THE "NETWORKING" OF THE SHREW
Katherina Minola on Facebook

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Abstract – This paper examines the 'staging' of Shakespeare's 'shrew,' Katherina, on Facebook. The different individual responses to the character present in the social network are analysed and categorised to determine specific reception modes and highlight the role of the new medium in the popular reception of Shakespeare's plays. This paper aims not to describe the consequences of the use of Shakespeare for the Net (the 'ennobling' of Web 2.0, thanks to the authority of the 'Bard') but to interpret this new kind of literary afterlife online by explaining the features of these unorthodox reworkings of Shakespeare's 'shrew' and by studying them in view of critical literature and in relation to other forms of popular adaptation. The conclusions show that the contemporary networking of Katherina Minola by ordinary people on Facebook mostly follows the same predominantly conservative line as the reception by the cultural élite of meaning makers.

Keywords: Shakespeare's afterlife; reception theory; Katherina Minola; *The Taming of the Shrew*; Web 2.0.

'Tis true: there's magic in the web of it
(W. Shakespeare, "Othello", 3.4.81)

1. Introduction

This paper presents an analysis of Shakespeare's 'shrew,' Katherina, as "staged" on Facebook. The different individual responses to the character present in the social network are examined and categorised to determine specific reception modes and highlight the role of the new medium in the reception of Shakespeare's plays. This paper aims not to describe the consequences of the use of Shakespeare for the Net (the 'ennobling' of Web 2.0, thanks to the authority of the 'Bard') but to interpret this new kind of literary afterlife online, which is better described by Sujata Iyengar and Christy Desmet as a posthuman set of "many parallel lives" that stem from a text (2012, p. 62). The aim is to explain the features of these unorthodox

reworkings of Shakespeare's 'shrew,' studying them in view of critical literature and in relation to other forms of popular adaptation.

As a social network wherein people can create their own profile, post pictures, inform friends regarding their 'status,' share content, and show their likes and dislikes, Facebook shares similarities with theatre. It is one of the most effective examples of Shakespeare's idea of the world as a stage and men and women as players, in that the practice of online self-presentation works as a public identity-making process or, in other words, as a social playacting – research states that this is particularly true for women, who are more concerned about creating a positive public image of themselves.[1] Today, Facebook is a stage for real people who project through it the idea of themselves that they want others to see and also an unconventional stage for fictional characters, such as the Shakespearean ones, that are turned into profile owners and adapted for this new 'locus' of performance, not situated in the real world but on the World Wide Web.

1.1 Shakespeare and the Web: Theoretical and Methodological Issues

When Shakespeare used the word 'web' in his plays, he obviously thought of either cobwebs or fabrics and accordingly used it as a metaphor for traps, human relationships, intrigues, and the intertwining plot of a life's experiences. The web mentioned in the epigraph to this paper refers to Desdemona's handkerchief. The love token Othello gives his wife, as Shakespeare has it, possesses a magic web that confers power to the woman who holds it and allows her to keep the eyes and the heart of her beloved exclusively to herself. This power lasts as long as the woman owns the handkerchief; once lost, the supernatural ability to create reciprocated love is over.

A similar kind of magic has been recognised by reception theorists in the web of texts, which survives as long as there are readers who read and interpret them. Hans Robert Jauss, one of the fathers of *Rezeptionsästhetik*, contends that

> a literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the
> same face to each reader in each period. It is not a monument which reveals its
> timeless essence in a monologue. It is much more like an orchestration which
> strikes ever new chords among its readers and frees the text from the substance
> of words and makes it meaningful for the time. (Jauss 1970, p. 10)

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[1] There are many sociological studies on this point, see for example Haferkamp *et al.* 2012.

What may be well named the magic of a text's web, through its reception, is now increased by another kind of web: the Internet.

The Web can multiply the number of citations, allusions, offshoots, and adaptations of a given text,[2] as well as the number of its readers and interpreters. Through hyperlinks and comments, it boosts the dialogue between readers and between texts (intertextuality) and makes this multi-level communication virtually never ending and graphically visible (and thus easily traceable), and all this inevitably affects the interpretation of the text itself. If the meaning of a work is the result of a dynamic process, which comprises both the questions that the text was originally meant to answer and those that readers have raised and can raise over time, according to their own specific horizon of expectations, and if the present is an inescapable part of the readers' understanding of literature, then the Web is a hermeneutic catalyst, which cannot but influence our perception of literature and drama as well.

The Web, according to its creator, Tim Berners-Lee, is "the universe of network-accessible information, an embodiment of human knowledge" and the realisation of the idea of "anything being potentially connected with anything" (quoted in Crystal 2001, p. 13, p. 195). Since the second-generation network, particularly, the Internet has been not only a place that everyone can access from virtually everywhere but also an inexhaustible space where everyone can be consumers and producers of any content at the same time. Hence, it is a space where academic and mass culture coexist,[3] where past interpretations of a given text, as well as the text itself, can be archived and enjoyed while the "here and now" of readers is triggered, as they are invited, more or less explicitly, to provide contemporary, and often personal, interpretations connected to the real world. A case in point is given by the preformatted prompts of social media and Web services, such as "broadcast yourself" (YouTube), "what's on your mind?" (Facebook), or "what's happening?" (Twitter). The perlocutionary force of these sentences is apparent also in the field of literary reception: they elicit from the network's user an individual response, contextually anchored to present society.

Scholars have examined the extent to which these features of the Web have been producing a new form of communication and information network. Outlining the role of the Internet in the development of the English language, David Crystal alluded to the description of good acting in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and contended that "the Web […] holds a mirror up to […] our

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[2] The words used to describe different kinds of intertextuality have been thoroughly discussed and investigated. In the field of Shakespeare studies see, for example, Desmet and Sawyer (1999); Fischlin and Fortier (2000); chapter 3 in Sanders (2006), Kidnie (2009).

[3] Studies on popular Shakespeare (see Lanier 2002) are not discussed in this section, but are taken into account in the analysis offered by this paper.

linguistic nature" (2001, p. 195). Possibly, the Web also holds a mirror up to our nature as readers/audience of drama and creates a new form of adaptation network, which certainly calls attention to the role of reception in the literary communication system, to the dialectical relationship between past and present interpretations, and to the sociopolitical effectiveness of drama. As W.B. Worthen puts it, "drama, dramatic performance, and the ways we understand them are constantly changing under the pressure of new technologies;" now, it is the turn of "digital media," and Shakespeare necessarily becomes "Cyber-Shakespeare" as well (2003, p. 2, p. 26).

Adaptation studies have since long questioned the alleged fixity of texts and valued the interaction of dramatic literature and society, which becomes ever more evident in the Web. Notably, John Bryant argued for a fluid text approach according to which "a *work* is the sum of its versions; *creativity* extends beyond the solitary writer, and *writing* is a cultural event transcending media" (2013, p. 47). Borrowing a key word from Web 2.0, one can conclude that he supported an idea of reception and "geneticism" that may be well-defined as "social."[4] Similar approaches have been devised in Shakespeare studies to examine the reception and appropriation of the playwright's work in different cultures and media. M.J. Kidnie (2009) defines Shakespeare's work as a mutable concept, shaped by its reception through time, and presentists focus on the importance of readers' outlook in the interpretation process:

> we encounter [...] historical works outside of their moment of origin, and they have meaning for us because their very otherness is a challenge to our own thinking, feeling, and values—which, however, constitute the only ground from which we can contemplate them. Any reading of works of the past has to work within this dialectic. There is never a moment of "timelessness"; there is instead a complex negotiation between then and now, and one that has to be continually renegotiated as our "now" changes in the wake of developing history. (DiPietro, Grady 2013, p. 10)

Living in the 21st century, our now contemplates the Web, the characteristics of which emphasise presentness, which is the reason why the aforementioned reception theories are particularly in tune with the investigations into Shakespeare and the Web. Examining contemporary media adaptations of Shakespeare, including online ones, Maurizio Calbi uses Jacques Derrida's conception of the "Thing 'Shakespeare,'" described as "an indeterminate ensemble of spectral and iterable marks" (Derrida in Calbi 2013, p. 1), and

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[4] John Bryant (2002) has shown the role of adaptation as evidence of the social function of literature and as moulder of the meaning of a work. Similarly, Linda Hutcheon (2006) has illustrated the critical importance of adaptation, while Julie Sanders (2006) has underlined the fruitfulness of 'infidelity' in Shakespearean adaptations.

elaborates the idea of "Shakespearean 'spectro-textuality,'" making clear that adaptations of Shakespeare do not leave "'Shakespeare'—its ontological status or its functioning as a cultural icon—unaffected" (Calbi 2013, p. 2).[5] Similarly, in his pivotal research into the topic, Stephen O'Neill affirms that "the 'Shakespeare' within YouTube Shakespeare is an open, dynamic process, in which the authority of the Shakespearean work is simultaneously invoked and constructed, renewed and dispersed" (2014, p. 6). The Web offers readers the opportunity to engage creatively with Shakespeare's plays and also to become "cultural producers," as Sujata Iyengar and Christy Desmet put it, "through their identification with and critique of" their characters (2012, p. 59).

2. Facebook 'Shrews'

One can determine 185[6] fictional profiles named Katherina Minola on Facebook,[7] plus 54 profiles with blank picture and timeline. The criterion chosen to assume that these Facebook identities are fictional is the joint occurrence of at least two of the following characteristics: a profile picture taken from a filmic or pictorial version of Shakespeare's Katherina Minola, personal information in line with this character[8] or containing elements alluding to Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*,[9] the presence of Shakespearean characters from the play in the "Friends" section, and timeline posts referring to the events that make its plot.

To have a more precise idea of the kind of reception suggested in these "Facebook adaptations," attempts have been made, although in vain, to reconstruct the exact reason why these profiles have been opened. A friendship request was sent to the profile owners, but only one of them accepted and answered my questions. Anyway, it may be presumed that most of these profiles were opened by students, probably as assessment for a

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[5] On the critical value of inter-medial adaptations of Shakespeare see Pennacchia Punzi 2012, which also highlights the intermediality of Shakespeare's plays themselves.

[6] The figures given above must be considered as transient and likely to change in the short term, because profiles can be easily opened and closed on Facebook. The last search was made on August the 27th, 2020.

[7] Not so many with respect to the 620 Facebook Ophelias spotted by Sujata Iyengar and Christy Desmet in 2009, which anyway included "persons whose given name simply happened to be Ophelia" (see Iyengar, Desmet 2012, p. 63). The spelling of the name varies (Katherine, Katharina, Katerina, Caterina). On the variations of the name in the play see Hodgdon (2010, p. 5).

[8] E.g. from Padua; engagement and marriage mentioned in the life events section; "Boss at making everyone's life miserable" listed as Katherina's job title.

[9] E.g. *The Taming of the Shrew* mentioned in the list of books liked.

course, in that the comments to the posts are almost always from profiles bearing the names of other characters of the Shakespearean play and not from common Facebook users; their activity is often limited to a span of 1 or 2 days, and no information is given about a theatre company or promotional ad for a production. Some of the profiles have probably been opened by Shakespeare fans who use Facebook to play a short role game or who love the character of Katherina Minola so much as to assume her identity on Facebook, as if to say they feel somewhat like her in real life—in fact in some cases Katherina's "friends" include profiles that are not Shakespeare-related.

2.1 Katherina Minola's Networked Face

The pictures most frequently used for the profile, listed below from the most to the least common, allow a first classification of Facebook 'Katherinas' into four groups:

1. "Screen Katherinas" (132 items): these profiles portray a snapshot of a filmic adaptation of the character. Most of them depict Elizabeth Taylor as playing the title role in Zeffirelli's box office success *The Taming of the Shrew* (1967), either in black and white or in colours; others show a picture of the "shrew," Kat Stratford, interpreted by Julia Stiles in Gil Junger's *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), a loose filmic adaptation of Shakespeare's play targeted to a teenage audience; just a few profiles feature the Kate interpreted by Shirley Henderson in David Richards's BBC *The Taming of the Shrew* (*ShakespeaRe-told*, 2005).

2. "Alluring Katherinas" (22 items): these profiles show a picture of a very attractive, contemporary woman. There are also a few pictures of beautiful girls in period costumes or wedding gowns. Although all the other Facebook Katherinas are white, this section includes black women as well.

3. "Farcical Katherinas" (18 items): these profiles have funny pictures featuring grotesque representations of or metaphors for the character. The list of things used as profile pictures comprises a rat, a hopping mad woman, a stylised drawing of a woman, a woman devil, a weird Goth punk girl, and a theatrical representation of a squabble between Kate and Petruchio.

4. "Victorian and Edwardian Katherinas" (12 items): these profiles are identified by a representation of the "shrew" in 19th- and early-20th-century visual arts. The list includes the pensive Kate starving at Petruchio's table, from Edward Robert Hughes's pre-Raphaelite *The Shrew Katherina* (1898); the worried Kate painted in the same situation by Augustus Leopold Egg (from *The Dinner Scene from 'The Taming of the Shrew,'* 1860); the angry Kate engraved by W. Joseph Edwards

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(*Katherine Taming of the Shrew*, act 2, sc.1, 1847); and the pictures of two actresses in the role of the "shrew:" Ada Rehan (1887) and Lily Brayton (1904).

These elements are indicative of today's reception of Shakespeare's Katherina Minola, at least visually: it appears that there is little room for an unmediated reception as people perceive the character as retold by other artists in different media, with a preference for films.

"Screen Katherinas" are highly favoured over an individual picture or avatar created using Shakespeare's words as starters and over more time-honoured versions of the character in painting and photography. Zeffirelli's Kate and a few contemporary filmed ones far outnumber the others. To some extent, also "alluring Katherinas" can be described as inspired by Zeffirelli: with their audacious attractiveness, they have the look and attitude given to the character by Elizabeth Taylor, parading her décolleté with her iconic, nearly topless dresses and tempting glance. It can be implied that for the average Facebook user interested in Shakespeare, the character corresponds to its "visual adaptation,"[10] with a preference for the cult, auteur style version.

A major reason for the face attributed to Katherina Minola in this social media platform is that *The Taming of the Shrew* is, in Elizabeth Schafer's words, "a much-filmed" play, counting more than 18 filmic adaptations (2002, p. 65), with Zeffirelli's version on top, having "probably been seen by more people than any other production of the play ever" (Schafer 2002, p. 75).[11] Shakespeare's Kate has a "filmic" face in the readers' mind, usually before they read the play. People are more acquainted with, and probably attached to, the reception of the work, than they are with the work itself, and this may prevent readers from catching the controversial features of its characters—particularly of the title role. Indeed, it is very likely that this pictorial hallmark of "Facebook Katherinas" corresponds to a predetermined interpretation of the character altogether. To verify this conjecture, one can read and analyse the kind of posts published in the timeline of the profile pages and compare them with filmic and critical interpretations of Shakespeare's Katherina.

The extent to which screen versions of the play influence the reception of the character on Facebook is an issue to be discussed in what follows, as is the query as to whether the peculiar virtual milieu of Facebook influences readers' response to the character.

2.2 Katherina Minola's Intimate Posts: The Influence of the New Medium

[10] The adjective *visual* is borrowed from Holderness (2002).

[11] When I asked one of the profile owners (a college teacher) why s/he used the picture of Zeffirelli's Kate, the answer was it is her/his favourite version.

From an overview of the posts published on the profiles named Katherina Minola, it emerges that the answer to the last issue raised above is straightforward: the channel is part of the linguistic and literary communication systems, and as such, it must influence them. Facebook as a new medium shapes the kind of information shared as well as its format and language. These features function as implicit strategies for relocating Shakespeare's characters in cultural and temporal terms as it happens with films. Just as Zeffirelli's "naturalistic aesthetic (owing more to the 'neo-realist' *ciné-verité* of Italian movies than to the traditional fictional or theatrical realisms of Zola and Giovanni Verga) is directed firmly towards a rendering of the classical heritage into forms immediate and comprehensible to modern experience" (Holderness 1989, p. 130) with an "emphasis on the young" (Holderness 1989, p. 130), Facebook profiles named Katherina Minola adopt the typical linguistic and visual style of the social network, resulting in a product that is true to life and palatable to young audiences. Since the identity and the experiences of Katherina Minola are presented through the tools of the social network platform, such as a profile picture and the typical pieces of information usually displayed with it, the character and her story obtain a topical relevance to the reader. The medium and its features function as "movement[s] of proximation" ([1982] 1997, p. 304) in Gérard Genette's terms, that is, strategies that bring Shakespeare's character culturally and chronologically closer to the horizon of expectations of a new audience.

As one would expect, Facebook "staging" through posts allows for what Deborah Cartmell would call a commentary "or adaptations that comment on the politics of the source text" (in Sanders 2006, p. 21), showing what is originally invisible. The profiles contain an average of eight posts on the core events of the story as seen from Katherina's perspective: Baptista's decision to have Katherina married before her sister Bianca, Katherina's wedding and Petruchio's "instructive" attitude toward her, and the final taming of Katherina. However, what emerges from the timelines of the profiles is not the story itself but rather an insight into Katherina's thoughts. The prompt provided by Facebook ("what's on your mind?") generates an "intimistic" approach to the play, more focused on the character's psyche than it is on plot events and leads "webnauts" to give words to the woman's feelings, using contemporary English, including the so-called net-speak, characterised by hashtags, abbreviations, and emoticons. Only in very few exceptions do we find direct quotations from Shakespeare or the use of a mock (and definitely broken) early modern English, which inevitably has a farcical effect.

The main issue of Facebook Katherinas' reflections is the woman's jealousy toward Bianca, who is popular with and praised by men, and the

suffering because her father prefers her younger sister. Here are some examples:

> My sister Bianca is so pretty, that's why she gets all the attention from guys and even my dad loves her mor. [#katerinaistheforgottenchild](#) (May 11, 2017)

> My sister is just a spoiled brat and no one cares about me! (February 4, 2013)

> Hates it when people talk about me as if I am not there at all. 😡 (April 5, 2011)

> I Hate MY SISTER I HAAAAATE HER! (March 20, 2013)

> Why do people like Bianca so much? I'm like 328473298032× better in every aspect! (March 13, 2013)

In this resentment lies Shakespeare's modern justification of Katherina's behaviour. The sense of inferiority as a sister and the feeling of being rejected as a daughter experienced by Katherina is a Shakespearean issue and can find wide validation in the work of critics such as Aurélie Griffin, who reads the play through the theory of the four humours and notices that the unfeminine choleric attitude[12] of Shakespeare's "shrew" is emotionally justified, as there are motivations for her shrewishness, both moral and psychological (see Newman 1986, pp. 93–94; Kahn 1975, p. 89). This makes her a much more complex character than her stereotypical predecessors, being the first to be provided with a father (Bradbrook 1958, p. 139) and thus a complete (patriarchal) social context, emotional profundity (Kahn 1975, p. 89), and from the perspective of Renaissance medicine, a reason to hope that she can be healed (Griffin 2018).

The same critics read into this emotional condition to detect gender issues and define Katherina as a social victim, highlighting how the "shrew" type was a patriarchal defensive strategy to contain the threat generated by free women, independent of men and willing to speak their mind. As Coppélia Kahn puts it, the play portrays "masculine behavior and attitudes which stereotype women as either submissive and desirable or rebellious and shrewish" (1975, p. 92). Moreover, Aurélie Griffin focuses her attention on the early modern construction of gender supported, and according to some, simultaneously challenged by the play, stating that Katherina "resists" the gender definition imposed on her by male characters "through metadramatic awareness and role-play" (2018). Embracing a contemporary perspective on the play, she asserts that "one of the disturbing features of this play is its oscillation between types (the shrew, the gentlewoman) and characterisation,

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[12]   On the early modern notion of femininity see Maclean 1980.

interrogating the very possibility of freeing oneself from socially constructed gender roles" (2018). Conversely, one of the disturbing and unexpected features of the posts published by Facebook Katherinas is exactly the frequent absence or scarce presence of the aforementioned considerations about gender.

2.3 Katherina Minola's Posts and Gender Issues: The Influence of Film Adaptations

Although Facebook posts underline Katherina's personal affliction, they do not often face the cognate and most important issue of the patriarchal order of society, which imposes gender roles on men and women, classifying the latter into angels or whores, or gentle ladies or terrible "shrews". The right to independence and self-determination for women is not often an issue in the networking of the "shrew." This point is clearly proved by Facebook posts linked with Katherina's final speech, whose implications about gender roles are usually erased or only apparently tackled.

Seminal feminist scholar Lynda Boose contends that sexual politics has been perceived as a crucial theme in the play since the beginning of its reception, having led to John Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize, or The Tamer Tam'd* (1611), which contemplates a second marriage for Petruchio because his tyranny was literally lethal for his first wife Kate (Boose 1991, p. 179). This reworking has the man humiliated by his new spouse—until she voluntarily turns into a virtuous wife— and this is probably the reason why it was more appreciated than Shakespeare's play at Charles I's court in 1633, when they were both staged within a few days from each other (Marcus 1992, pp. 199-200). According to Boose, and more generally, to the play's critics, the final speech provides readers with key elements for highlighting possible feminist stances in the text. Because the protagonist addresses it to a "presumptive Everywoman […] women viewers suddenly find themselves universal conscripts, trapped within the rhetorical co-options of a discourse that dissolves all difference between the 'I' and 'you' of Kate and her reluctant sisters" (Boose 1991, p. 180). That is to say, this speech has been crucial in productions and adaptations to provide a discernible reading of *The Taming of the Shrew* (Hodgdon 2010, p. 118): either conservative or gender-sensitive, considering Katherina's words either as the result of an honest conversion or instead as clever and revengeful playacting.

The potentialities of "Facebook adaptations" from the female protagonist's perspective have been well exploited only in a few profiles. This is the case in one of them, where we first read Katherina's ideas about her disappointment on being called a shrew just for her nonalignment and self-determination and then a sardonic explanation of what it means to be a good wife. The first post reads:

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> Petruchio, Hortensio, and Lucentio were making a bet to see which one of their wives was the most obedient. I didn't like how everybody thought that I had no chance of winning because they thought that I was a shrew. Just because I speak out and I'm not a suck up like most of the other woman [sic] in this society doesn't make me a shrew. (June 6, 2010)

The following post reports the result of the bet and Katherina's description of a good wife, which consequently sounds ironic, as a recipe for easy money:

> I just won the bet of one hundred crowns for being the most obedient woman. To be an obedient woman you have to pay respect, be kind and be nice to your husband. You have to treat them [sic] with kindness and respect because he is the one who cares about you and he is the one who comforts you. A wife should owe their [sic] husband the same loyalty as a subject owes his king. (June 6, 2010)

Another profile interestingly shows a post expressing a gender-conscious assumption on marriage—the main topic of the play according to Coppélia Kahn (1975)—rebalancing the sexual politics of Shakespeare's text:

> Why is it that marriage and love do not embrace each other? Surly [sic] spending the rest of your life with one chosen person must mean something of value. If you do not love, cherish and respect your other half, then they are no other half of you, nor a human being. They are an object, and, if you are marrying an object, then why not a chair or a table? (March 6, 2010)

Some posts highlight other gender issues. One underlines the marketability of women in a post that reads "my dad thinks I am for sale" (November 30, 2012), and another one shows Katherina's awareness of the fact that her bad reputation is due to the threat she poses as an independent woman: "Apparently I am a 'shrew' and a 'wretch' well at least I speak my mind unlike those filthy cowards" (December 10, 2013). Some other profiles display posts on gender equality not directly stemming from the Shakespearean source text but inspired by it, for example, a meme of Matrix Morpheus reading "What if I told you that men and women are equal in 2013."

In many other Facebook accounts examined for this paper, one finds a rather conservative rendition of Katherina's story and of her final speech, often associated with the typical pre-formatted Facebook post on the new relationship status (engagement or marriage). Here are some examples worth a long quotation section:

> I would like to mention that I strongly believe that every women [sic] should respect and do what their husbands tells [sic] them do to. A women [sic] owes her husband the same loyalty a subject owes his king. I am ashamed of my past actions and even more ashamed that women are so foolish as to declare

was [sic] when they should plead on their knees for peace. they [sic] should love ad [sic] obey their husbands.
I love you Petruchio Antonio ❤️ (February 21, 2013)
1 comment by Petruchio Antonio: That hath been the perfect lecture my dear ❤️ Now come on and kiss me Kate and off to bed we go! (February 21, 2013)

I love my husband, every wife should show respect to their spouse. I am now not the shrew that i [sic] used to be, but a nice polite women [sic].
1 Comment by Petruchio Antonio: My work here is done (January 3, 2011)

Today I saw the sun, which was the moon at first, and a man named Vincentio, who was a young maiden at first, all according to my dear wonderful husband Petruchio Esposito!! Whatever he says, goes, from now on.. […] ❤️ == act 4 scene 5 (June 11, 2010)

It honestly bewilders me how Bianca Minola and the widow can be so disrespectful to their husbands. Their husbands do so much for them, he works all the time for their betterment and comfort. He works out in the freezing cold while they stay tucked at home in warm comfortable beds and he keeps them safe and yet all he asks for in return is love, obedience, kinds [sic] looks, listening, and respect. He does so much and asks for so little yet they can't even comply to that. Well, I'll teach them a lesson or two in how to keep their man happy. But as long as I can keep mine happy I'm perfectly ok. (April 14, 2014)

love   you   Petruchio,   thanks   for   taming   me ❤️
forever and always, your kate [sic] ❤️ ❤️ ❤️ (June 6, 2011)

In these posts, one can find not only Shakespeare's lines rewritten and adapted for the new medium but also Katherina's thoughts amplified, showing that she is genuinely adopting Petruchio's viewpoint and thus a patriarchal perspective. Gender inequality is totally justified and naturalised through the discourse of romance and romantic love.

There are also posts of a third kind that assume a patriarchal view on society and a conservative conception of gender, although implicitly. They include many sentences in which Katherina aggressively defines herself using denigrating and stigmatizing words, such as "I am a hood rat bitch" (March 11, 2014), or "Boss at Making everyone's life miserable" (May 2, 2014). Other networked Katherinas represent the woman's transformation as a calculated performance of female virtues in an ideal war against men. One Katherina openly speaks about her playacting technique, but she does it in a way that depicts her as shrewish and coincides with the negative stereotype of the aggressive and threatening conquering woman.

I will follow my husbands [sic] orders! Everyone can believe he tamed me, but I tamed him in many ways! #Whotamedwho? (March 25, 2014)

The attitude implied in the posts quoted above reminds one of the girl power culture, typical of the glamorous and popular feminist movement brought to the fore in the second half of the 1990s. As argued by Angela McRobbie, it is a right-wing feminist discourse, which has no political agenda and is rather focused on "the seductions of individual success, the lure of female empowerment and the love of money" (2000, p. 212), losing track of the struggle against sexism.

The best way to describe the content published by Facebook Katherinas, considering their treatment of sexual politics and gender issues, is probably by borrowing the words used by Holderness to describe Zeffirelli's *The Taming of the Shrew*: they are "not so much anti-feminist as a-feminist" (1989, p. 150). The borders between the two categories, however, are dangerously porous. This gender unconscious reading of the play is shared by most of the other screen versions of *The Taming of the Shrew*, which usually eschew gender politics or assume a conformist view of them (Schafer 2002, p. 65). Julie Sanders notices "an uncomfortable propensity to make comic capital out of domestic abuse" in *Kiss Me Kate*, Samuel and Bella Spewack's musical (1948), turned into film by George Sidney in 1953 (Sanders 2007, p. 73). Zeffirelli's film, the most "quoted" on Facebook, emphasises the physical desirability of the "shrew" and adds romance to the plot by presenting a love-at-first-sight story between two people who are mutually attracted and complicit in playing a hilarious love chase. In Holderness' mind, in so doing, "Zeffirelli has altered the rules of the game to such an extent that the film has little to say about the sexual politics of *The Taming of the Shrew*," (Holderness 2002, p. 150) although one may object that the attractiveness of the woman is patriarchally central to the consideration of the character of the "shrew" as an acceptable woman. Even in *10 Things I Hate About You*, Julia Stiles's Kat Stratford is a very pretty teenager, only apparently anti-conformist as she ultimately gives up her individuality for social acceptance (see Pittman 2011). This is typical of films addressing a female teenage audience, including the Shakespearean ones, in which the cultural authority of the "Bard" is used "to legitimate a rather repressive notion of female intelligence" (Burt in Pittman 2011, p. 100). Something very similar happens in the 2005 BBC version of *The Taming of the Shrew*: Katherine Minola is a politician marrying for propaganda purposes — thus to be socially more appreciated — but marriage turns out to be a challenge that may even ruin her career. In the end, Katherine, whose submission speech seems justified by her sexual attraction to Petruchio, manages "to reconcile the two most decisive factors in a modern woman's life, career and the family, and she has proved to be outstandingly successful in both" (Földváry 2013, p. 58). The images of "Katherine and Petruchio, together with their triplets, standing in front of 10 Downing Street" (*ibid.*) that

accompany the closing credits are emblematic of the "have-it-all" credo of the girl-power culture.

According to Diana Henderson, *Shrew* films are a mirror of the patriarchal need to contain the ideology of women's emancipation, which has always been perceived as threatening. She argues that

> the clustering of filmed Shrews correlates with those decades when […] the media are actively encouraging women to find their pleasures in the home; moreover, Shrew occurs at moments of new viewing technologies and is promptly reproduced in the new media before most if not all other Shakespeare plays. The agents of culture seem anxious to make sure that *The Taming of the Shrew* is preserved, even as our science progresses. (2003, p. 122)

To the list she makes, which includes silent films, television, and home videos, the Web must be mentioned to date. Indeed, *The Taming of the Shrew* is the first of Shakespeare's plays to be adapted — under the title *The Twitter of the Shrew* — for Twitter, and[13] as has been shown, several Katherinas populate Facebook. These new additions do not challenge Henderson's point: the networked "shrew" of contemporary readers, who become "cultural producers" (Iyengar and Desmet 2012, p. 59) in the Web, remains, predominantly, a tamed woman promoting imbalanced gender roles and naturalising them in the name of romantic love.

3. Conclusion

Facebook "stagings" of Katherina Minola mostly comprise individual and emotional responses to Shakespeare's character and her story, transposed to the present time. The networked "shrews" relocate Shakespeare's play to our contemporary context through the very use of the new medium and its cognate language and aesthetic; however, they surprisingly do not often challenge the sexual politics of the play, leaving the authority of canonical Shakespeare untouched. Only rarely is the play really made meaningful for the present time through a feminist reading, which was instead expected, given the fact that the profiles would suggest a (re)telling of the story from the perspective of its female protagonist. The response to the work is far more intimate than it is social or political. On one hand, this can be explained by considering Facebook to be a social platform that prompts the expression of a person's thoughts and feelings and implicitly promotes "orthodox" behaviour to achieve social acceptance; on the other hand, it can be also explained given the influence of screen adaptations of the "shrew," which commonly adopt a

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[13]   See Cornfeld *et al.* 2018.

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conservative, patriarchal gaze that prioritises women's beauty and tend to disregard social problems related to gender. The profile pictures of Facebook Katherinas, dominated by Zeffirelli's version, together with the mostly apolitical reading of the play implied by their posts, can *hold a mirror up to the nature* of the contemporary popular reception of the character and demonstrate the enormous role of film versions in the never-ending dynamic process that constitutes a work.

Discussing the role of editors, together with theatre and film directors, in the reception of *The Taming of the Shrew*, particularly concerning feminist issues, Leah Marcus identifies "a process of naturalization by which the patriarchal ideology of *The Shrew* gradually became 'reality' in terms of public expectations in the theatre and readers' expectations of Shakespeare. […] But that process was not without its glitches, temporary reversals, and ambivalences" (1992, p. 199). The contemporary networking of the "shrew" by grassroots participants in the cultural debate, presently a very powerful "medium" by way of which people may come to know Shakespeare, mostly follows the same predominantly conservative line as the reception by the cultural élite of meaning makers: it shows only some attempts to interrogate patriarchal constraints of gender roles but mostly it confirms and thus reinforces such expectations on readers and audiences of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*.

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