacy's Sauny the Scott revises Petruccio's reference to Katherine's limp (quoted above: 2.1.245-49, 252) to make it more colloquial (note that "Saun." is Sauny, Lacy's Scottish version of the Grumio character, and Petruccio addresses "Peg" because Lacy's heroine is Margaret, not Katherine):

Pet. What a Rogue was that told me thou wert Lame, thou art as streight as an Osier! and as Plyable, O what a rare walk's there! why there's a gate puts down the King of Frances best great Horse.

Saun. And the King of Scotland's tea.

Pet. Where did'st thou Learn the grand Paw Peg? It becomes thee rarely. (11)
Worsdale's *A Cure for a Scold* shortens this speech, so that Manly, the Petruccio character, says simply, "What Rogue was he, that told me thou wert lame? Thou art as straight, Peg, as an Osier, and as pliable; that Air, that Walk becomes thee to a Miracle" (11). The Garrick version follows closely the Shakespeare play's lines referring to Katherine's gait.

Even in the probable absence of a visual representation of disability on stage in production for the first 400 years of the play's stage history, the verbal references to Katherine's limp contribute meaning to the play: they raise questions about the morality involved in marrying for money, and they contribute to the characterization of Petruccio as having the power to shape reality through his rhetoric. While we cannot answer the question of whether these were the only meanings that Shakespeare envisioned for the references to Katherine's limp, interpreting Katherine as a disabled woman will productively complicate ideas about the origin of her shrewishness, and this will be even more noticeable when this interpretation takes place through the visual representation of Katherine as disabled.

**Interactions between Disability and Gender Performance in *The Taming of the Shrew***

By putting into play ideas about both disability and gender norms in his depiction of the character Katherine, Shakespeare provides directors and performers with a range of interpretive possibilities. Performances will differ in what attention they pay to the idea of disability, but even when a production references disability only verbally, by adhering to the play text, the text itself offers more psychological complexity to the character than other iterations of the same folktale sources. The folktale examples studied by Brunvand and such English ballads as "A Merry Jest of a Shrewde and Curste Wyfe, Lapped in Morrelles Skin, for Her Good Behavyour" do not offer explanatory or mitigating details regarding the woman's shrewishness. *The Taming of a Shrew*, a text closely related to *The Taming of the Shrew*, does not include references to Katherine's limp or to her distress when Petruccio is late for the wedding. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, we see in the depiction of Katherine characterizing details that change the cultural stereotype of "shrew" into something more complex and, in Bean's word, "humanized." Jonathan
Culpeper endorses this interpretation by analyzing the ways in which Katherine departs from the Elizabethan "social schema" of understandings of what a "shrew" is. Shakespeare's decision to alter source materials (and perhaps even an earlier draft, if we accept that *The Shrew* represents a revision of an earlier draft that became *A Shrew*) indicates an interest in exploring the question of *why* a woman might behave shrewishly that is progressive compared with the gender politics of his time.

But whatever interest and significance verbal references to Katherine's disability may hold, the full implications of a disabled heroine cannot be realized without representing Katherine's limp visually in production. The meaning of a dramatic representation of a disabled heroine in a romantic comedy will be culturally specific, of course, and the responses of viewers will provide information about not only the play performance, but about underlying ideas and assumptions about the meaning of disability. Unfortunately, our culture's view of disabled people is so limited that we may be literally unable to conceptualize a disabled shrew. Readers and audience members are trained to respond to disabled fictional characters with pity; Katherine's violence and anger — binding Bianca's hands, breaking the lute over Hortensio's head, hitting Petruccio — coupled with a pity-inducing limp are as incongruous to reviewers of Hinton's 2008 Stratford production as it would be to see Tiny Tim beating his sister with his crutch. Thus, those reviewers who did not entirely pan Hinton's decision regarding the limp tended to focus on responses of pity: the scenes at Petruccio's house "make an egocentric man's mistreatment of a handicapped woman gruesome, not funny" (Hoile); and Irene Poole shows "the difficulties of not simply being a woman in those times but one with a handicap … . [her Katherine] is clearly a sympathetic victim of both her times and circumstances" (Dale).

Drama critics who reviewed Hinton's Stratford Shakespeare Festival production betrayed their embeddedness within culture not only through the responses of pity just detailed, but even through their boredom. Ouzonian writes, "One can just imagine the moment of I-could-have-had-a-V8 recognition when Hinton came up with this ('You see? That's why she's so mean!'), but it does absolutely nothing for poor Irene Poole, except slow down the amount of time it takes her to cross the stage." Well, yes: it does increase
the time it takes the actress to cross the stage. A more sensitive critic might recognize in his or her own impatience and frustration with having to wait for an actress to move an example of the social effects of the disabled body: an actress on stage creates an embodied performance of the delay that disabled bodies cause; audience members feel bored and frustrated, pitying and perhaps slightly guilty about their reactions; and at least one observer reacts with the anger and derision evident in every sentence of Ouzonian's review: it doesn't take a V8 moment to persuade me that this might indeed explain why Katherine is so angry and unpleasant toward others.

I hope that more directors will follow Peter Hinton's lead in exploring the rich possibilities for characterization created by attention to Katherine as physically disabled. References to Katherine's disability can lead to multiple interpretive possibilities: her status as a disabled woman in a society that puts a premium on women's physical appearance may help to explain her unwillingness to perform traditional femininity before her marriage, and this explanation may or may not lead to an interpretation of Katherine as a proto-feminist. In the backstory for the character suggested by Shakespeare's reference to her limp and her gender performance, community reactions to her disability have persuaded Katherine that marriage is an unattainable goal (see, e.g., Abate 32). She reacts by giving up on normative femininity. One could perform this defiantly, emphasizing a proto-feminist Katherine, by highlighting her anger and violence, especially in scenes with characters other than the newly met Petruccio, to indicate that her grudge is justified and of long standing. Alternately, one could perform Katherine's lack of traditional femininity hopelessly, by emphasizing her embarrassment at being made "a stale ... amongst these mates," her hurt that Bianca is Baptista's "treasure," and her "shame" at being "poor Katherine" whose groom is late to their wedding (1.1.58, 2.1.32, 3.2.8, and 3.2.18, respectively). The range of possible interpretations that could follow from the decision to make Katherine limp suggests the richness of this possibility for creating meanings for context and characterization in performance.

Whatever emotional interpretation a director and actress might decide on for Katherine's shrewishness, consideration of the interaction of disability with gender performance can also help to motivate Katherine's transformation and
final speech. Just as Katherine's disability helps in imagining a complex and persuasive etiology for her shrewish behavior, it also serves to connect the taming plot to romance stories of fantastic wedding-night transformations. In Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale* and in the Tale of Florent in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, an ugly, aged woman transforms herself into a young beauty in response to her new husband's decision to give her sovereignty. Yet the transforming magic of marriage itself becomes the theme of the anonymous author of the 1640 pamphlet "A certaine relation of the hog-faced gentlewoman called Mistris Tannakin Skinker ... Who was bewitched in her mothers wombe in the yeare 1618. and hath lived ever since unknowne in this kind to any, but her parents and a few other neighbours. And can never recover her true shape, tell she be married... ." The author attempts to lend credence to the astrologer who declares that Miss Skinker's facial deformity will disappear if she marries a gentleman, for "whilst she continued in the estate of a Virgin, there was no hope of her recovery," by claiming that in the Gower story, marriage itself plays a role in the bride's transformation. According to the author, Gower's bride says, "Now Sir, you have given me that which all women most desire, my Will, and Soveraignty; and know I am the Kings daughter of Sicily, who by a wicked and sorcerous step-dame was thus inchanted, never to returne to my pristine shape, till I was first married, and after had received such power from my Husband." To the extent that Katherine's disability connects the plot to stories of magical post-wedding transformation, the "honeymoon" of Katherine and Petruccio becomes a liminal space, the transitional phase of ritual transformation, in which "undoing, dissolution, decomposition are accompanied by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns" (Turner 99). Certainly, Baptista's surprise at his daughter's transformation suggests some of the magic of the romance genre: "Another dowry to another daughter, / For she is changed as she had never been" (5.2.118-19); and Lucentio closes the play with the line "'Tis a wonder, by your leave, she will be tamed so" (193).

Further, as in these romance tales, Katherine's transformation from shrew into a wife who is obedient but not cowed cannot take place without her cooperation. As discussed earlier, by insisting on speaking only praise of her, Petruccio uses his skill with language to shape, rather than merely reflect,
reality (Baumlin). However, Katherine is co-creator with him; her own verbal agency prevents Petruchio from achieving the kind of omnipotence often associated at this time with rhetorical success (Rebhorn); certainly, her 44-line speech regarding wives' obedience emphasizes that her taming does not involve silencing. Interestingly, in a play that has focused so much attention on Katherine's body — the way she walks in the wooing scene; her body's need for food, clothing, and rest in the taming scenes; the presence or absence of beauty in her body and face — Katherine builds her argument for wives' obedience on the weakness of female bodies and the ugliness of an angry female face. For a woman to rebel against her husband "blots [her] beauty," because "A woman moved is like a fountain troubled, / Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty" (5.2.143, 146-47). Further, a woman should lie "warm at home, secure and safe" (155) while her husband ventures out, and Katherine explains the reason:

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? (169-72)

Through her words, Katherine creates a locus of meaning for the disabled married female body. By implication, she now has the beauty of the not-moved woman, and her individual disability has been subsumed into the general weakness of her entire sex.

The interpretive possibilities for disability in this play are more psychologically complex, and perhaps more interesting, than Shakespeare's use of disability as a marker of moral turpitude in Richard III. Instead of marking an interior state, disability represents an obstacle to social acceptance. In a study of disabled female characters in Victorian fiction, Martha Stoddard Holmes suggests that "one of the functions of the disabled woman character is to shore up the institution of marriage — and the idea of a married woman's happiness — by embodying the miseries of the woman who must live outside it" (224). In this light, as unmarried shrew, Katherine expresses the anger and unhappiness of the woman who expects her disability to bar her from taking on the most important social role a woman in her culture can achieve. The greatest shame she can imagine is to be an old maid who "must dance
barefoot on [Bianca's] wedding day, / And for [Baptista's] love to [Bianca] lead
apes in hell" (2.1.33-34) or to be jilted at the altar, so that people will point at
her and say, "Lo, there is mad Petruccio's wife, / If it would please him come
and marry her" (3.2.19-20). As wife, however, she has escaped from this fate
and is no longer the social outsider that she had been and had expected to
be. From the more privileged status of wife, she has the rhetorical power to
reshape the meaning of her disability. Whereas before, disability served as
the negative endpoint of the scale of female attractiveness, Katherine's
emphasis in her final speech on women's physical weakness creates the
potential to imagine disability instead as part of a continuum of female
weakness. Her argument positioning that weakness as a rationale for lying
"warm at home, secure and safe" implies that she is even more deserving of
her husband's attentive care than a stronger woman. Thus, to the extent that
Katherine has become a "winner" in the game of patriarchy, her motivation to
disrupt patriarchy through non-normative gender displays has disappeared. In
this regard, her willingness to donate her linguistic and rhetorical skills to the
cause of patriarchy, though problematic for modern readers, serves as a fitting
moral to the play's underlying fable of "Patriarchy and Its Discontents."

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**Endnotes**

1. An earlier version of this article was presented at the 37th Annual Meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America, Washington, DC, April 9-11, 2009. I am grateful to the conveners and participants in the
"Disabled Shakespeare" seminar at the meeting, and particularly to Simone Chess, Allison Hobgood, Katherine Schaap Williams, and David Houston Wood, for helpful comments on this paper. My thanks also to Damian Fleming for his expertise in Latin.

2. In Tori Haring-Smith's survey of stage productions of the play from 1594 to 1983, Diana Henderson's analysis of twentieth-century filmic and televised versions of the play, and Michael Friedman's overview of recent feminist productions of the play, I find no mention of a Katherine performed with a limp.

3. See Johnston 128-32 for overview of this argument and connections to Judith Butler's work; see Parker 339-40, especially note 5, for feminist critiques of Laqueur and Greenblatt.

4. The original reads, "Omne autem imperfectum deforme. In monstris multa imperfectio" (Weinrich II.86b). Weinrich expresses the same basic idea a page earlier: "Primum quia in imperfectis non est pulchrum, At[que] monstra imperfecta" (II.86a) ["For that which is distinguished by imperfections is not beautiful, and monsters are imperfect"]; this clarifies that in the first sentence, Weinrich intends "deforme" to mean "ugly."

5. For comparisons between Taming's Katherine and the Griselda story, see Brown; Jaster. Considering the two stories side by side is instructive in terms of both stories' tendency to imagine a marriageable woman as a collection of the qualities of physical attractiveness, feminine virtue
(conceptualized as obedience in both stories), and wealth, with the Griselda story counterbalancing positive attractiveness and virtue against negative wealth and the *Taming* story pitting negative attractiveness and virtue against positive wealth. By the end of the play, as both Brown and Jaster point out, Katherine has come to resemble Griselda in terms of feminine virtue.

6. See Haring-Smith 16-20 for an analysis of Petruchio's more gentlemanly character in Garrick's version, as well as discussion of how later adaptations of Garrick's text made Petruchio even more attractive.

7. The anonymous *The Taming of a Shrew* (entered into the Stationers' Register and published in 1594) is similar in many respects to Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (first published in the 1623 Folio), and the question of which play was written first has vexed generations of Shakespeare scholars (see, e.g., Houk and Duthie for examples of pre-postmodern scholarship on the question, which arrived at something like consensus that A Shrew derives from an earlier version of *The Shrew*). Leah Marcus argues against the entire enterprise, recommending that editors combine A Shrew and *The Shrew* to form composite texts, such as we now have of *King Lear*. Their close textual relationship provides added significance to differences between the two plays in the characterization of Katherine.

8. I find support for my contention that attention to Katherine's body and disability in the play as a whole connects with Katherine's own attention to bodies in her final speech in the fact that the final speech in *The Taming of a Shrew* (the similar play that makes no reference to Katherine as limping) bases the argument for wives' submission on
religious analyses of women's sinfulness and inferiority rather than on their bodily weakness.

9. See Mitchell and Snyder, chapter 4, for a discussion of the multiple meanings of deformity in the afterlife of the historical Richard III.