

Shakespeare's Sense of Dialectics: A Philosophical Contribution to Kate's Policy

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For someone who is not familiar with Shakespearean studies writing about Shakespeare is a sort of suicide. It is much like writing about Kant, or Plato, for people who are not skilled philosophers. And yet, there is an aspect of Shakespeare's work which is peculiarly attractive for a person who, like me, studies metaphysics and philosophical logic, and it is the special and deep sense of conceptual dialectics revealed by Shakespeare's text. So I will try to say something about this, without touching the technicalities of philological and literary analysis, and trying not to make too many mistakes in this regard.

1. Super-concepts

Shakespeare's work is full of dialectics, in any sense of the term 'dialectics': as the art of discussion, or the art of dramaturgic conflicts (in Brecht's idea), or as the art of contradictions; finally: as the semantics of concepts, and especially 'second-order' concepts, such as truth (and falsity), reality (and appearance), identity (and difference), etc. This last meaning is not largely used, in the tradition, but historically it is one of the first, and most important (especially for Hegel, in a possible interpretation¹). And it is the meaning I tend to favour (though not disregarding the connection with the others).

¹ See Angelica Nuzzo, "Dialectic as Logic of Transformative Processes", in *Hegel: New Directions*, ed. Katerina Deligiorgi, Durham, Acumen, 2006; and Elena Ficara, "Hegel's Dialectic in Contemporary Continental Philosophy", *Idealistic Studies*, 39 (2010), pp. 87-97.

Generally speaking, concepts, in Shakespeare's theatrical work, do live, and play one against the other, in a way that has no equivalent, as far as I know. And I suggest that this is not a *linguistic* or merely *expressive* feature, though Shakespeare's euphuism or pre-baroque conceitism have been frequently mentioned by critics and interpreters. Rather, I would say, it is a *logical* as well as *practical* requisite. Possibly, one could even say that from the conceptual logic that Shakespeare puts into practice, very often (if not always) springs the very structure of the figured action.

It is this, I think, that makes Shakespeare's text a true resource for philosophers. Although it is a *methodological* and not *theoretical* resource. "Play with concepts!" is the suggestion that Shakespeare, as it were, addresses to philosophers: "because concepts are your creatures, and the material of your work, like wood for a woodcarver". 'Playing' here means seeing the ambiguity of concepts, their tendency to clash and fight, to iterate reflectively, mutually connect and exclude each other. When you think you have found the way of getting the better of them, suddenly they produce the worst: contradiction, absurdity, and also epistemic and practical injustice.

But more specifically, the main role in this picture is played by that special sort of concepts that I mentioned before, and that I would call, following a suggestion that incidentally appears in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, "super-concepts" (*Über-begriffe*). Possibly, the shortest list of super-concepts is the one that the medievals called 'transcendentals': *unum*, *verum*, *bonum* – where *unum* (for both Aristotelian and Platonic traditions) ultimately means *esse*, being, reality. But the list may be longer, we may also add other second-order concepts, more or less semantically connected to them.

Now, what of these (and similar) concepts² is most important for our needs is that they are so to speak everywhere, in our thinking and reasoning, and acting. In fact, they are the principal structures that rule our inferences, and via our (more or less good) inferences rule our beliefs, decisions, and actions. In fact, they mainly have an *inferential* role: I know or believe that things stand in a certain way (reality is so made), so I believe or suppose they also are or might

² Notably, they are for Aristotle as well as for a long philosophical tradition the typical subjects of the "first philosophy", *prima philosophia*. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 2, 1008a-c.

be in another way; I think (know, believe, suppose) that what you say is true, and consequently other sentences are also true; I know this action is good, then some other actions are also good. Notably, these three exemplified inferences do not 'contain' anything, they have no content: it is not specified which action the good action is, which sentence you uttered, and which sorts of things I am referring to. We simply see that truth, reality and good are the forces that drive thought from premises to conclusions. I infer 'from this, that' because I infer true from true, being from being, and good from good.

So we can say these concepts are the formal, I would say super-formal, structures that govern our thinking. And via our thinking, they rule our interactions, and discussive confrontations. Because a second important aspect of the *Überbegriffe* is that they mainly have a *critical*, that is, *sceptical* role (in the ancient sense of *skepsis*, 'research'). I never think of reality, or truth, or good. I always use them, but I do not mention them, and I do not even think of them as such (although I am a philosopher).

However, when some of these concepts in my view are so to say *violated*, or used in a distorted or doubtful way, they suddenly appear in my mind. If anyone tries to make me believe that something that I know to be non-existing, in fact exists, or tries to pass off as true what I know or suspect to be false; if I see injustice, wickedness, and evil deeds, that occur (or risk occurring) without punishment: well, in these cases, the comedy (or tragedy) of super-concepts begins. And they begin to openly act in our language and thought.

A third point which should be taken into consideration is that these special kinds of second order concepts are universally 'ordinative', which means they put general order into concepts: they provide a high-level organization of the conceptual dotation we normally use in our thinking. For instance the concept of reality does unify and organize our unspecified vision of single things or events, by offering the distinction between those of them that are real, and not only apparent (seeming). From now on, we will be able to further specify the domain of real entities, for instance by distinguishing, if we want, those among them that are physical (being in space and time), and those that are not, or which ones belong to possible worlds. Also, we may note that the notion of physical objects also includes animals, and human bodies, distinguishing among them female and male bodies, and the practical and social properties they respectively have.

This system of concepts, which is more or less 'naturally' involved in our language, has no true relevance, as such (except possibly for philosophers belonging to neo-positivist tradition). And it is not even relevant to specify in detail the typological relations occurring between first, second, third order etc. concepts, and between them and the super-ordinative transcendental principles. What is interesting, in fact, is the *dialectical movement* which stirs the supposedly ordinate hierarchy of types or orders. And this dialectical movement is characteristically due first to the possible *iteration* of super-concepts, namely in their epistemic and semantic role, which was one of the first elements of Plato's concern, as developed in *Parmenides*.

To put things very simply: we may say: "it is not true that what you believe is not true", and even this may be true or false, or we may say "it is true that truth is not a concept", which is not true; or we may say "it is not true that there is no truth", which is surely true. Also 'good' has a similar property of 'iterability': I say "it is not good to think that this is not good", or "what is judged being good is not good", or also: "it is good to promote good actions", "people who believe there are good things generally are not good", etc. Evidently, the conceptual names in each case may be different, so we may have the oxymora of bad goodness, or unjust justice, useless utility, rational irrationality, but also unfaithful loyalty, or loyal unfaithfulness, or sad happiness and happy sadness, and malicious candour, cooperative conflicts, or also, like Bianca says, in *The Taming of the Shrew*: content of a discontent (I.i.80³). These are *stratified* contradictions, where the second level of a certain concept denies and stultifies the first level. Hegel (mainly in his early writings) paid special attention to the philosophical import of self-contradictory iterations, focusing, for instance, on the paradox of 'infinite finiteness' inconsequently defended by some interpreters of Kant.

But it is the so-called *undefined iterability* of super-concepts that causes many problems for philosophers, and somehow even justifies their job, in many cases. Because very often, people who pretend to be defenders of good in fact are not good, and brave supporters of truth are consummate liars, and what seems to be existent, or is universally alleged to be existent, does not exist. So the philosopher's job

³ All references are to William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. Brian Morris, The Arden Shakespeare, London-New York, Methuen, 1981.

is to disentangle these conceptual stratifications, revealing what is false in the pretended truth, and injustice in the alleged justice.

The playing of unjust justice, untrue truth, true appearance, false reality, etc., is possibly the most evident philosophical feature we may find in Shakespeare's work. If we accept this basic idea, we can see that the expression 'linguistic game' with reference to Shakespeare's method is not totally appropriate, or rather, does not exhaust the specific playing of language and thought involved in it. This playing is not only linguistic or poetic, but one would say logical, which means it concerns reasoning, and the way in which natural rules and mistakes of our reasoning, depending on the natural use of iterable concepts, rule our life.

2. *Dream scepticism and double deceits*

So both tragedy and comedy of human thought, as it were, may be connected to super-concepts, as they are the both mental and linguistic forces of (wrong or right) reasoning, ultimately governing human beliefs, decisions, and actions. Shakespeare more than other theatre writers grasps and gives us back these tragedies and comedies. The philosophical game which is to be played then is not properly (and only) the dance and playing of words, or characters, but of super-concepts: and this is namely what Hegel, following the ancient philosophers, called dialectics. In Shakespeare's texts we discover "the logical thrill of dialectics" (as the young Nietzsche described Plato's interpretation of Socrates' teaching).

I focus here on one of the most puzzling of Shakespeare's comedies, *The Taming of the Shrew*, where the special happiness of Shakespearean dialectics finds two typically super-conceptual subjects: *true* and *false* (or *reality* and *appearance*), and *masculine* and *feminine*. Notably, the latter have super-conceptual reference insofar as anthropological specifications, that is to say, specifications of the general notion of human being.

The frame of the comedy, which is only a sort of prologue in the 1623 version, immediately presents the abyss of what contemporary philosophy calls *dream scepticism*⁴: the beggar mocked, who awakes as

⁴ A very nice presentation of the entire theme, which occupies endless literature nowadays, is Jan Westerhoff, *Reality: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.

a fake 'lord', and very soon (in fact too soon) believes that this is his reality. And the false appearance of which Sly, the beggar, is victim, introduces all the substitutions of the story which follows. Not only that, but also the other theme, the difference between men and women, and namely the submission required for women, is mentioned.

"[H]e shall think by our true diligence / He is no less than what we say he is" (Induction.i.68-69). Why is it so easy to deceive people about their own identity? The first answer is well known: because we all live, as far as truth and reality are concerned, all alone with our experience, and we know that our experience may be deceptive. We need other people's confirmation, and even when facing unequivocal evidence, if someone else (possibly more than one person) is resolute enough in denying our conviction, we very easily capitulate, and falsity becomes truth.

So it is the natural *loneliness* of conscience, which is here put into light: the fact that I am alone, with my awareness of being existent, in some sense, ultimately creates my sense of being and being a single entity in the world. But this awareness in itself is what introduces the hyperbolic doubt of scepticism. How do you know that you're not the only true human being, endowed with interior feelings, in a world of zombies, that is people who have only the appearance of feelings and internal states but are not endowed of either? How do you know you are not a brain in a vat, connected to computers giving the impression of being the person you believe to be, and the impression of things like you think things are? These are the very famous *sceptical hypotheses* cherished by contemporary philosophers. However, setting aside the relevant contributions to the theme provided by a vast filmography, from *The Matrix* onwards, we see that in Sly's case the tragedy of subjectivity, closed in the strict and inexpressive loneliness of consciousness, is translated into comedy, which means action, and representation.

The second theme, the simple equation 'honourable women = obedient women', is presented when the lord suggests instructions for the page Bartholomew:

dress'd in all suits like a lady.

[...]

He bear himself with honourable action,
Such as he hath observ'd in noble ladies
Unto their lords, by them accomplished.

[...]

With soft low tongue and lowly courtesy. (Induction.i.104-12)

The ancient *topos* of tearful womanliness, which prepares Kate's dry eyes, is also mentioned:

Bid him shed tears, as being overjoyed,
to see her noble lord restored to health,
[...]
If the boy have not a woman's gift
To rain a shower of commanded tears,
An onion will do well for such a shift,
Which in a napkin being close convey'd. (Induction.i.118-25)

So the joke is ready, and here is the false truth revealed, the simulated recognition:

Thou art a lord, and nothing but a lord.
Thou hast a lady far more beautiful
Than any woman in this waning age. (Induction.ii.62-64)

After a brief doubt ("would you make me mad?", Induction.ii.17), Sly willingly capitulates:

Am I a lord, and have I such a lady?
Or do I dream? Or have I dreamed till now?
I do not sleep. I see, I hear, I speak.
I smell sweet savours and I feel soft things.
Upon my life, I am a lord indeed.
And not a tinker, nor Christophero Sly. (Induction.ii.69-74)

Eventually, the wisest decision is taken: "Well, bring our lady hither to our sight, / And once again a pot o' th' smallest ale" (Induction. ii.75-76). And also the residual doubt is presented in fairly inattentive way. The Servingman says: "These fifteen years you have been in a dream, / Or when you wak'd, so wak'd if you slept", and Sly in turn: "By my fay, a goodly nap. / But did I never speak of all that time?" (Induction.ii.80-83). In fact, the servant's explanation simply confirms what happened just before – which would have to be considered suspicious. However, the perplexity is soon dispelled.

So we see here the second reason why the trick so easily succeeds, which is what is most interesting, in my view. It is the fact that the Lord's fictional strategy is paralleled by Sly's almost blind assent, which evidently is not only due to the force of shared opinions about

reality against the weak loneliness of consciousness, but also to the very pleasant reality that the fiction presents.

Ultimately, what really does Sly have to lose, if he had to lose truth, and reality? What really does he have to gain, gaining truth? In Sly's view, the trick in itself provides an advantage, so it is not important if lady, dresses, ale, wealth and comforts truly are his own possession, or not. Why not simulate believing what those people seem to be eager for him to believe? Double fiction, one would say: the fiction is fictionalized in turn. We can see that Gorgias' principle always holds: who exactly is the deceiver? Who is the person who is adopting a certain strategy, to deceive others? At least in some cases, the deceived is smarter than the deceiver.

Sly's policy in this sense is a typical super-conceptual strategy, insofar as it concerns truth and falsity, reality and false appearance. And we may apply it to any sceptical hypothesis. If you suggest to me that reality is different from how I think it is, maybe I cannot show it is not so, but I can always say that as far as the false reality remains what I think it is, and gives me all the resources and joys it usually gives me, there is no point in gaining or losing truth about it. In other terms, if Descartes' deceiving demon has really given me the show of life, and the sumptuous fiction of reality, I am totally grateful to him. Because this falsity, which is the show of life, is a precious gift⁵.

Definitely, the two tricks (one perpetrated by the Lord and the other given by Sly's rapid approval), join and come to a final accomplishment: "Now Lord be thanked for my good amends", Sly says, and all: "Amen" (Induction.ii.98-99). And just after this, the page in the guise of a lady introduces what will be the second (double) super-conceptual trick, the trick centred on woman's submission: "My husband and my lord, my lord and husband; / I am your wife in all obedience" (Induction.ii.107-8).

3. *Male women and female men*

The conceptual perspective is extremely useful when you have to come to terms with incomprehensible and ambiguous phenomena of

⁵ This is sometimes claimed by suggesting that Descartes' demon is the "second God" of gnosticism.

life. Very simply, the rule is: each time you find an intractable problem, a paradox, or some irreducible contradiction, pay attention to the super-conceptual problem involved, because very often this happens because there is some hitch, somewhere, concerning truth or being or good (or their names and equivalents). So it is useful to have an idea of the nature of these and other concepts, and their odd behaviours. The experience of the semantic behaviour of concepts (especially super-concepts) should be, hypothetically, the main requisite of philosophers (not only analytic philosophers, or philosophers of language). But it concerns, as I hinted above, the same play of life, insofar as grasped by thought and language.

3.1. *The play of concepts*

In the third volume of his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, Hegel suggests that Shakespeare's characters are in fact concepts: in Shakespeare we find "the universality of humanity", and grasped as such⁶ without any flexible adaptation to the variety of life. Shakespeare's characters (Hegel mainly speaks of tragedies) do not have the vagueness and internal contrasts of psychical life, rather, they represent the virtues and vices of conceptuality, and so their adventures and misadventures are the adventures and misadventures of thought.

The fact is that concepts do have a life, and a variety, they fight and dance, as I suggested above. And this depends of their nature, which is worth now seeing in some detail, with special reference to the ambiguous and fragile concepts of man and woman, male and female. We can isolate five points.

First, concepts are cognitive unities (usually instantiated by one or more words), but they have no true unity, actually: they are *mereological sums of disparate determinations*. When you say "male", or "female", you do not properly say something definite. Or at least: you cannot think that the *intension* (to say the conceptual content determining the collection you are referring to) is uniform. Because with 'male' you may mean lots of things, and accordingly, when you use

⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "In Shakespeares Lustspielen und Tragödien überwiegt das Allgemeinmenschliche", in *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, vol. III, in *Werke*, auf der Grundlage der Werke von 1832-1845, neu ed. Ausgabe, hg. von E. Moldenhauer und K.M. Michel, Bd. 15, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1986, p. 498.

(thinking or speaking) the predicate 'female' you include in one word very many disparate properties. Some of these properties are obvious, and have biological nature, some are social, psychological, and evidently cultural. In this heterogeneous set of disparate aspects, you will find inconsistencies, contrasts, and diversities of all kinds.

Second, we have seen that concepts, and namely general (super-conceptual) determinations are *iterable*, so you may have impolitical politicians, and evidently male women, or female men. And this effect is not only a rhetorical artifice, an oxymoron, or a linguistic game, but it is the simple reality of things, when grasped by language and thought. If we take this into account, we are ready to acknowledge the disguise not only (or properly) of people and characters, but of concepts. Everyone knows that simulated second-order behaviours are at the basis of every problem in our public life. Second order conceptual simulations may drive our beliefs where we do not really want them to go, and consequently may drive our actions to what we would never do, otherwise. Accordingly, a female man might find difficult to express his female nature because people expect him to behave in a non-female way, and this dysfunction may affect the same person, and his/her surroundings in infinite ways. So in the notions of female man or male woman we find the stratified contradiction I have mentioned above.

Third, concepts are *vague*. Which means: their application (assertibility, and thinkability) is (often) to be practiced in degrees. Some first-order concepts are typically vague, like 'old' or 'tall'. And vagueness in this case depends on the perspectival nature of the concept (what is old or tall for me is not old or tall for you), as well as on temporal variations, because: what is not old today is old tomorrow. Some concepts-predicates are 'multi-dimensional', say: nice, or happy. There are many ways, and perspectives, and times, of niceness, or happiness. This typically affects truth, because when we have to say "this is happy", or "this is nice", "he's an old man", or "he's tall" the truth of our assertion should be graduated (half truth, almost truth, etc.).

As to male and female determinations, contemporary philosophy tells us that there are (at least) five sexes, in fact, and manliness and womanless are to be located in a graduate line, of this sort:

Man

Woman

At the two heads of the line we have the perfect male, and the perfect woman, while in the middle, we have the perfect hermaphrodite. The other two determinations are male woman and female men, and the graduation of the line lets us see that there are infinite degrees of more or less strong femaleness of men, and maleness of women, from 0 to 1.

To a certain extent, one may say that all concepts are vague⁷. And so truth itself is vague. This is the typical result of fuzzy logics, which deal with reasoning involving vague premises. So the basic graduated line (what gives us most of problems) is the one concerning truth, because we may have 0.5 true, or 0.8 true, or 0.2 true, etc. sentences:

False = 0

True = 1

The fourth point, which is worth underlining, is something that the dialectical tradition has somehow overemphasized, and it is the *conflict* occurring between concepts (and consequently between ideas, theories, and ways of thinking and conceiving reality, because some concepts become ideas, and so produce ideal pictures, and *Weltanschauungen*). At first, one might think that the gradual nature of truth should lead us to admit that everything is grey, shadowed, vague and substantially untrue. But this is simply wrong, because it misunderstands the fact that in the line there are the two heads, actually: so there is absolute falseness (point 0) and there is absolute truth (point 1). We are generally aware of the phenomenon of vagueness, which is fairly intuitive, but we also know that something is surely true, and something false. As a matter of fact, we know lots of absolute truths: for instance I know that I am here now, I know that the Pythagorean theorem is true, I know that I do not like wicked people, and I can acknowledge wickedness (even if I can forgive them, thinking they are somehow in trouble), etc.

This means that ultimately, vagueness does not really change our vision of things, and our ways of thinking of them, and speaking of them⁸. So we see that even if vagueness seems to be everywhere, it does not remove the conflict between true and false, good or bad, appearance and reality, and any other contraposition of this sort. So we also see that the border between the extension and counter-extension

⁷ See Graham Priest, "A Site for Sorites", in *Liars and Heaps: New Essays on Paradox*, ed. J. C. Beall, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2003.

⁸ This is a point stressed by Stewart Shapiro in *Vagueness in Context*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.

of concepts is fragile, and continually violated, but *it remains a war zone*. And it is in this war zone that the relation between Katherine and Petruchio (and more generally, but at first latently, between husbands and wives) develops, in the comedy.

Finally, the fifth point is something that instead the anti-conceptual perspective, say the one defended by Nietzsche, or by some feminist philosophers, has always opposed to Hegel and other interpreters of conceptual dialectics. It is the fact that concepts do serve for describing and even seeing real objects and facts, but they are totally different entities. Real things, facts, and events, are manifold, and vague, and move, exactly like concepts, but *in a totally different way*. The realm of concepts-words is endowed of a sort of reality, or factuality, that parallels the true effective reality, pretending to take care of it (and in a sense taking care of it), but in fact systematically violating its true nature⁹. In fact concepts give uniformity where there is heterogeneity, steadiness where there is movement, and they actually organize reality into hierarchies, structures, levels, etc. This is evidently due to their capacity of making one what is disparate, and to collect things, on the basis of their similarity: I can say "this is a woman" because someone a long time ago noted that many human individuals presented certain shared properties, and he or she, a long time ago, called this set of things 'women'. Now I can speak of women in the world, and think of them, because I have this concept-name. But notably, the individuals that I 'collect' with it remain heterogeneous, and mobile. Then concepts (words) somehow *violate the truth, in the very moment in which they give us the opportunity of telling the truth*. This is basically the reason why some philosophers, following Nietzsche¹⁰, have thought that language, and the claim to truth that language supposes, are basically a deceitful trap, in which we are forced to live and think.

If we take into account all this (internal multiplicity, possible iterability, vagueness, conflict, disparity between concepts and real things), we are ready to enter into the "logical thrill of dialectics" that ultimately rules our life, and makes of it a conceptual play, to be played in a tragic or comic way.

⁹ Notably, this is exactly what Petruchio does, in simulating care toward Katherine, while in fact destroying its nature. The difference is that the power of language, as it were, is without deceiving intention.

¹⁰ See Nietzsche's early writing *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense* (1873).

And namely, we can look at Kate's misadventures in the perspective of a certain social life, in which movements, vagueness, iterability and conflicts of predicates endowed with ontological relevance, such as male and female, are disregarded, and they are entangled into a system of true falsity and false truth, of stratified simulations and disguises. The origin of the entire mechanism is evidently what a feminist reading would stress, that is: the problem of power; the power of men over women, and the failure of attempted efforts of women to contrast it. But what creates the story, is the use of truth and lie, semi-lie and half-truth, that each concept-character puts into practice.

3.2. Katherine the curst

Maybe it is not by chance that the "conceited history", as history of concepts, begins by Lucentio's profession of Socratic faith.

Here let us breathe and haply institute
A course of learning and ingenious studies.
[...]

I study
Virtue and that part of philosophy
Will I apply that treats of happiness
By virtue specially to be achiev'd. (I.i.8-20)

This is openly the theory of *areté* plus *noesis* producing *eudemonia* (virtue+knowledge = happiness), and it is also accompanied, to complete the picture, by the Socratic idea of *philein*, the pleasure of knowledge, negatively declared by Tranio: "No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en" (I.i.39).

The announced pleasure tells us that, ultimately, all serious knowledge may turn into comedy. And soon the story enters into the main game, the one concerning Kate's supposedly intractable disposition. The difficulty of finding a husband for her, leads Baptista to the decision:

importune me no farther
For how I firmly am resolv'd you know;
That is, not to bestow my youngest daughter
Before I have a husband for the elder. (I.i.48-51)

In fact, Kate's first words, prepared by Gremio's verdict "She's too rough for me" (I.i.55), are not totally rough, if not else, because they openly contain a prayer "I pray you, sir, is it you will / To make a stale of me amongst these mates?" (I.i.57-58). So we may suppose the beginning of the hostility was not hers.

What Katherine tries to win (and won't succeed) is the force of the prejudicial conception of 'female disposition' surrounding her: "No mates for you / Unless you were of gentler, milder mould", so Hortensio says (I.i.59-60), and further, against Katherine's rude words (inspired by legitimate pride), he exclaims: "From all such devils, good Lord deliver us!" (I.i.66), while Tranio comments: "That wench is stark mad or wonderful forward" (I.i.69). Also Bianca's mild behaviour, and modesty, and silence (praised by the wise Lucentio) contrasts Kate's feminist rebellion, which is destroyed in an instant by Bianca's quiet and poisoned words: "Sister, content you in my discontent. / Sir [to the father], to your pleasure humbly I subscribe" (I.i.80-81).

Kate's problem is clearly political. It arises from the legitimate reaction to a conceptual content that she refuses, because she can see in it an entire system of false humility (Bianca), trivial desire (the 'mates') and affectionate domination (the father Baptista). The poor Katherine tries to face these unfortunate waves by roughly protesting her right of freedom and human dignity "shall I be appointed hours, as though, belike, I knew / Not what to take and what to leave?" (I.i.103-4). And it is *ontological* freedom: freedom of not being what one is supposed to be. Later, she will openly say: "I see a woman may be made a fool / If she had not a spirit to resist" (III.ii.218-19).

Sure, Kate is a shrew, the term is irremediably negative¹¹. But why is she so bad, rough, and even brutal? Many clues tell us that she is exasperated and made wicked by the duty of being a woman in the way in which a woman supposedly must be. The concept of 'woman' in which and by which her life and behaviour are located and described is a prison, for her. And she is even more exacerbated by the passive-aggressive attitude of her sister, who is not behind her, and rather, with graceful submissiveness, perfectly complies with a woman's identity duties. Thus implicitly confirming that she is wrong, in asking for ontological freedom.

¹¹ On the meaning of 'shrew' see Nadia Fusini, "La tortora e il calabrone", in *I volti dell'amore*, Milano, Mondadori, 2003, p. 41.

Kate's shrewishness is then the reaction to falsity and repression involved in the conception of woman expressed in Baptista's, Bianca's and other people's words and attitudes. Later, Petruchio will get the point: "yourself and all the world / That talk'd of her have talk'd amiss of her. / If she be curst, it is for policy" (II.i.283-85). And this is exactly Kate's policy: being rough when women are required to be sweet, being talkative and contentious when women are supposed to be quiet, calm and silent. It is a rebellion against the traditional concept of 'woman': Kate shows these properties (being silent, quiet, sweet) are not given as such.

Petruchio perfectly grasps the truth of Kate's situation. But he uses this awareness to introduce and develop his own fictional strategy. As Lucentio has come to Padua for philosophy, so Petruchio has come "Hapily to wive and thrive as best I may" (I.ii.55), and Katherine is surely a good candidate. There is the problem of Kate's intemperate mood, actually. "[T]hough her father be very rich, any man is so very a fool to be married to hell?" was Gremio's verdict (I.i.123-25), and Hortensio warns Petruchio:

Her only fault, and that is fault enough,
Is that she is intolerable curst,
And shrew and froward so beyond all measure
That, were my state worser than it is,
I would not wed her for a mine of gold. (I.ii.87-91)

But this is not a problem, for Petruchio, who typically represents the perfect man, so to speak: the person whose property of being man has value 1 (in the supposed masculinity scale). He has no fear of hell, and even less of cursed or mad women:

Be she as foul as was Florentius' love
As old as Sybil, and as curst and shrewd
As Socrates' Xanthippe, or a worse,
She moves me not, or not removes at least
Affection's edge in me, were she as rough
As are the swelling Adriatic seas.
I come to wive it wealthily in Padua;
If wealthily, then happily in Padua. (I.ii.68-75)

His experience makes him the paradigm of male determination and courage:

Have I not heard great ordnance in the field,
 And heaven's artillery thunder in the skies?
 Have I not in a pitched battle heard
 Loud 'arums, neighing steeds, and trumpets clang?
 And do you tell me of a woman's tongue
 That gives not half so great a blow to hear
 As will a chestnut in a farmer's fire?
 Tush, Tush, fear boys with bugs! (I.ii.202-9)

We see then Katherine's disadvantage: that she has to face this perfectly masculine man, when she is a woman who is not strictly and entirely 'female'. Face to Petruchio's value 1, Katherine is a 'male woman', so she is endowed of the intermediate value 0.75, or even less. Notably, this disparity does not concern the *psychology* of characters, but the *concepts* they represent (like Hegel suggests), and the playing of their respective properties (courage, sweetness, determination, submission, etc.).

3.3. Petruchio's policy

It is a true war. "I am as peremptory as she proud-minded" (II.i.131), but Petruchio's strategy at first is to conceal the war under kindness and false wooing, to destroy Kate's defence by mental confusion and contradiction; though sometimes leaving it emerge, by facts, actions, and words. In this process, truth and falsity play an important role, as always happens when a conflict for supremacy is at stake.

The first step is plain falsity, evidence negated: "Hearing thy mildness prais'd in every town, / Thy virtues spoke of, and thy beauty sounded, / Yet not so deeply as to thee belongs, / Myself am mov'd to woo thee for my wife" is Petruchio's beginning (II.i.191-94).

And further:

'Twas told me you were rough, and coy, and sullen,
 And now I find report a very liar;
 For thou art pleasant, gamesome, passing courteous,
 But slow in speech, yet sweet as springtime flowers.
 Thou canst not frown, thou canst not look askance,
 Nor bite the lip, as angry wenches will,
 Nor hast thou pleasure to be cross in talk.
 But thou with mildness entertain'st thy wooers,
 With gentle conference, soft and affable. (II.i.237-45)

The ambiguity is poisoned, and unbearable, because Petruchio seems to side with Kate, against other people who do not understand her, but, he simply does not tell the truth, of which Katherine is totally aware.

And the second step is to let the war become evident:

For I am he am born to tame you Kate,
And bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate,
Conformable as other household Kates. (II.i.269-71)

And Katherine has a lucid mind on this point:

You have show'd a tender fatherly regard
To wish me wed to one half lunatic,
A madcap ruffian and a swearing Jack,
That thinks with oaths to face the matter out. (II.i.279-82)

Petruchio's false alliance goes on:

Father, 'tis thus: yourself and all the world
That talk'd of her have talk'd amiss of her.
If she be curst, it is for policy,
For she's not froward, but modest as the dove.
She's not hot, but temperate as the morn.
For patience she will prove a second Grissel,
And Roman Lucrece for her chastity.
And to conclude, we have 'greed so well together,
that upon Sunday is the wedding day. (II.i.283-91)

Katherine, reluctant, comments: "I'll see thee hanged on Sunday first" (II.i.292). Despite this, the appearance is saved by Petruchio in front of other men:

'Tis bargain'd 'twixt us twain, being alone,
That she shall still be curst in company.
I tell you 'tis incredible to believe
How much she loves me. O the kindest Kate!
She hang about my neck, and kiss on kiss. (II.i.297-301)

And the war is always in progress, though in Petruchio's philosophy of genders, even the calmest and peaceful man (say 0.7 man) has victory

in his grasp, as he can easily manage to tame the most quarrelsome woman (say 0.3 woman):

O you are novices. 'Tis a world to see
How tame, when men and women are alone,
A meacock wretch can make the curstest shrew. (II.i.304-6)

It is enough to be a man, to have a guarantee of victory and supremacy.

Faced with this double disconcerting attitude, Kate is aware of the announced disaster. She comments:

I must forsooth be forc'd
To give my hand, oppos'd against my heart,
Unto a mad-brain rudesby, full of spleen,
Who woo'd in haste and means to wed at leisure. (III.ii.8-11)

And it is in a last residual effort to contrast the mad-brain man, that Katherine defends her ideal of resisting woman "a woman may be made a fool / If she had not a spirit to resist" (III.ii.218-19).

A natural component of the concept of true man (see the first property of concepts above mentioned) is the idea of *ownership*, and to complete the picture, Petruchio emphasizes this aspect:

I will be master of what is mine own.
She is my goods, my chattels, she is my house,
My household stuff, my field, my barn,
My horse, my ox, my ass my any thing.
And here she stands. Touch her whoever dare!
I'll bring mine action on the proudest he
That stops my way in Padua. (III.ii.227-33).

However, these aspects of male determination, which would make the situation clearer, are not enough to dispel the main point of Petruchio's strategy, which is ultimately the *simulation of madness*, by plain falsity, inexplicable kindness, sudden roughness, and absence of any consequence. Notably: to simulate madness is a strategy that power often adopts, because in this way you will have the fear of subjugated people, and the end of any rational defence of them. Tranio comments: "Of all mad matches never was the like" (III.ii.240), and Bianca: "That being mad herself, she's madly mated"

(III.ii.242). While Gremio's judgement is: "I warrant him, Petruchio is Kated" (III.ii.243¹²).

But the difference between the two 'madnesses' is already evident: Katherine is consequent and sincere, in her being not a 'woman' like people think a woman should be, her policy is only the political effort to make clear her dignity as a human being, as such endowed with free will and able to make decisions about her own destiny. So the war she is fighting is not the contrast between men and women, played by other women using 'female' means. She tries instead to defend her right – as a human being – to speak and answer back, to discuss and refute, when people criticize her or her behaviour. Even, the right of hitting, banging and beating, a right that ultimately she *should* have, inasmuch as male people have it. The problem she is facing is the dissonance between the concept of woman in the specific account given by her father, her sister, and generally other people, and the reality of her own singular being: so she's dealing with the fifth of the conceptual problems listed in 2.1. Petruchio simply wants to restore the alleged properties of 'good wife' in a wife who has only one of them: a large dowry.

3.4. The school of cruelty

'Paraconsistent' logicians try to save logic from the ruinous effects of contradiction. The main and first of these effects is classically the *explosion* of truth. The principle¹³ is: if you accept even only one contradiction, the logical system 'explodes', because *everything becomes true*. So the system 'trivializes'. Evidently, if everything is true, then everything is also contradictory, any empty thing is also full, any object is absent and present at the same time, any truth is also falseness, and any falseness is also truth. In a word, you accept that for each proposition *p* true, 'not *p*' will be true as well. So here is the explosion of any meaning, sense, and truth. And when you have the explosion of language, power is the only thing that remains.

¹² See Fusini: in fact, to obtain Kate's transformation, Petruchio himself had to transform in turn, becoming rough and cruel like she was. Fusini observes that the idea of *transformation* is crucial, in the play. More generally some transformation, or taming, is somehow natural and necessary, in relations between women and men; the good relation arises, in any case, from "the miracle of metamorphosis" (Fusini, p. 52).

¹³ See Graham Priest, *In Contradiction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006 (2nd edition).

The trivialization of language and thought is the ultimate result of Petruchio's policy, after the wedding, when the rich new wife is located in his own house, at his own disposal, and so can be dominated by an entire strategic system. So he creates what Hannah Arendt called an "organized lie", a structure of beliefs and a way of reasoning simply based on misleading and false principles, and a systematic negation of the evidence of facts (Arendt says "factual truth").

Petruchio's cruelty was already clear at the beginning, when he reversed Kate's image, by declaring "thou art pleasant, gamesome, passing courteous", and "sweet as springtime flowers" (II.i.239-40). This is the first 'violence' perpetrated against Kate's identity¹⁴. Against the prison of being a woman in a socially accepted way Kate had adopted another identity, the identity of "intolerable curst, / And shrew and forward so beyond all measure" (I.ii.88-89), and now all this becomes nothing, in Petruchio's words.

The passages of Petruchio's trivialization are totally clear, and so we attend the accurate construction of the organized lie. Petruchio be-reaves Katherine of food and sleep, by pretending to take care of her: so we have first *the stratified contradiction of being careful in denying all care*. Katherine is completely aware of the mechanism:

And that which spites me more than all these wants,
He does it under name of perfect love,
As who should, if I should sleep or eat,
'Twere deadly sickness or else present death. (IV.iii.11-14)

And he utters *contradictory statements*, that deny both p and not p at the same time, or assert both. In brief he adopts the typical "newspeak" language of totalitarian power well described by Orwell in his 1984. But he also destroys *consequentiality* (which is a typical effect of explosion), the right nature of inferences (from this, that) that come from asserting stable truth. And all this wrapped in a game which is the game of taming a shrew, that is to say: to make a 1 female person of a woman who is only 0.3 female or so (in the sense in which 'female' should be intended).

Faced with the power that destroys rationality, violating any consequentiality, and any truth, Kate says:

¹⁴ Fusini notes that in this way Petruchio "tears her image and identity from her" (Fusini, p. 45).

My tongue will tell the anger of my heart,
 Or else my heart concealing it will break
 And rather than it shall, I will be free
 Even to the uttermost, as I please, in words. (IV.iii.77-80)

This is Kate's feeble rebellion, and Petruchio, without any consequence: "Why, thou say'st true. It is a paltry cap" (IV.iii.81) (but she was saying the opposite). And she answers: "Belike you mean to make a puppet of me" (IV.iii.103), and again he: "Why, true, he means to make a puppet of thee" (IV.iii.104). And when the tailor tries to re-establish truth and meaningfulness: "She says your worship means to make a puppet of her" (IV.iii.105), Petruchio exclaims: "O monstrous arrogance! Thou liest" (IV.iii.107) and he protests the tailor for not having done what requested.

Even the most obvious evidence is destroyed: "Good Lord, how bright and goodly shines the moon" (IV.v.2), Petruchio says. "The moon? The sun! It is not moonlight now" Kate objects (IV.v.3), and her husband: "I say it is the moon that shines so bright" (IV.v.4), and she insists, "I know it is the sun that shines so bright" (IV.v.5). But here is the power of the owner that becomes power of reality, and truth and falsity: "It shall be moon, or star, or what I list" (IV.v.7). And when contradicted, the power can punish the refuter: "Or e'er I journey to your father's house, / [*To Servants.*] Go on and fetch our horses back again" (IV.v.8-9). So Hortensio (who now sees Kate's unfortunate situation) suggests: "Say as he says, or we shall never go" (IV.v.11).

This is the usual reaction to unjust power: to accept the negation of evidence, for fear, but also for practical reasons, because otherwise the utilities of life, like going where we were supposed to go, and doing what we supposedly should do in a context of destroyed truth are impossible. But are the results of these 'practical reasons' without truth truly 'practical', that is to say useful, for shared needs? Possibly not. Their only effect is to allow the unjust power to go on with its perverse method, whose primary food is the absence of truth.

The complete strategy is openly presented in the famous passage of Act IV:

Thus I have politicly begun my reign,
 And 'tis my hope to end successfully.
 My falcon now is sharp and passing empty,

And till she stoop she must not be full-gorg'd,
 For then she never looks upon her lure.
 [...]
 She ate no meat today, nor none shall eat;
 Last night she slept not, nor tonight she shall not.
 [...]
 Ay, and amid this hurly I intend
 That all is done in reverend care of her.
 [...]
 This is a way to kill a wife with kindness. (IV.i.175-95)

Killing by kindness and faked care has been typical of 'paternalistic' strategy, in patriarchal contexts. And it creates a true didactical system. Tranio will comment: "Faith, he is gone unto the taming-school", and Bianca: "The taming-school? What, is there such a place?"; "Ay, mistress, and Petruchio is the master, / That teacheth tricks eleven and twenty long, / To tame a shrew and charm her chattering tongue" (IV.ii.54-58).

4. *Kate's policy*

Petruchio's success is anticipated by the synthesis provided by Curtis' words:

In her chamber,
 Making a sermon of continency to her,
 And rails, and swears, and rates, that she, poor soul,
 Knows not which way to stand, to look, to speak,
 And sits as one new-risen from a dream. (IV.i.169-73)

This is the typical effect of organized lies: that people living in them, do live in a dream, in a fictional reality, which is not exactly the happy dream of romance fiction, because it is continually contradicted by the hard and true reality of deprivation and humiliation.

People living in an organized lie are deprived of *reality*, and *truth*, and evidently of *god*. From now on, they won't be able to use any one of the three super-concepts. They won't have any further hope of getting Lucentio's equation: *arete+noesis = eudemonia* (virtue+knowledge = happiness). So they do not know "which way to stand, to look, to speak" and they live as in a sort of half dream, like Curtis says of Katherine.

It should be noted that Kate already lived in a sort of organized lie: the one, less cruel but no less fictional and misleading, produced by her father Baptista, and by the people surrounding her. And she tried to struggle within the limits of that ideological structure. So in a sense Petruchio's policy was disloyal, simply because its victory, against such a weak opponent, was too easy (as he otherwise had supposed, seeing the frailty of the system in which Katherine lived).

The absence of logic and truth destroys all of Kate's resources. Thought and language are led, by themselves, to annihilation, because any contrast or defence, any good or bad argument becomes irrelevant in the face of Petruchio's power, which is both the power of plain falsity (see the case of moon), of plain non-consequentiality (see the contrast with the tailor), and the power of false intention of kindness and attentions toward Kate (softly killing). So Kate capitulates, eventually: "Be it moon, or sun, or what you please. / And if you please to call it a rush-candle / Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me" (IV.v.13-15) and later: "What you will have it nam'd, even that it is, / And so it shall be so for Katherine" (IV.v.21-22).

This puts an end to the war: "Though long, our jarring notes agree" (and the wise Lucentio states it, at the beginning of V.ii). There is no more enmity between Katherine and Petruchio. In total submission, Katherine accepts to destroy her own cap, because asked by Petruchio: "Katherine, that cap of yours becomes you not. / Off with that bauble, throw it under foot", (V.ii.122). But by far more important was the destruction of language and thought that she had to accept before.

And we see then the reversal of the situation¹⁵. The shrew is tamed, and women who were once sweet reveal their combative disposition. Katherine's performance gives rise to scandal among women, and the quiet Bianca reveals her fighting spirit (significantly, the matter concerns a cap, which is supposed by the author to be one of the mainly important things for women):

BIANCA

Fie, what a foolish duty call you this?

¹⁵ *The Silly Lady (La dama boba)*, the famous comedy by Lope de Vega of 1613 (perhaps inspired by Shakespeare's play), develops a very similar reversal, though concerning becoming intelligent of a silly girl, well indoctrinated by love. A confrontation between the two plays will reveal, I suppose, many interesting aspects, also from a dramaturgic point of view.

LUCENTIO

I would your duty were as foolish too.

The wisdom of your duty, fair Bianca,

Hath cost me a hundred crowns since supper-time. (V.ii.126-29)

And here is the no more gentle Bianca's answer: "The more fool you for laying on my duty" (V.ii.130).

Petruchio: "Katherine, I charge thee, tell these headstrong women / What duty they do owe their lords and husband" (V.ii.131-32).

The long final monologue, addressed to the widow and other women who are not humble servants of their husbands, is a very famous text, a true set piece for actresses. It celebrates in an ambiguous way the final victory of men over women, and definitive capitulation of any female effort to revenge.

I am asham'd that women are so simple
 To offer war where they should kneel for peace,
 Or seek for rule, supremacy, and sway,
 When they are bound to serve, love, and obey.
 Why are our bodies soft, and weak, and smooth,
 Unapt to toil and trouble in the world,
 But that our soft conditions and our hearts
 Should well agree with our external parts?
 Come, come, you froward and unable worms,
 My mind hath been as big as one of yours,
 My heart as great, my reason haply more,
 To bandy word for word and frown for frown.
 But now I see our lances are but straws,
 Our strength as weak our weakness past compare,
 That seeming to be most which we indeed least are. (V.ii.162-76)

Kate seems to have espoused the entire ideology. In the monologue, all aspects of it are mentioned, even, as we can see, the connection between female submissive attitude and biological conditions. But is it really so? Has Kate really espoused what she in all ways tried to combat? In fact, the entire comedy develops and illustrates the overturning of truth and falsity, reality and appearance, and the traps that language may create by making appear false what is true and vice versa. Ultimately, this same overturning is the core of Kate's and Petruchio's crazy alliance, based on the explosion of language.

Because what ultimately makes Petruchio and Kate unite is this destruction of any concept, as such: which means (see the fifth aspect of concepts) the destruction of any cultural prison for men and women. In this perspective, it is not so difficult to read Kate's monologue as totally fictional and ironical, as the continuation of the strange crazy war that wife and husband have undertaken¹⁶.

Is the shrew really tamed? This is the same as asking: did really Sly believe he was a lord? Hortensio congratulates Petruchio: "Now go thy ways, thou hast tamed a curst shrew" (V.ii.189). But is it really so? The wise Lucentio has the last word, which is ambiguous, in a certain way: "'Tis a wonder, by your leave, she will be tam'd so" (V.ii.190). What is really a problem with men and women is the idea of 'man' and 'woman' that members of the two categories conceive and cherish. What is wrong is the idea that women are and should be in a certain way, and not in another, and consequently, if one tries to behave as if she were in the other way, she is simply wrong. If we accept this (a shared point for recent feminism) the philosophical aspects of Kate's policy seem to emerge in the clearest way. It is not clear if she really espouses the ideology, because in a world without truth there is no true submission, and no true acceptance of an ideology more than another. But this absence of truth is as such the beginning of a possible future truth: and this is typical of the dialectic of concepts. Because when you destroy the alleged meanings of concepts, you may be ready to promote your (and their) future freedom.

A possible contribution to Kate's policy would be then: play with the contradictions, the absence of consequentiality, the lies of power, and wait for the moment in which the power itself will become a victim of its own contradictions, lack of sense, and lies. It is not so easy, because really weak people are weak also in their being alone. No woman in fact defended Katherine, when she was a shrew, and no woman sees her new strange submission. So what ultimately she can do is to adopt Lucentio's Socratic suggestion (happiness = virtue+knowledge), with a specification: do not search for your happiness *in* intellectual virtues (so closing yourself in the dream of reason), but *by* intellectual virtues. We must admit that since the be-

¹⁶ See Fusini, in which Kate's "ironical" apologetic of husbands is interpreted as a development of the amorous skirmish, ruled by the new language of Kate's metamorphosis.

ginning Kate's policy is searching for freedom in language, and free reasoning. The fact that she did not succeed, surely, was due to her intractable mood, in a context in which the adulation of power (so falsity) would have been more appropriate, given her loneliness. But it was also due to the fact that she was the character created by a (male) theatre writer, who was surely genial, but was forced to accept (or willingly accepted) the dominant vision. We have seen the first two phases of Kate's policy: we do not know whether in a further sixth act of the comedy another turn would have taken place.