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► To cite this version:

Dominika Kecsöová. “And now, speak:” Emotional Manipulation in The Taming of the Shrew, The Winter’s Tale and Macbeth. 2019. halshs-02324677

HAL Id: halshs-02324677

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02324677>

Preprint submitted on 22 Oct 2019

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“And now, speak:” Emotional Manipulation in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Winter’s Tale* and *Macbeth*

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Emotional manipulation as a form of violence, despite beginning to be widely discussed in recent years, still belongs among secondary characteristics of domestic abuse; since it is, by definition, “an interpersonal emotional construct,”¹ its lasting effects remain invisible, but often prove more damaging than physical injuries. The harm is inflicted through “symbolic acts, humiliation, and verbal threats.”² Identifying emotional manipulation and reacting to it adequately presents a complex issue even these days, despite abundant examples in literature.³ This essay shall analyse emotional manipulation within partnerships in three plays of William Shakespeare: *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Winter’s Tale* and *Macbeth*. Each of these plays falls within a different genre, which not only proves the ubiquity of such manipulation, but also reveals the underlying power structures fuelling these behaviours. Emotional manipulation is used by both male and female characters as a vehicle of power; the violence inflicted on the other partner relies entirely on language, and therefore emotional manipulation should be considered in relation to rhetoric. This becomes apparent especially within Brummett’s understanding of rhetoric as violence, in his words “an act that influences and manages the meanings victims experience through the course of their relationships, whether done through physical means or not.”⁴ The experience of the victim is thus dependent on the contrast between reality and the way it is constructed by the manipulator. These three main themes – power, rhetoric and reality – appear in all instances of emotional manipulation in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Winter’s Tale* and *Macbeth* and provide the basis for analysing the manipulation in these plays.

The Taming of the Shrew, one of Shakespeare’s “problem plays” may not even seem like a comedy to 21st century audiences – as Elizabeth Hutcheon states, if we are reading

¹Rachel Grieve et al., “Masculinity might be more toxic than we think: The influence of gender roles on trait emotional manipulation,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 138 (2019): 158, Science Direct <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0191886918305282?via%3Dihub>> 18 July 2019.

² Josie Queen et al., “Being Emotionally Abused: A Phenomenological Study of Adult Women’s Experiences of Emotionally Abusive Intimate Partner Relationships,” *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 30.4 (2009): 238, Taylor & Francis Online <<https://doi.org/10.1080/01612840802701257>> 21 July 2019.

³ It must be noted that there is a significantly smaller number of examples in the media, though the issue is being talked about more and more.

⁴ Christy Dale L. Sims, “Invisible Wounds, Invisible Abuse: The Exclusion of Emotional Abuse in Newspaper Articles,” *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 8.4 (2008): 380, Taylor & Francis Online <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10926790802480422>> 23 July 2019.

Katharina as “cowed into submission by Petruchio’s tactics, it is hard to participate in the comedic happiness of the play’s ending.”⁵ Before the play itself, the induction presents manipulation (or, to be more particular, gaslighting)⁶ as a device to entertain the audience; however, this very device makes it possible to consider the play in a slightly different light. As shown in the induction, the main contrast informing *The Taming of the Shrew* is reality versus illusion. This contrast then raises the question of Katharina’s shrewishness (Is the perception of her as a shrew real?) and of the success of Petruchio’s manipulation (Is she really “tamed” by the end of the play?). The text offers only partial answers, and of course, its interpretation depends on staging. Nevertheless, this demonstrates that the key to emotional manipulation is perception, and the rest of the characters in the play perceive Katharina as she seems in Hortensio’s description in Act I: “Her only fault, and that is faults enough, / Is that she is intolerable curst / And shrewd and forward” (I.ii.86-9).⁷ The rhetoric power wielded by the characters has the potential to influence reality; Petruchio begins his manipulation of Katharina by manipulating her image, as he openly states in his monologue in Act II:

I will attend her here,
And woo her with some spirit when she comes.
Say that she rail; why then I’ll tell her plain
She sings as sweetly as a nightingale:
Say that she frown, I’ll say she looks as clear
As morning roses newly wash’d with dew:
Say she be mute and will not speak a word;
Then I’ll commend her volubility,
And say she uttereth piercing eloquence:
If she do bid me pack, I’ll give her thanks,
As though she bid me stay by her a week:
If she deny to wed, I’ll crave the day
When I shall ask the banns and when be married.
But here she comes; and now, Petruchio, speak. (II.i.167-180)

⁵ Elizabeth Hutcheon, “From Shrew to Subject: Petruchio’s Humanist Education of Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*,” *Comparative Drama* 45.4 (2011): 318, EBSCO <<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype=shib&custid=s1240919&profile=eds>> 22 July 2019.

⁶ *The Cambridge Dictionary* defines gaslighting as “the action of tricking or controlling someone by making them believe things that are not true.” This tactic appears most prominently in *The Taming of the Shrew* and constitutes a psychological abuse. S.v. “gaslighting”, *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary and Thesaurus* (2008) The Cambridge Dictionary Online <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/gaslighting>> 27 July 2019.

⁷ This and all following quotations are from *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, The Alexander Text* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006).

Petruchio's manipulation is based on his rhetorical ability and his goal is to convince both the audience and Katharina: the audience should stop seeing Katharina as a shrew, while she herself is supposed to change her behaviour on the basis of this rhetorical re-description, despite the fact that Katharina's shrewishness is a rhetorical construct perpetuated by other characters to begin with. Katharina, however, proves a worthy opponent in this verbal sparring, so that while her "shrewishness" is connected to her being "an inappropriate speaker,"⁸ her speeches are not as unintelligible as Elizabeth Hutcheon would have them. Hutcheon interprets Petruchio's behaviour as education in rhetoric, claiming that by the end of the play Katharina becomes a speaking subject;⁹ this education, however, is conducted through emotional manipulation. Rather than providing Katharina with rhetorical power, Petruchio intends to overturn her presentation of herself.¹⁰ Act IV consequently abounds with scenes of manipulation, as Petruchio begins his project of "taming" proper, which he envisages as a sort of guide for other husbands. To assist his manipulation, Petruchio uses physical means such as lack of food and sleep: "She eat no meat to-day, nor none shall eat; / Last night she slept not, nor to-night she shall not...This is a way to kill a wife with kindness; / And thus I'll curb her mad and headstrong humour" (IV.i.181-2, 192-3). The label of the "shrew" may at this point be attached to him as well, since he mistreats not only Katharina (though he may call it "kindness"), but also his servants:

PETRUCHIO

Enter one with water

Come, Kate, and wash, and welcome heartily.

You whoreson villain! will you let it fall?

Strikes him

KATHARINA

Patience, I pray you; 'twas a fault unwilling. (IV.i.138-140)

Katharina, on the other hand, defends the servants against Petruchio in all instances; when not constructed as a shrew, her behaviour is far from what the audience would expect if the label were true. In the following scenes Petruchio "imposes activity, mobility, dress, thoughts"¹¹ in a way that, based on a study by Josie Queen, Margaret H. Brackley, and Gail B. Williams, would constitute abuse. Despite Petruchio's gaslighting, Katharina refuses "to enter the

⁸ Hutcheon, 323.

⁹ Hutcheon, 323.

¹⁰ Hutcheon, 326.

¹¹ Queen et al., 240.

fictional space that Petruchio has constructed, she holds onto her experience of reality in the face of his presentation of it,”¹² insisting on her right of speech: “I am no child, no babe: / Your betters have endured me say my mind, / And if you cannot, best you stop your ears” (IV.iii.74-6). Speech is the defining element of the “shrew” label in the play and also a way to resist manipulation; no wonder then that Katharina exclaims “I will be free / Even to the uttermost, as I please, in words” (IV.iii.79-80). She is soon stripped of this as her last freedom – but through her acceptance of Petruchio’s perception of the world, the play highlights its own illusory nature. It is not important what Katharina thinks, as long as her behaviour and speech are the image of the “tamed” wife. After Petruchio gains his ends, he begins to present reality:

KATHARINA

Forward, I pray, since we have come so far,
And be it moon, or sun, or what you please:
An if you please to call it a rush-candle,
Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me.

PETRUCHIO

I say it is the moon.

KATHARINA

I know it is the moon.

PETRUCHIO

Nay, then you lie: it is the blessed sun.

KATHARINA

Then, God be bless’d, it is the blessed sun:
But sun it is not, when you say it is not;
And the moon changes even as your mind.
What you will have it named, even that it is;
And so it shall be so for Katharine. (IV.v.12-22)

The manipulation in *The Taming of the Shrew* is based on opposites and is made possible by rhetorical construction. Katharina’s final speech is the most divisive aspect of the whole play: the text presents us with what seems to be Petruchio’s rhetorical victory, even though it is greatly helped by physical effects of lack of sleep and food. Yet Katharina’s speech is curiously unconvincing in comparison with the rest of the play – the nature of her “taming” remains largely dependent on decisions of director and actors staging the play.

¹²Hutcheon, 327.

Unlike *The Taming of the Shrew*, the emotional manipulation in *The Winter's Tale* is closely linked to jealousy, as Leontes, king of Sicilia, attempts to sacrifice his wife in order to achieve rest, relief and social order;¹³ the reason for his behaviour is that Leontes believes his wife, Hermione, has been unfaithful to him with his friend, Polixenes, king of Bohemia. Leontes' manipulation places Hermione in the position of an adulteress, so that he (similarly to Petruchio) manipulates not only his wife, but also the audience and the court within the play. His jealous conviction is, however, dependent upon witnesses:

LEONTES

You, my lords,
Look on her, mark her well; be but about
To say 'she is a goodly lady,' and
The justice of your hearts will thereto add
'Tis pity she's not honest, honourable.'
(...)
Ere you can say 'she's honest:' but be't known,
From him that has most cause to grieve it should be,
She's an adulteress.

HERMIONE

Should a villain say so,
The most replenish'd villain in the world,
He were as much more villain: you, my lord,
Do but mistake. (II.i.64-8, 76-80)

Leontes in the rhetoric construction of his wife places, similarly to Renaissance painters, one hidden flaw in Hermione's perfection: he formulates a complex argument in which his wife is the ideal woman, but due to a loss of honesty he cannot respect her perfection anymore. This construction of Hermione serves not only to manipulate Leontes' audience, but also to convince himself; in fact, the amount of obsessively jealous soliloquies points to Leontes' need to literally speak his wife's unfaithfulness into reality. The manipulation directed towards Hermione is not as clear as Petruchio's was, partially because Hermione refuses to yield – her death and resurrection can be interpreted as a kind of emotional manipulation too, conducted vicariously through Paulina. The queen's words "How will this grieve you, / When

¹³ Claire Dawkins, "Gendered Narratives of Marital Dissolution in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*," *Women's Studies* 46.2 (2017): 102, EBSCO
<<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype=shib&custid=s1240919&profile=eds>> 25 July 2019.

you shall come to clearer knowledge, that / You thus have publish'd me!" (II.i.96-8) turn prophetic in the latter part of the play.

Both Leontes and Hermione manipulate the emotions of the audience using variety of tactics, including "public performance, persuasion, the strategic use of amplification of coalitions and outrage, and emotional entrepreneurship"¹⁴ all of which can be seen in Act II; however, it is Leontes who is less sure of his power. When Hermione says "The king's will be perform'd!" (II.i.115) Leontes replies in the same line by asking "Shall I be heard?" (II.i.115). This once again reveals that at the centre of emotional manipulation is a power structure considered destabilised by one of the characters: emotional manipulation presents a means of gaining power in a relationship. Hermione's political and personal power should not be underestimated, though it depends upon the support she has as a queen: she affirms her position through her refusal to accept Leontes' fantastic accusations. The conflict between Leontes and Hermione is not only that of illusion and reality (in relation to Hermione's adultery), but also a battle for power conducted through rhetoric virtuosity. Public performance of such rhetoric in court (both judicial and royal) highlights the nature of manipulation as a power-based interpersonal structure. The illusory nature of this power is articulated by Hermione in her defence in Act III:

HERMIONE

Sir,

You speak a language that I understand not:

My life stands in the level of your dreams,

Which I'll lay down.

LEONTES

Your actions are my dreams;

You had a bastard by Polixenes,

And I but dream'd it. As you were past all shame, –

Those of your fact are so – so past all truth:

Which to deny concerns more than avails; for as

Thy brat hath been cast out, like to itself,

No father owning it, – which is, indeed,

More criminal in thee than it, – so thou

Shalt feel our justice, in whose easiest passage

¹⁴ Rose McDermott., "Leadership and the Strategic Emotional Manipulation of Political Identity: An Evolutionary Perspective," *The Leadership Quarterly* (2018): 5, ScienceDirect
<<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1048984318301310?via%3Dihub>> 20 July 2019.

Look for no less than death. (III.ii.76-89)

After Hermione's presumed death, Paulina assumes her role as a voice of conscience; she accuses Leontes of tyranny and murder – reminded of his acts and the tragedy they lead to, Leontes repents through Paulina's manipulation. Emotional manipulation, therefore, is not necessarily only malevolent: while Leontes uses manipulation to make certain illusory perceptions seem true, Paulina's manipulation ensures the happy ending of the play.

In *Macbeth*, on the other hand, emotional manipulation leads to real death: while all the previous marriages could be described as psychosexual wars, this one is particularly striking, as lady Macbeth manipulates her husband without him being aware of it. When she argues for the murder of Duncan, she does not reference power (already attained or to be still attained) as a motivating factor to spur her husband into action; rather, she constantly mocks and devalues his manhood. Macbeth acts because he perceives a lack of power as a threat to his selfhood:

LADY MACBETH

Was the hope drunk

Wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it slept since?

And wakes it now, to look so green and pale

At what it did so freely? From this time

Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard

To be the same in thine own act and valour

As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that

Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,

And live a coward in thine own esteem,

Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'

Like the poor cat i' the adage?

MACBETH

Prithee, peace:

I dare do all that may become a man;

Who dares do more is none. (I.vii.35-47)

Lady Macbeth deliberately describes violence as valour and aggression as sexual prowess: her manipulation is highly effective, since Macbeth echoes her ideas for the rest of the play – when he is about to commit regicide, he does so with “Tarquin's ravishing strides” (II.i.55), describing his act as a rape. Lady Macbeth aligns violence with masculinity and then presents it as desirable: “When you durst do it, then you were a man; / And, to be more than what you

were, you would / Be so much more the man” (I.vii.49-51). To achieve this, she manipulates Macbeth’s anxiety and highlights threats to their shared identity.¹⁵ She assumes a position of masculinity: in the context of Galenic one-sex model, her call to spirits to “unsex” her is perceived as a possibility – she can become a man not only through her behaviour, but also physically. If Macbeth does not dare to act, thus forfeiting his masculinity, she will assume it (and the power related to it) for herself. In this particular marriage, masculinity is the symbol of power and Macbeth and lady Macbeth seem unable to wield it both at the same time.

The banquet scene in Act III most clearly demonstrates the way lady Macbeth uses manipulation to gain power; when Macbeth reacts to Banquo’s ghost, she mocks this reaction as unmanly, going as far as to outright ask Macbeth “Are you a man?” (III.iv.58) As in the previous plays, lady Macbeth attempts to control the way her husband sees reality, when she denies the existence of the ghost. Thus, when the ghost enters the second time, Macbeth feels compelled to repeat several times that his reaction is not due to lack of manliness and compares his behaviour to that of lady Macbeth:

You make me strange even to the disposition that I owe,
When now I think you can behold such sights
And keep the ruby of your cheeks
When mine is blanched with fear. (III.iv.112-116)

Lady Macbeth in this particular scene assumes not only his masculinity, but also Macbeth’s position as a host and a husband, rendering him practically useless. It is no surprise then that Macbeth wants to keep his wife in the dark about the other murders, so that she can be “innocent of the knowledge” (III.ii.45), until she can “applaud the deed” (III.ii.46). Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband’s fear of being perceived as less than a man so well that Macbeth continues conflating manhood with violence even after her death. He uses the same techniques towards other male characters in the play, repeatedly challenging Malcolm by calling him a “boy”. The emotional manipulation used by lady Macbeth is based on “using cues that in other circumstances would indicate a particular emotion as an appropriate response”¹⁶ so that she can “shape emotional responses, even if those cues are false,

¹⁵ McDermott, 2.

¹⁶ McDermott, 7.

manufactured or misrepresented.”¹⁷ As this and previous examples prove, emotional manipulation is not limited to men only, though the research suggests that “the consistent effect of masculine gender roles in the prediction of emotional manipulation for both sexes reveals that perceptions of agency and dominance are key to emotional manipulation.”¹⁸

As was demonstrated in all three plays, power is the key concept connected to emotional manipulation. The power structures informing intimate partnerships in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Winter's Tale* and *Macbeth* are connected with the social position of the main characters; the manipulation functions as a form of rhetoric¹⁹ and is used to realize certain constructs through speech. As Christy-Dale L. Sims states:

The destruction of the victim's identity and sense of self may be accomplished rhetorically by the abuser through the use of displaced or symbolic violence, or any combination of some or all of the following behaviors: jokes and teasing, blaming, belittling, ridiculing, criticizing, insulting, name-calling, derogatory comments, bickering, quarreling, silence, ignoring, gestures, and threats.²⁰

The difference between literature and accounts of emotional abuse reported by the victims is relatively small: Shakespeare's characters use gaslighting well before the term denoting this type of manipulation even existed. The techniques remain the same, even though nowadays we may evaluate emotional manipulation differently. Nevertheless, emotional abuse is still hard to identify, as the victims' stories are excluded from newspapers, so that “their experiences are effectively marginalized and made invisible by the focus given to physical forms of violence, such as battery and sexual abuse.”²¹ In this regard the possibility to see these plays as stories of emotional manipulation allows for a recognition of such behaviours in oneself or in others; such a recognition often presents the first step in dealing with the trauma of emotional abuse. The point of this essay, however, is not to provide a solution (since the only possible solution is a deep change within society), but to point out the prevalence of emotional manipulation in relationships both real and staged, past and present,

¹⁷ McDermott, 7.

¹⁸ Grieve et al., 160.

¹⁹ Sims, 379.

²⁰ Sims, 381.

²¹ Sims, 377.

straight or queer; identification of these behaviours and articulation of the ways in which they are harmful can be conducted through literature – which is exactly what this essay attempted to do.

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