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Household Kates: Domesticating Commodities in *The Taming of the Shrew*

NATASHA KORDA

COMMENTARY ON SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW* has frequently noted that the play's novel taming strategy marks a departure from traditional shrew-taming tales. Unlike his predecessors, Petruchio does not use force to tame Kate; he does not simply beat his wife into submission.[1] Little attention has been paid, however, to the historical implications of the play's unorthodox methodology, which is conceived in specifically economic terms: "I am he am born to tame you, Kate," Petruchio summarily declares, "And bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate / Conformable as other household Kates" (2.1.269–71).[2] Petruchio likens Kate's planned domestication to a domestication of the emergent commodity form itself, whose name parallels the naming of the shrew. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *cates* as "provisions or victuals bought (as distinguished from, and usually more delicate or dainty than, those of home production)." The term is an aphetic form of *acate*, which derives from the Old French *achat*, meaning "purchase."[3] Cates are thus by definition exchange-values—commodities, properly speaking—as opposed to use-values, or objects of home production.[4] In order to grasp the historical implications of *Shrew*'s unorthodox methodology and of the economic terms Shakespeare employs to shape its taming strategy, I would like first to situate precisely the form of its departure from previous shrew-taming tales. What differentiates *The Taming of the Shrew* from its precursors is not so much a concern with domestic economy—

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[1] See *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. Brian Morris (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), 1–149, esp. 70; Richard Hosley, "Sources and Analogues of *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 27 (1963–64): 289–308; and John C. Bean, "Comic Structure and the Humanizing of Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*" in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely, eds. (Urbana, Chicago, and London: U of Illinois P, 1980), 65–78. See also note 6, below.

[2] Quotations from *The Taming of the Shrew* follow the Arden Shakespeare text, edited by Brian Morris.

[3] *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., prepared by J. A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, 20 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 2:978 and 1:66; hereafter cited simply as *OED*.

[4] "He who satisfies his own need with the product of his own labour admittedly creates use-values, but not commodities. . . . In order to become a commodity, the product must be transferred to the other person . . . through the medium of exchange" (Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes [New York: Vintage Books, 1977], 131).

which has always been a central preoccupation of shrew-taming literature—but rather a shift in *modes of production* and thus in the very terms through which domestic economy is conceived. The coordinates of this shift are contained within the term *cates* itself, which, in distinguishing goods that are purchased from those that are produced within and for the home, may be said to map the historical shift from domestic use-value production to production for the market.

Prior to Shakespeare's play, shrews were typically portrayed as reluctant producers within the household economy, high-born wives who refused to engage in the forms of domestic labor expected of them by their humble tradesman husbands. In the ballad "The Wife Wrapped in a Wether's Skin," for example, the shrew refuses to brew, bake, wash, card, or spin on account of her "gentle kin" and delicate complexion:

> There was a wee cooper who lived in Fife,
> Nickety, nackity, noo, noo, noo
> And he has gotten a gentle wife. . . .
> Alane, quo Rushety, roue, roue, roue
>
> She wadna bake, nor she wadna brew,
> For the spoiling o her comely hue.
>
> She wadna card, nor she wadna spin,
> For the shaming o her gentle kin.
>
> She wadna wash, nor she wadna wring,
> For the spoiling o her gouden ring.[5]

The object of the tale was simply to put the shrew to work, to restore her (frequently through some gruesome form of punishment[6]) to her proper productive place within the household economy. When the cooper from Fife, who cannot beat his ungentle wife due to her gentle kin, cleverly wraps her in a wether's skin and tames her by beating the hide instead, the shrew promises: "Oh, I will bake, and I will brew, / And never mair think on my comely hue. / Oh, I will card, and I will, spin, / And never mair think on my gentle kin," etc.[7] Within the tradition of shrew-taming literature prior to

[5] Muriel Bradbrook cites this ballad as a possible source for *Shrew* in "Dramatic Role as Social Image: a Study of *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Muriel Bradbrook on Shakespeare* (Sussex, UK: Harvester Press; Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1984), 57–71, esp. 60. Brian Morris discusses the ballad in his introduction to the Arden edition and in Appendix III, where he reprints several versions of it (75 and 310–16).

[6] The prescribed method of shrew-taming prior to Shakespeare's play was typically violent. The more severe the punishment inflicted, the more complete the shrew's "recovery" to the world of work seemed to be. In John Heywood's interlude *Johan Johan the Husband* (1533–34), cited by Bradbrook as an early Tudor source for *Shrew*, the eponymous Johan spends the first one hundred lines of the play elaborating how he will beat his wife. See Heywood, *Johan Johan the Husband*, The Malone Society Reprints (Oxford: University Press, 1972), sig. A1^{v}; and Bradbrook, 59–61. In the anonymous verse tale "Here begynneth a merry Ieste of a shrewde and curste Wyfe, lapped in Morrelles Skin, for her good behauyour" (1550), the shrew is forced into a cellar by her husband, beaten mercilessly with birch rods until she faints, at which point he wraps her naked, bloody body in a salted hide, threatening to keep her there for the rest of her life. Thereafter she performs his commands humbly and meekly. See Morris, ed., 70.

[7] In the Scottish tale titled "The Handsome Lazy Lass," cited as a folktale source for *Shrew*,

Shakespeare's play, the housewife's domestic responsibilities were broadly defined by a feudal economy based on household production, on the production of use-values for domestic consumption.[8]

With the decline of the family as an economic unit of production, however, the role of the housewife in late-sixteenth-century England was beginning to shift from that of skilled producer to savvy consumer. In this period household production was gradually being replaced by nascent capitalist industry, making it more economical for the housewife to purchase what she had once produced. Brewing and baking, for example, once a routine part of the housewife's activity, had begun to move from the home to the market, becoming the province of skilled (male) professionals.[9] Washing and spinning, while still considered "women's work," were becoming unsuitable activities for middle-class housewives and were increasingly delegated to servants, paid laundresses, or spinsters.[10] The housewife's duties were thus gradually moving away from the production of use-values within and for the home and toward the consumption of market goods, or cates, commodities produced outside the home. The available range of commodities was also greatly increased in the period, so that goods once considered luxuries, available only to the wealthiest elites, were now being found in households at every level of society.[11] Even "inferior artificers and many farmers," as William Harrison notes in his *Description of England*, had "learned . . . to garnish their cupboards with plate, their joint beds with tapestry and silk hangings, and their tables with carpets and fine napery."[12]

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a farmer likewise tricks his wife, who "will not do a hand's turn, she is so lazy," into offering to do "the hardest and most exhausting work" on the farm; see Morris, ed., 73–74. In Heywood's *Johan Johan the Husband* the protagonist points to his wife's reluctance to do housework as the reason for beating her: "Whan she offendeth and doth a mys / And kepeth not her house / as her duetie is / Shall I not bete her if she do so / Yes by cokke blood that shall I do" (sig. A1^{v}).

[8] An interesting exception to this norm is the fifteenth-century cycle of mystery plays (in particular, the Towneley version) in which Noah's wife is portrayed as an overly zealous producer. She refuses to put aside her spinning and board the ark even as the flood waters reach her feet: "Full sharp ar thise showers / That renys aboute. / Therefor, wife, haue done; / Com into ship fast," Noah pleads. "In fayth, yit will I spyn; / All in vayn ye carp," replies this industrious shrew (*The Towneley Plays*, ed. Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994], ll. 506–9 and 519–20). Martha C. Howell speculates that Mistress Noah is spinning not solely for her own household but for the market, and that the play stigmatizes the vital role many women played in late-medieval market production (*Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities* [Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1986], 182, n. 19). See also note 13, below.

[9] See Susan Cahn, *Industry of Devotion: The Transformation of Women's Work in England, 1500–1660* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987), esp. 42–46. Cf. Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1919); and Roberta Hamilton, *The Liberation of Women: A Study of Patriarchy and Capitalism* (London and Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1978).

[10] See Cahn, 53–56.

[11] On conspicuous consumption in early modern England, see F. J. Fisher, *London and the English Economy, 1500–1700* (London and Ronceverte: The Hambledon Press, 1990), 105–18; Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); Chandra Mukerji, *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983); and *Consumption and the World of Goods*, John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

[12] William Harrison, *The Description of England: The Classic Contemporary Account of Tudor Social Life*, ed. Georges Edelen (New York: The Folger Shakespeare Library and Dover Publications, 1994), 200.

The Taming of the Shrew may be said both to reflect and to participate in this cultural redefinition by portraying Kate not as a reluctant producer but rather as an avid and sophisticated consumer of market goods. When she is shown shopping in 4.3 (a scene I will discuss at greater length below), she displays both her knowledge of and preference for the latest fashions in apparel. Petruchio's taming strategy is accordingly aimed not at his wife's productive capacity—he never asks Kate to brew, bake, wash, card, or spin—but at her consumption. He seeks to educate Kate in her new role as a consumer of household cates.

Before examining in precisely what way Petruchio seeks to tame Kate's consumption of cates, I would like to introduce a further complication into this rather schematic account of the shift from household production to consumption, being careful not to conflate material change with ideological change. The ideological redefinition of the home as a sphere of consumption rather than production in sixteenth-century England did not, of course, correspond to the lived reality of every early modern English housewife. Many women continued to work productively, both within and outside the home.[13] Yet the acceptance of this ideology, as Susan Cahn points out, became the "price of upward social mobility" in the period and, as such, exerted a powerful influence on all social classes.[14] The early modern period marked a crucial change in the *cultural valuation* of housework, a change that is historically linked—as the body of feminist-materialist scholarship which Christine Delphy has termed "housework theory"[15] reminds us—to the rise of capitalism and development of the commodity form.[16]

According to housework theory, domestic work under capitalism is not considered "real" work because "women's productive labor is confined to use-values while men produce for exchange."[17] It is not that housework

[13] See Martha C. Howell's rich and complex account of the types of female labor that took place, both within and outside the home, in late-medieval and early modern northern European cities. Howell's book resists the nostalgic overvaluation of female production in precapitalist society which has informed much of the earlier work on this subject and, in particular, that of the housework theorists.

[14] See Cahn, 7 and 156.

[15] In an article first published in 1978, Christine Delphy maintained: "We owe to the new feminists . . . the posing, for the first time in history, of the question of housework as a *theoretical* problem." She asserted that no coherent "theory of housework" had thus far been produced and offered her own preliminary attempt at such a systematic theorization ("Housework or domestic work" in *Close to Home: A materialist analysis of women's oppression*, ed. and trans. Diana Leonard [Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1984], 78–92, esp. 78).

[16] As Annette Kuhn observes, feminist materialists of the 1970s "seized upon [housework] as the key to an historically concrete understanding of women's oppression, . . . as the central point at which women's specific subordination in capitalism is articulated" (*Feminism and Materialism: Women and Modes of Production*, Annette Kuhn and AnnMarie Wolpe, eds. [London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978], 198).

[17] See Karen Sachs, "Engels Revisited" in *Women, Culture, and Society*, Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1974), 221–22; and Kuhn, "Structures of Patriarchy and Capital in the Family" in Kuhn and Wolpe, eds., 42–67, esp. 54. Housework theory is not so much a unified theory as a debate. Not all housework theorists view the unremunerated status of housework as resulting from its circumscription within a matrix of use-value production. Another, more radical strain of housework theory argues that the housewife does produce through her housework a commodity that is recognized and exchanged on the market—namely, the labor power of her husband and family—and that this work should therefore be paid or remunerated; see Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James,

disappears with the rise of capitalism; rather, it becomes economically devalued. Because the housewife's labor has no exchange-value, it remains unremunerated and thus economically "invisible."[18] Read within this paradigm, *Shrew* seems to participate in the ideological erasure of housework by not representing it on the stage, by rendering it, quite literally, invisible. The weakness of this analysis of the play, however, is that it explains only what Kate does not do onstage and provides no explanation for what she actually does.

In continuing to define the housewife's domestic activity solely within a matrix of use-value production, housework theory—despite its claim to offer an historicized account of women's subjection under capitalism—treats housework as if it were itself, materially speaking, an unchanging, transhistorical entity, which is not, as we have seen, the historical case. For though the market commodity's infiltration of the home did not suddenly and magically absolve the housewife of the duty of housework, it did profoundly alter *both* the material form and the cultural function of such work insofar as it became an activity increasingly centered around the proper order, maintenance, and display of household cates—objects having, by definition, little or no use-value.

Privileging delicacy of form over domestic function, cates threaten to sever completely the bond linking exchange-value to any utilitarian end; they are commodities that unabashedly assert their own superfluousness. It is not simply that cates, as objects of exchange, are to be "distinguished from" objects of home production, however, as the *OED* asserts. Rather, their very purpose is to signify this distinction, to signify their own distance from utility and economic necessity. What replaces the utilitarian value of cates is a symbolic or cultural value: cates are, above all, signifiers of social distinction or differentiation.[19] Housework theory cannot explain *Shrew*'s recasting of the traditional shrew-taming narrative because it can find no place in its strictly economic analysis for the housewife's role within a *symbolic* economy based on the circulation, accumulation, and display of status objects, or what Pierre Bourdieu terms "symbolic" (as distinct from "economic") capital.[20] How did the presence of status objects, or cates, within the nonaristocratic household transform, both materially and ideologically, the "domesticall duties" of the housewife? To what degree was her new role as a consumer and caretaker of household cates perceived as threatening? What new mechanisms of ideological defense were invented to assuage such perceived threats? I shall argue that it is precisely the cultural anxiety surrounding the housewife's new managerial role with respect to household cates which prompted Shakespeare to write a new kind of shrew-taming narrative.

The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1972). For critiques of this notion, see Delphy, 88–89; and Paul Smith, "Domestic Labor and Marx's Theory of Value" in Kuhn and Wolpe, eds., 198–219, esp. 212.

[18] On the economic invisibility of housework, see Delphy, 84.

[19] On commodities as signs of distinction, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984); and Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1981).

[20] Bourdieu, "Symbolic capital" in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977), 171–83.

To provide the framework for my analysis of Shakespeare's rewriting of the shrew-taming tradition, I would like to turn from housework theory to the theorization of domestic leisure and consumption, beginning with Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*. Like the housework theorists, Veblen maintains that the housewife's transformation from "the drudge and chattel of the man, both in fact and in theory,—the producer of goods for him to consume"—into "the ceremonial consumer of goods which he produces" leaves her no less his drudge and chattel (if only "in theory") than her predecessor.[21] For Veblen, however, the housewife's new form of drudgery is defined not by her unremunerated (and thus economically invisible) productivity but rather by her subsidized (and culturally conspicuous) nonproductivity itself. The housewife's obligatory "performance of leisure," Veblen maintains, is itself a form of labor or drudgery: "the leisure of the lady . . . is an occupation of an ostensibly laborious kind. . . . it is leisure only in the sense that little or no productive work is performed."[22] Just as the housewife's leisure renders her no less a drudge of her husband, according to Veblen, her consumption of commodities likewise renders her no less his commodity, or chattel, insofar as she consumes for her husband's benefit and not her own.[23] The housewife's "vicarious consumption" positions her as a status object, the value of which derives precisely from its lack of utility: "She is useless and expensive," as Veblen puts it, "and she is *consequently* valuable."[24]

When it comes to describing what constitutes the housewife's nonproductive activity, however, Veblen becomes rather vague, remarking only in passing that it centers on "the maintenance and elaboration of the household paraphernalia."[25] Jean Baudrillard offers a somewhat more elaborated account in his *Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, a text strongly influenced by Veblen. With the advent of consumer culture, he asserts, the "cultural status of the [household] object enters into direct contradiction with its practical status," and "housekeeping has only secondarily a practical objective (keeping objects ready for use)"; rather, "it is a manipulation of another order—symbolic—that sometimes totally eclipses practical use."[26] Like Veblen, Baudrillard views the housewife's conspicuous leisure and consumption as themselves laborious, though for the latter this new form of housework is more specifically described as the locus of a "*symbolic* labor," defined as the "active manipulation of signs" or status objects.[27] The value of the housewife's manipulation of the "cultural status of the object," Baudrillard maintains, emerges not from an "economic calculus" but from a "symbolic and statutory calculus" dictated by "relative social class configurations."[28] For both Veblen and Baudrillard, then, the housewife plays a crucial role in the production of cultural value in a consumer society.

[21] Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 83.

[22] Veblen, 57–58.

[23] "She still quite unmistakably remains his chattel in theory; for the habitual rendering of vicarious leisure and consumption is the abiding mark of the unfree servant" (Veblen, 83).

[24] Veblen, 149 (my emphasis).

[25] Veblen, 57–58.

[26] Baudrillard, 45–46.

[27] Baudrillard, 33 and 5 (my emphasis).

[28] Baudrillard, 46.

It is in the early modern period that the housewife first assumes this vital new role within what I shall term the *symbolic order of things*.[29] The figure of "Kate" represents a threat to this order, a threat that Petruchio seeks to tame by educating her for her role as a manipulator of status objects. To say that Kate poses a threat to the symbolic order of *things*, however, is to signal yet another departure from the traditional shrew-taming narrative, in which the shrew is characteristically represented as a threat to the symbolic order of *language*. This linguistic threat is not absent from Shakespeare's version of the narrative and has received substantial critical commentary. In order to compare this threat with that posed by her relationship to things, I will briefly consider two compelling accounts of the threat posed by Kate's words.

In Shakespeare's rendering of the traditional topos, Joel Fineman points out, the shrew's linguistic excess becomes a threat not of too many words but rather of too much meaning. Kate's speech underscores the way in which language always "carries with it a kind of surplus semiotic baggage, an excess of significance, whose looming, even if unspoken, presence cannot be kept quiet."[30] The semantic superfluity of Kate's speech leads to a series of " 'fretful' verbal confusions" in which the "rhetoricity of language is made to seem the explanation of [her] ongoing quarrel with the men who are her master."[31] The example Fineman cites is Kate's unhappy lute lesson, recounted by her hapless music master, Hortensio:

> BAPTISTA Why then, thou canst not break her to the lute?
> HORTENSIO Why no, for she hath broke the lute to me.
> I did but tell her she mistook her frets, . . .
> "Frets, call you these?" quoth she, "I'll fume with them."
> And with that word she struck me on the head.
> (2.1.147–53)

Fineman sees Kate's shrewish "fretting" as a direct result of the rhetorical excess of her speech—in this case, her pun on *frets*. Karen Newman adds that Kate's "linguistic protest" is directed against "the role in patriarchal culture to which women are assigned, that of wife and object of exchange in the circulation of male desire."[32] Kate's excessive verbal fretting turns her into an unvendible commodity. Yet while Newman emphasizes Kate's own position as an "object of exchange" between men, she specifically discounts the importance of material objects elsewhere in the play. The role of things in Petruchio's taming lesson is subordinated in Newman's argument to the more "significant" role of words: "Kate is figuratively killed with kindness, by her husband's rule over her not so much in *material* terms—the with-

[29] While it is conceptually closer to the work of Jean Baudrillard and Pierre Bourdieu, my phrase carries resonances of Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault; see Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1977), ix and 30–113; and Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon, 1970).

[30] Joel Fineman, "The Turn of the Shrew" in *The Subjectivity Effect in Western Literary Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 120–42, esp. 128.

[31] Fineman, 127.

[32] Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1991), 39–40.

holding of food, clothing and sleep—but in the withholding of *linguistic* understanding."[33]

In contrast to Newman, Lena Cowen Orlin, in a recent article on "material culture theatrically represented," foregrounds the play's many "references to and displays of objects, and especially household furnishings." Orlin does not simply insist on the importance of *res* within the play at the expense of *verba*. She maintains that both material and linguistic forms of exchange, far from being opposed within the play, are repeatedly identified. Drawing on Levi-Strauss, Orlin argues that the play "synthesizes" the three "forms of exchange that constitute social life," namely, the exchange of wives, of goods, and of words.[34] While I agree with Orlin's claim that the play draws very explicit connections between its material and symbolic economies—particularly as these economies converge on what I have called the symbolic order of things—I resist the notion that Kate's position with respect to this order is simply that of a passive object of exchange. Kate is not figured as one more cate exchanged between men within the play; rather, it is precisely her *unvendibility* as a commodity on the marriage market that creates the dramatic dilemma to be solved by the taming narrative. The question concerns the relation between Kate's own position as a cate and her role as a consumer of cates. For Kate's unvendibility is specifically attributed within the play to her untamed consumption of cates.

At the start of the play, Kate's consumption is represented as a threat that Petruchio, in his novel way, will seek to tame. Both Newman and Fineman take Petruchio's first encounter with Kate, perhaps the most "fretful" instance of verbal sparring in the play, to demonstrate that the shrew-tamer chooses to fight his battle with the shrew "in verbal kind."[35] "O, how I long to have some chat with her" (2.1.162), he utters, in anticipation of their meeting. The content of Petruchio's punning "chat" with Kate, however, is principally preoccupied with determining her place within the symbolic order of things. The encounter begins with Petruchio stubbornly insisting on calling Katherina "Kate":

PETRUCHIO Good morrow, Kate, for that's your name, I hear.
KATHERINA Well have you heard, but something hard of hearing;
They call me Katherine that do talk of me.
PETRUCHIO You lie, in faith, for you are call'd plain Kate,
And bonny Kate, and sometimes Kate the curst;
But Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom,
Kate of Kate Hall, my super-dainty Kate,
For dainties are all Kates. . . .
(ll. 182–89)

[33] Newman, 44 (my emphasis). In a book so strongly concerned with the relation of women to commodities in the early modern period, it is curious that Newman so emphatically denies the significance of the commodity's conspicuousness in *The Taming of the Shrew*. My reading of Kate's role with respect to household cates is greatly indebted to several chapters in this volume, in particular "Dressing Up: Sartorial Extravagance in Early Modern London" and "City Talk: Femininity and Commodification in Jonson's *Epicoene*" (109–27 and 129–43).

[34] Lena Cowen Orlin, "The Performance of Things in *The Taming of the Shrew*," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 23 (1993): 167–88, esp. 167 and 183–85.

[35] Fineman, 125.

If Petruchio's punning appellation of Kate as a "super-dainty" cate seems an obvious misnomer in one sense—she can hardly be called "delicate"—in another it is quite apt, as his gloss makes clear. The substantive *dainty*, deriving from the Latin *dignitatem* (worthiness, worth, value), designates something that is "estimable, sumptuous, or rare."[36] In describing her as a "dainty," Petruchio appears to be referring to her value as a commodity, or cate, on the marriage market (he has just discovered that her dowry is worth "twenty thousand crowns" [l. 122]).

Yet Petruchio's reference to Kate as "super-dainty" refers to her not as a commodity or object of exchange between men but rather as a *consumer* of commodities. According to the *OED*, in its adjectival form the term *dainty* refers to someone who is "nice, fastidious, particular; sometimes, over-nice" as to "the quality of food, comforts, etc." In describing Kate as "super-dainty," Petruchio implies that she belongs to the latter category; she is "over-nice," not so much discriminating as blindly obedient to the dictates of fashion. Sliding almost imperceptibly from Kate as a consumer of cates to her status as a cate, Petruchio's gloss ("For dainties are all Kates") elides the potential threat posed by the former by subsuming it under the aegis of the latter. His pun on *Kates/cates* dismisses the significance of Kate's role as a consumer (as does Newman's reading) by effectively reducing her to an object of exchange between men.

The pun on *Kates/cates* is repeated at the conclusion of Petruchio's "chat" with Kate (in the pronouncement quoted at the beginning of this essay) and effects a similar reduction: "And therefore, setting all this chat aside, / Thus in plain terms," Petruchio proclaims, summing up his unorthodox marriage proposal, "I am he am born to tame you, Kate, / And bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate / Conformable as other household Kates" (ll. 261–62, 269–71). And yet, in spite of his desire to speak "in plain terms," Petruchio cannot easily restrict or "tame" the signifying potential of his own pun. For once it is articulated, the final pun on *Kates/cates* refuses to remain tied to its modifier, "household," and insists instead upon voicing itself, shrewishly, where it shouldn't (i.e., each time Kate is named). In so doing, it retrospectively raises the possibility that cates themselves may be "wild," that there is something unruly, something that must be made to conform, in the commodity form itself. This possibility in turn discovers an ambiguity in Petruchio's "as," which may mean either "as other household cates are conformable" or "as I have brought other household cates into conformity." The conformity of household cates cannot be taken for granted within the play because cates, unlike use-values, are not proper to or born of the domestic sphere but are produced outside the home by the market. They are by definition extra-domestic or to-be-domesticated. Yet insofar as cates obey the logic of exchange and of the market, they may be said to resist such domestication. Petruchio cannot restrict the movement of cates in his utterance, cannot set all "chat" aside and speak "in plain terms," because commodities, like words, tend to resist all attempts to restrict their circulation and exchange.

The latter assertion finds support—quite literally—in Petruchio's own chat. The term *chat*, as Brian Morris points out in a note to his Arden edition, was itself a variant spelling of *cate* in the early modern period (both

[36] *OED*, 4:218.

forms descend from *achat*). The term *chat* thus instantiates, literally performs, the impossibility of restricting the semantic excess proper to language in general and epitomized by Kate's speech in particular. In so doing, however, it also links linguistic excess—via its etymological link with the signifier *cate*—to the economic excess associated with the commodity form in general and with cates, or luxury goods, in particular. Within the play, the term *chat* may thus be said to name both material and linguistic forms of excess as they converge on the figure of the shrew. It refers at once to Kate's "chattering tongue" (4.2.58) and to her untamed consumption of cates.

Kate's verbal frettings are repeatedly linked within the play to her refusal to assume her proper place within the symbolic order of things: she cannot be broken to the lute but breaks it instead. It is not clear, however, that her place is simply that of passive exchange object. For to be broken to the frets of a lute is to become a skilled and "active manipulator" (to recall Baudrillard's term) of a status object.[37] My argument thus departs from traditional accounts of the commodification of or traffic in women which maintain that women "throughout history" have been passive objects of exchange circulating between men. Such accounts do little to explain the specific historical forms the domination of woman assume with the rise of capitalism and development of the commodity form. They do not, for example, explain the housewife's emerging role as a manipulator of status objects, or household cates.

I would like to question as well the viability, in the present context, of Veblen's assertion that the housewife's "manipulation of the household paraphernalia" does not render her any less a commodity, "chattel," of her husband. The housewife's consumption of cates, which Veblen views as thoroughly domesticated, was in the early modern period thought to be something wild, unruly, and in urgent need of taming.[38] If *Shrew*'s taming

[37] In " 'Sing Againe Syren': The Female Musician and Sexual Enchantment in Elizabethan Life and Literature" (*Renaissance Quarterly* 42 [1989]: 420–48), Linda Phyllis Austern notes that formal musical training was considered "a mark of gentility" in the period insofar as it was both "costly and time-consuming" (430). It thus became "a functional artifice" used by young women "to attract socially desirable husbands" (431). (Perhaps this is why Baptista seeks to have his daughter learn the lute.) In a contemporary treatise entitled *The Praise of Musicke* (1586), the art of music is specifically compared to other luxury commodities: "so Musicke is as the most delicate meates, and as the finer apparell: not indeede necessary simply, but profitablie necessary for the comlinesse of life. And therefore *Socrates* and *Plato*, and all the *Pythagoreans* instructed their yong men and maydes in the knowledge of Musicke, not to the provocation of wantonnesse, but to the restraining and bridling their affections under the rule and moderation of reason" (quoted in Austern, 428). The threat of "wantonnesse," of excess, posed by the maids' consumption of musical cates is immediately tamed by the author of this treatise, who quickly shifts from a model of superfluous consumption to one of restraint or discipline. The defensive rhetoric of the treatise, as Austern argues, came in response to contemporary attacks on the playing of musical instruments by women as a form of untamed, "Syrenesque" seduction.

[38] Domestic manuals of the period manifest anxiety over the limits of a woman's right to dispose of household property. William Gouge's *Of Domesticall Dvties* (London, 1622), for example, devotes some fifteen chapters to defining the precise limits of the housewife's managerial role with respect to household goods. While it is the responsibility of the "godly, wise, faithfull, and industrious woman," he maintains, to "ordereth all the things of the house," he goes on to specify that this power must never exceed the scope of her husband's authority. In the dedicatory epistle of Gouge's treatise, however, we find that his attempt to limit the

narrative positions Kate as a "vicarious consumer" to ensure that her consumption and manipulation of household cates conforms to her husband's economic interests, it nevertheless points to a historical moment when the housewife's management of household property becomes potentially threatening to the symbolic order of things. Before attending to the ways in which the shrew-taming comedy seeks to elide this threat, we should take the threat itself seriously; only then will we be able to chart with any clarity Kate's passage from "chat" (i.e., from the material and linguistic forms of excess characteristic of the shrew) to "chattel."

At the start of the play, as Newman asserts, Kate's fretting is represented as an obstacle to her successful commodification on the marriage market. When Baptista finally arranges Kate's match to the madcap Petruchio, Tranio remarks: " 'Twas a commodity lay fretting by you, / 'Twill bring you gain, or perish on the seas" (2.1.321–22). Baptista's response, "The gain I seek is quiet in the match" (l. 323), underscores the economic dilemma posed by Kate's speech: her linguistic surplus translates into his financial lack and, consequently, her "quiet" into his "gain." Yet Kate's fretting refers not only to what comes out of her mouth (to her excessive verbal fretting) but to what goes into it as well (to her excessive consumption). The verb *to fret*, which derives from the same root as the modern German *fressen*, means "to eat, devour [of animals]; . . . to gnaw, to consume, . . . or wear away by gnawing" or, reflexively, "to waste or wear away; to decay."[39] Kate's untamed, animal-like consumption, Tranio's remark implies, wears away both at her father's resources and at her own value as well. In describing Kate as a "fretting commodity," as a commodity that not only consumes but consumes itself, Tranio emphasizes the tension between her position as a cate, or object of exchange, between men and her role as a consumer of cates.

To grasp the threat posed by the early modern housewife's consumption of cates, as this threat is embodied by Kate, however, we must first consider more closely what Baudrillard terms the "relative social class configurations" at work within the play. For the discourse of objects in *The Taming of the Shrew* becomes intelligible only if read in the context of its "class grammar"—that is to say, as it is inflected by the contradictions inherent in

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housewife's governance of household property was not overly popular with his parishioners: "I remember that when these *Domesticall Duties* were first uttered out of the pulpit, much exception was taken against the application of a wiues subiection to the restraining of her from disposing the common goods of the family without, or against her husbands consent." Gouge defends himself as follows:

> But surely they that made those exceptions did not well thinke of the *Cautions* and *Limitations* which were then deliuered, and are now againe expresly noted: which are, that the foresaid restraint be not extended to the *proper goods of a wife*, no nor overstrictly to such *goods as are set apart for the vse of the family*, nor to *extraordinary cases*, nor alwaies to an *expresse consent*, nor to the *consent of such husbands as are impotent, or farre and long absent*. If any other warrantable caution shall be shewed me, I will be as willing to admit it, as any of these. Now that my meaning may not still be peruerted, I pray you, in reading the restraint of wiues power in disposing the goods of the family, euer beare in minde those Cautions.

Gouge proffers so many mitigating exceptions to his own rule that perhaps it was more often honored in the breach than in the observance.

[39] *OED*, 6:185.

its appropriation by a particular social class or group.[40] In general terms *The Taming of the Shrew* represents an *embourgeoisement* of the traditional shrew-taming narrative: Petruchio is not a humble tradesman but an upwardly mobile landowner. Unlike the cooper's wife, Kate is not of "gentle kin"; she is a wealthy merchant's daughter. The play casts the marriage of Petruchio and Kate as an alliance between the gentry and mercantile classes and thus between land and money, status and wealth, or what Bourdieu identifies as symbolic and economic capital.

Petruchio is straightforward about his mercenary motives for marrying Kate: "Left solely heir to all his [father's] lands and goods," which he boastfully claims to "have better'd rather than decreas'd" (2.1.117–18), Petruchio ventures into the "maze" of mercantile Padua hoping to "wive it wealthily . . . / If wealthily, then happily in Padua" (1.2.74–75). Likening his mission to a merchant voyage, he claims to have been blown in by "such wind as scatters young men through the world / To seek their fortunes farther than at home" (ll. 49–50). Petruchio's fortune-hunting bombast, together with his claim to have "better'd" his inheritance, marks him as one of the new gentry, who continually sought to improve their estates through commerce, forays into business or overseas trade, or by contracting wealthy marriages.[41] If Petruchio seeks to obtain from his marriage to Baptista's mercantile household what is lacking in his own domestic economy, however, the same can be said of Baptista, who seeks to marry off his daughter to a member of the landed gentry. The nuptial bond between the two families promises a mutually beneficial exchange of values for the domestic economies of each: Petruchio hopes to obtain surplus capital (a dowry of "twenty thousand crowns"), and Baptista the status or symbolic capital that comes with land (the jointure Petruchio offers in return [2.1.125]).[42]

Kate's commodification as a marriage-market cate thus proves beneficial to both her father's and her future husband's households. But it is also the case that her consumption of cates is represented, at least initially, as mutually detrimental. At the start of the play, as we have seen, Kate's excessive consumption renders her an unvendible commodity. Baptista is unable to "rid the house" (1.1.145) of Kate and is consequently unwilling to wed his younger daughter, Bianca, to any of her many suitors. Kate's fretting represents perhaps an even greater threat to Petruchio's household, however, although one of a different order. To comprehend this difference, one must comprehend the place occupied by cates within the two domestic economies. Petruchio's parsimonious attitude toward cates, evidenced by the disrepair of his country house and the "ragged, old, and beggarly" condition of his servants (4.1.124), stands in stark contrast to the conspicuous consumption that characterizes Padua's mercantile class.[43]

[40] Baudrillard, 37.

[41] Carol F. Heffernan, "*The Taming of the Shrew*: The Bourgeoisie in Love," *Essays in Literature* 12 (1985): 3–14, esp. 5. On the gentry's increasing reliance on commerce in the period, see Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540–1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

[42] On the "economic and cultural symbiosis of land and money" in the period, see Stone and Stone, 26. The Stones conclude that the perceived symbiotic relation between the landed and merchant classes was more a "question of values and attitudes" than of "the facts of social mobility" (211).

[43] Cf. William Harrison's description of the "great provision of tapestry, Turkey work,

Gremio, a wealthy Paduan merchant and suitor to Bianca, for example, describes his "house within the city" as "richly furnished with plate and gold" (2.1.339–40):

> My hangings all of Tyrian tapestry.
> In ivory coffers I have stuff'd my crowns,
> In cypress chests my arras counterpoints,
> Costly apparel, tents, and canopies,
> Fine linen, Turkey cushions boss'd with pearl,
> Valance of Venice gold in needlework,
> Pewter and brass, and all things that belongs
> To house or housekeeping.
>
> (ll. 342–49)

If housekeeping at Petruchio's country estate involves little more than keeping the "rushes strewed" and the "cobwebs swept" (4.1.41), in Gremio's description of his city dwelling, it is an enterprise that centers on the elaborate arrangement and display of cates. Each of Gremio's "things" bears testimony to his ability to afford superfluous expenditure and to his taste for imported luxuries: his tapestries are from Tyre (famous for its scarlet and purple dyes), his apparel "costly," his linen "fine," his "Turkey cushions boss'd with pearl." His household is invested, literally "stuff'd," with capital.

The marked difference between the two men's respective notions of the "things that belongs/To house or housekeeping" underscores the differing attitudes held by the minor gentry and mercantile classes in the period toward "household cates." For the mercantile classes conspicuous consumption served to compensate for what, borrowing Baudrillard's terminology, we might call a "true social recognition" that otherwise evaded them; the accumulation of status objects served to supplement their "thwarted legitimacy" in the social domain.[44] As Lawrence and Jeanne Fawtier Stone observe, however, for the upwardly mobile gentry "the obligation to spend generously, even lavishly," as part of their newly acquired social status "implied a radical break with the habits of frugality which had played an essential part in the[ir] . . . upward climb."[45] The lesser gentry could make it into the ranks of the elite only by being "cautious, thrifty, canny, and grasping, creeping slowly, generation after generation, up the ladder of social and economic progress, and even at the end only barely indulging in a life-style and housing suitable to their dignity and income."[46] For the mercantile classes conspicuous consumption functioned as a necessary (though not always sufficient) means to elite status; for the lesser gentry it was an unwished-for consequence of it.

Arriving at their wedding in tattered apparel and astride an old, diseased horse, Petruchio proclaims: "To me she's married, not unto my clothes. / Could I repair what she will wear in me / As I can change these poor accoutrements, / 'Twere well for Kate and better for myself" (3.2.115–18).

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pewter, brass, fine linen, and thereto costly cupboards of plate" found in the houses of "gentlemen, merchantmen, and some other wealthy citizens" (200).

[44] Baudrillard, 40.

[45] Stone and Stone, 185. On taste as a category of social distinction, see Bourdieu, *Distinction*, passim.

[46] Stone and Stone, 187.

As if to prove his point that Kate's extravagance will leave him a pauper, his self-consuming costume seems to wear itself out before our eyes: his "old breeches" are "thrice turned" (l. 42); his boots have been used as "candle-cases" (l. 43); his "old rusty sword" has a "broken hilt" (ll. 44–45). As for his horse: it is "begnawn with the bots [parasitical worms or maggots]" (ll. 52–53) and, even more appropriately, "infected"—as, he insinuates, is his future wife—"with the fashions" (l. 50). The term *fashions* (or *farcin*, as it was more commonly spelled), which derives from the Latin *farcire*, meaning "to stuff," denotes a contagious equine disease characterized by a swelling of the jaw. Kate's taste for fashionable cates is likened to this disease of excessive consumption, which threatens to gnaw away at her husband's estate.

Following the wedding ceremony, Kate's excessive consumption seems to result in her swift reduction to the status of "chattel." Petruchio whisks his bride away after announcing to the stunned onlookers:

> 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.
> (ll. 227–31)

Petruchio's blunt assertion of property rights over Kate performs the very act of domestication it declares; reduced to an object of exchange ("goods" and "chattels"), Kate is abruptly yanked out of circulation and sequestered within the home, literally turned into a piece of furniture or "household stuff." The speech follows a domesticating trajectory not unlike that outlined by housework theory: it circumscribes Kate within a matrix of use-value production. The relationship between household stuff and household cates may be described as that between mere use-values and exchange-values, or commodities, properly speaking. The *OED* defines *stuff* as "the substance or 'material' . . . of which a thing is formed or consists, or out of which a thing may be fashioned."[47] As such, it may be identified with the use-value of the object.[48] Entering into the process of exchange, commodities, "ungilded and unsweetened, retaining their original home-grown shape," are split into the twofold form of use-value and value proper, a process Marx calls "*Stoffwechsel*"—literally, the act of (ex)change (*Wechsel*) that transforms mere stuff (*Stoff*) into values, or cates.[49] In transforming Kate from an object of exchange into the home-grown materiality of mere stuff, into a thing defined by its sheer utility, a beast of burden ("my horse, my ox, my ass"), Petruchio's speech reverses the processes of commodification. Reducing Kate to a series of increasingly homely things, it finally strips her down to a seemingly irreducible substance whose static immobility ("here she stands") puts a stop to the slippage of exchange evoked by his list

[47] *OED*, 16:983. Note that this definition dates from the beginning of the sixteenth century.

[48] According to Marx, it is "the physical body of the commodity which is the use-value or useful thing" (126).

[49] "Commodities first enter into the process of exchange ungilded and unsweetened, retaining their original home-grown shape. Exchange, however, produces a differentiation of the commodity into two elements, commodity and money, an external opposition which expresses the opposition between use-value and value which is inherent in it" (Marx, 198–99).

of goods. Her deictic presence seems to stand as the guarantee of an underlying, enduring use-value.

As a member of the gentry, Petruchio stands for the residual, land-based values of a domestic economy that purports to be "all in all sufficient" (*Othello*, 4.1.265). The trajectory traced by his index of goods moves not only from exchange-value to use-value but from liquid capital, or "movables,"[50] to the more secure form of landed property ("house . . . field . . . barn"). Yet Petruchio's portrait of an ideally self-sufficient household economy, in which the value of things is taken to be self-evident and not subject to (ex)change, is belied by the straightforwardly mercenary motives he avows for marrying Kate. Paradoxically, in order to maintain his land-based values, Petruchio must embrace those of the marketplace.[51] In seeking to arrest the slippage of exchange, his speech implicates its speaker in an expanding network or maze of equivalent value-forms ("goods . . . any thing") whose slide threatens to destabilize the hierarchy of values he would uphold. If Petruchio succeeds in mastering Kate, his position as master is nevertheless qualified by his own subjection to the exigencies and uncertainties of the new market economy. In his endeavor to domesticate the commodity form, one might say, Petruchio is himself commodified, himself subjected to the logic of commodity exchange. As Gremio so eloquently puts it: in taming Kate, Petruchio is himself "Kated" (3.2.243).

The contradictions inherent in Petruchio's class status make his task as shrew-tamer a complex one: he must restrict his wife's consumption without abolishing it entirely, must ensure that it adequately bears testimony to his own elite status without simultaneously leading him to financial ruin. The urgent requirement to maintain a proper balance between expenditure and thrift in the elite (or would-be elite) household and the perceived danger of delegating this task to the housewife are described in the following mid-seventeenth-century letter of advice, written by the Marquis of Halifax to his daughter:

> The Art of laying out Money wisely, is not attained to without a great deal of thought; and it is yet more difficult in the Case of a *Wife*, who is accountable to her *Husband* for her mistakes in it: It is not only his *Money*, his *Credit* too is at Stake, if what lyeth under the *Wife's* Care is managed, either with undecent *Thrift*, or too loose *Profusion*; you are therefore to keep the *Mean* between these two *Extreams*, . . . when you once break through those bounds, you launch into a wide Sea of *Extravagance*.[52]

At stake in the housewife's proper management of money or economic capital, Halifax suggests, is her husband's credit, or symbolic capital. "Symbolic capital," Bourdieu maintains, "is always *credit*, in the widest sense of the word, i.e. a sort of advance which the group alone can grant those who give

[50] The term *chattel* derives from the Latin *capitale* and in the sixteenth century meant either "capital, principal," or, more commonly, "a movable possession; any possession or piece of property other than real estate or a freehold" (*OED*, 3:59).

[51] By the late sixteenth century the landed gentry had to a large extent adopted an emergent-market view of land and labor, though their view of their own society was still governed by residual concepts of feudal entitlement; see Stone and Stone, 181–210.

[52] [George Savile, Marquis of Halifax], *The Lady's New-years Gift: or, Advice to a Daughter*, 3d ed. (London: M. Gillyflower and J. Partridge, 1688), 86–90.

it the best material and symbolic *guarantees*."[53] It is not simply that economic capital serves to buttress symbolic capital when it is spent on "material and symbolic guarantees" such as status objects. Symbolic capital in turn attracts economic capital: "the exhibition of symbolic capital (which is always very expensive in economic terms) is one of the mechanisms which (no doubt universally) make capital go to capital."[54] Yet symbolic and economic capital are not always mutually reinforcing. Indeed, insofar as "symbolic capital can only be accumulated at the expense of the accumulation of economic capital," the two are often at odds.[55] In the case of the upwardly mobile gentry in early modern England, as the Stones make clear, the effort to balance the two was an ongoing struggle.

In this context the early modern housewife's new role in the symbolic ordering of household cates takes on its full importance. She was made responsible for maintaining the proper balance of economic and symbolic capital within the household economy. The early modern housewife had to learn to spend enough to ensure her husband's status or cultural credit without overspending his income or economic credit. Domestic manuals of the period repeatedly express anxiety over the housewife's ability to strike this balance and are intent on circumscribing her management of household expenditure within the bounds of her husband's authority. For example, in *Of Domesticall Dvties* William Gouge writes,

> Wives cannot alwaies know their husbands ability: for their husbands may be much indebted, and yet to maintaine his credit, whereby he hopeth to raise his estate, may allow liberall maintenance for his house, if thereupon his wife shall gather that he is very rich, and accordingly be very bountifull in her gifts, she may soone goe beyond his ability, and so increase his debt, as he shall neuer be able to recouer himselfe.[56]

Gouge's warning is specifically concerned with the housewife's ability to distinguish symbolic from economic capital. Wives, he warns, are likely to be lured by symbolic capital, to believe that their husbands, because they spend freely on status objects, must be "very rich." The trick of good housewifery in this period, then, is knowing how to manipulate status objects for others and knowing how *not* to be taken in by them. It is precisely this trick, I maintain, that Petruchio teaches Kate. He seeks to unmask the lure of status objects for Kate while teaching her to deploy this lure skillfully for others.

Culminating in the play's final scene, in which Kate obeys Petruchio's command to take off her "dainty" cap and throw it underfoot, Petruchio's strategy aims to tame Kate's consumption of cates. "My falcon now is sharp [i.e., hungry] and passing empty," he explains, "and till she stoop she must not be full-gorg'd, / For then she never looks upon her lure" (4.1.177–79). Far from simply withholding cates from her, however, he continually offers them to her, only to find "some undeserved fault" in their appearance (l. 186), which, he claims, will make them unworthy of her refined tastes. His taming thus succeeds not by destroying the lure of the commodity but rather by exploiting it, by combatting Kate's daintiness with his own super-daintiness.

[53] Bourdieu, *Outline*, 181.
[54] Bourdieu, *Outline*, 181.
[55] Bourdieu, *Outline*, 180.
[56] Gouge, 297.

Arriving at his country estate at the beginning of Act 4, famished from their journey, Kate sits down to sup; but her dinner is sent back to the kitchen by Petruchio, who refuses it as "burnt and dried away" (l. 157). "Better 'twere that both of us did fast," he assures her, than to eat "such over-roasted flesh" (ll. 160–62). By the third scene Kate is ravenous and begs Petruchio's servant for something to eat: "I prithee go and get me some repast, / I care not what, so it be wholesome food" (ll. 15–16). Momentarily forgetting the discriminations of taste, Kate is eager to fill her stomach with any wholesome stuff that will satisfy her appetite. Grumio does not simply ignore her request but perversely teases her with edible cates, offering her a "neat's foot" (l. 17), a "fat tripe finely broil'd" (l. 20), and a "piece of beef and mustard" (l. 23)—"a dish," Kate acknowledges, "that I do love to feed upon" (l. 24).[57] After listing all of the delicacies on the menu, however, Grumio objects to each as being "unwholesome"; like Kate, he gibes, they are "too hot" and "choleric" (ll. 19, 25, 22). Her temper flaring at this, Kate begins to fret and accuses Grumio of feeding her "with the very name of meat" (l. 32). Here Kate hits on the foundation of her husband's strategy: Petruchio's object lesson in consumption centers on the *symbolic* dimension of cates. By feeding her with nothing but the "*name* of meat," with cates in their pure form as signifiers of taste and social distinction, Petruchio aims to bring home to her their lack of substance, or stuff.

Following their abortive supper, Petruchio summons in the haberdasher, commanding him to display his "ruffling treasure" and "ornaments" (ll. 60–61). When the latter produces the cap he has made for Kate, Petruchio ridicules it, comparing it to an edible cate, or "velvet dish" (an analogy that enables him to extend his lesson in consumption from comestibles to other commodities):

> Why, this was moulded on a porringer!
> A velvet dish! Fie, fie! 'Tis lewd and filthy.
> Why, 'tis a cockle or a walnut-shell,
> A knack, a toy, a trick, a baby's cap.
> Away with it! Come, let me have a bigger.
> (ll. 64–68)

Petruchio objects to the cap on the grounds that it is unwholesome and insubstantial—a cap, one might say, in name only. "I'll have no bigger," Kate

[57] The early modern break with medieval cookery was marked by a shift from quantitative display to the qualitative refinement of "conceited" dishes. For the first time, as Stephen Mennell notes in *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985), "knowledgeability and a sense of delicacy in matters of food" had come to function as markers of elite status—there was now "food to be emulated and food to be disdained." Differences in social standing were expressed not so much through the quantity or kind of food consumed by different social classes but "more subtly through styles of cooking and serving" (75). When it came to meat, the elite were no longer distinguished as those who ate game and fowl as opposed to "gross meats" but as those who ate good cuts of meat as opposed to low-grade cuts. The "cut" of one's meat, as Jean-Louis Flandrin puts it, literally took on a social function, that of "dividing the vulgar from the distinguished"; see Jean-Louis Flandrin, "Distinction through Taste" in *Passions of the Renaissance*, Roger Chartier, ed., Vol. 3 of *A History of Private Life*, Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, gen. eds., trans. Arthur Goldhammer, 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard UP, 1987–91), 265–307, esp. 273. Cf. Fernand Braudel, "Superfluity and Sufficiency: Food and Drink," *The Structures of Everyday Life*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper and Row, 1981). On the refinement of table manners, cf. Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners*, Vol. 1 of *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, 2 vols. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

responds. "This doth fit the time, / And gentlewomen wear such caps as these" (ll. 69–70), revealing that she has indeed been seduced by the lure of the status object. Petruchio continues to expand his list of edible trifles, insisting: "It is a paltry cap, / A custard-coffin, a bauble, a silken pie" (ll. 81–82). In likening the commodities that are brought in after supper to banqueting conceits, commonly known as "voids" or "empty dishes," Petruchio again emphasizes the commodity's lack of substance. To consume such cates is to consume a void. It brings not satiety but only renewed want.

Banqueting conceits, Patricia Fumerton maintains, were made not to satisfy the appetite (indeed, they were often made out of nothing but paper) but rather to serve as signifiers of status and superfluous expenditure.[58] This function was quite explicit in the case of certain "conceited dishes" that were actually made in the likeness of expensive but "trifling" luxury commodities, such as "Buttons, Beades, Chaines . . . Slippers . . . [and] Gloues."[59] As if to secure their purely superfluous status, the consumption of these "empty dishes" took the form of conspicuous waste; at the banquet's end they were ceremonially smashed to pieces.[60] Through his taming lesson, Petruchio aims to separate the stuff of the commodity from its value as a cate. Status objects, he teaches, are not so much things as no-things.[61]

Petruchio continues the analogy, comparing the tailor's latest creation to a dainty dessert:

> What's this? A sleeve? 'Tis like a demi-cannon.
> What, up and down, carv'd like an apple-tart?
> Here's snip and nip and cut and slish and slash,
> Like to a censer in a barber's shop.
> Why, what a devil's name, tailor, call'st thou this?
> (ll. 88–92)

The dress is refused on account of its "curiously cut" sleeves (l. 141), which are likened to the design of a dainty apple-tart, one that is "carv'd" full of holes. When the tailor objects that the dress was designed "according to the fashion and the time" (l. 95) and in accordance with Grumio's orders, the latter responds: "I gave him no order, I gave him the stuff" (l. 119). Grumio follows his master in distinguishing between the "stuff" of the dress in its "ungilded and unsweetened" form and the labor that transforms it into a cate, a thing of value. "I bid thy master cut out the gown," he says, "but I did not bid him cut it to pieces" (ll. 127–28), further differentiating the utilitarian act of "cut[ting] out" from the stylish "cut[ting] . . . to pieces"—the snipping, nipping, slishing, and slashing that creates its cultural value as an object of fashionable taste.

[58] According to Patricia Fumerton, the "essential food value of banqueting stuffs . . . was *nothing*. . . . the culinary referent of the void was zero" (*Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament* [Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1991], 133).

[59] John Murrell, *A Daily Exercise for Ladies and Gentlewomen* . . . (1617), quoted here from Fumerton, 130.

[60] Fumerton, 130–32.

[61] In Marx's terms, Petruchio distinguishes a thing's "stiff and starchy existence as a body" from "its sublime objectivity as a value" (144). "Not an atom of matter," Marx writes, "enters into the objectivity of commodities as values; in this it is the direct opposite of the coarsely sensuous objectivity of commodities as physical objects" (138).

When the tailor reads out the "note of the fashion" to show that it indeed specifies " 'The sleeves curiously cut,' " Grumio replies: "Error i' th' bill, sir, error i' th' bill! I commanded the sleeves should be cut out, and sewed up again" (ll. 129, 141, 143–44). Grumio's remark suggests that, if Petruchio's taming strategy reveals the "cut" that divides the commodity into its twofold form as use-value and status value,[62] it does so only in order to sew it up again, to reduce the status value, make it conform to the use value. In a commodified world, however, to suture the cut of the commodity and thereby create the ruse that its value is inherent in its substance is to turn the commodity into a fetish. Baudrillard's definition of commodity fetishism is particularly apt in this context. For what is fetishized, he maintains, is specifically "the sign object, the object eviscerated of its substance . . . and reduced to the state of marking a difference."[63] Petruchio's taming lesson unmasks both the cut of the commodity, its function as a differentiating signifier of social distinction, and the lure that sutures this cut by dissimulating the lack of substance, or stuff, it conceals. It does so, however, in order to teach Kate both how better to distinguish and how to deploy them.

The success of this lesson is borne out by Kate's final gestures of obedience, the destruction of her dainty cap and her last speech, gestures that are performed as the final, sweet conceits of the play's concluding scene, which is, not coincidentally, set at a banquet. "My banquet is to close our stomachs up," announces Lucentio, its host, to the play's three newlywed couples, "For now we sit to chat as well as eat" (5.2.9, 11). The ensuing chat is an intricate verbal performance in which the bridegrooms argue over whose wife is the "veriest shrew of all" (l. 64). To decide the matter, Petruchio proposes the test of obedience, which Kate wins when she unhesitatingly obeys his command to come. Although Kate's arrival wins the bet, Petruchio insists on "show[ing] more sign" of his wife's "new-built virtue and obedience" (ll. 118–19) by commanding her to destroy her dainty cap. That Kate should appear at the end of the play sporting a fashionable cap, much like (or, depending on the production, identical to) the one taken away when she was less obedient, confirms that Petruchio's taming strategy is aimed not at closing her stomach up, at abolishing her appetite for cates, but rather at harnessing that appetite, at making it conform to his own economic interests.

The destruction of Kate's confectionary cap, like that of a banqueting void, represents not a renunciation of the commodity but rather an affirmation of its power, of its new hold over the early modern household economy. "Economic power," Bourdieu maintains, "is first and foremost a power to keep economic necessity at arm's length. This is why it universally asserts itself by the destruction of riches."[64] It is a gesture of conspicuous yet carefully controlled waste, demonstrating both Petruchio's ability to afford superfluous expenditure and his control over his wife's consumption. Unlike her earlier breaking of the lute, this destruction of riches demonstrates

[62] "Commodities come into the world in the form of use-values or material goods. . . . This is their plain, homely, natural form. However, they are only commodities because they have a dual nature, because they are at the same time objects of utility and bearers of value" (Marx, 138).

[63] Baudrillard, 93.

[64] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 55.

that Kate has been successfully broken to her proper place within the symbolic order of things.

While Kate's final gesture of obedience signals her readiness to assume an active managerial role in domestic affairs, we never in fact *see* her preside over the household economy or its property. This gesture itself, moreover, is peculiarly self-effacing. It seems that Kate can prove her readiness for this role only through a wholly *passive* gesture that displays her subordination to her husband's authority. She can prove herself a worthy caretaker of commodities only by destroying her own most cherished commodity, her fashionable cap. The self-consuming nature of the gesture reflects the contradictions inherent in the role of the "vicarious consumer": it must appear wholly idle (efface its status as work); be ostensibly unproductive or superfluous (ideally, an act of conspicuous waste); and, most importantly, be executed vicariously (i.e., *for* another). The vicarious consumer consumes not for herself, in her own interest, but for that of her husband.

What distinguishes Kate from the other wives at the end of the play is not that she has learned how *not* to consume but that she has learned how to consume *nothings* (voids, empty dishes, insubstantial cates) for her husband's benefit. Failing to comprehend this novel form of duty, Bianca and the Widow express their abhorrence at the apparently useless waste of such a fine cap. Baptista, however, is won over by the signs of Kate's "new-built" virtue and obedience, so much so that he awards Petruchio another twenty thousand crowns: "Another dowry to another daughter," he announces, "for she is chang'd, as she had never been" (ll. 115–16). By the end of the play, Kate has successfully learned to manipulate status objects and, in so doing, to bolster her husband's credit in a way that "makes capital go to capital."

If, as Baptista's act demonstrates, symbolic capital is but "a transformed and thereby *disguised* form" of economic capital, it nevertheless produces its "proper effect," according to Bourdieu, "only inasmuch, as it conceals the fact that it originates in 'material' forms of capital which are also, in the last analysis, the source of its effects."[65] It becomes the ideological burden of Kate's final speech to conceal the economic underpinnings of her symbolic labor, to render them culturally invisible. The speech accomplishes this task by defining the housewife's (nonproductive) activity as a form of leisure rather than labor:

> Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
> Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee,
> And for thy maintenance; commits his body
> To painful labour both by sea and land,
> To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,
> Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe;
> And craves no other tribute at thy hands
> But love, fair looks, and true obedience;
> Too little payment for so great a debt.
> (ll. 147–55)

Kate's speech inaugurates a new gendered division of labor, according to which husbands "labour both by sea and land" while their wives luxuriate at

[65] Bourdieu, *Outline*, 183.

home, their "soft," "weak" bodies being "unapt to toil and trouble in the world" (ll. 166–67). It is this new division of labor that produces the economic invisibility and unremunerated status of housework described by housework theory. In erasing the status of housework as work, separate-sphere ideology renders the housewife perpetually indebted to her husband insofar as her "love, fair looks, and true obedience" are insufficient "payment" for the material comfort in which she is "kept."

Within the terms of the play, however, the unremunerated status of housework derives not from its circumscription within a matrix of use-value production but from the cultural necessity of concealing the economic origins of the housewife's symbolic labor. If *The Taming of the Shrew* may be said to map the market's infiltration of the household through the commodity form in late-sixteenth-century England, it also marks the emergence of the ideological separation of feminine and masculine spheres of labor (and with it the separation of home/market and housework/work), which masked this infiltration by constructing the household as a refuge *from* the market. Ironically, Kate's final speech renders invisible the housewife's managerial role as a consumer and caretaker of household cates—the very role for which Petruchio's "taming-school" (4.2.54) seeks to prepare her. At the end of the play, she herself appears to stand idle, frozen within the domestic sphere, like a use-less household cate.

As Lena Cowen Orlin points out, "the husband's political roles of lord, head, and sovereign are grounded economically" in Kate's speech in his role as her "keeper."[66] The speech ingeniously deploys the language of economic debt and indebtedness to secure a political analogy in which the household is figured as a microcosm of the state and the husband its sovereign or prince. Its aim is to restore the husband's "rule, supremacy, and sway" (5.2.164) within a domestic hierarchy that has been threatened by the housewife's managerial role in the household economy. The speech, as Orlin notes, shifts back and forth between political and economic forms of obligation; the husband's political sovereignty over his wife is immediately anchored in his role as her keeper. Once the marital relation is defined in economic terms ("one that cares for thee, / And for thy maintenance") and the wife's position within this relation defined as one of lack ("Too little payment for so great a debt"), the speech returns again to the political analogy, to what "the subject owes the prince," as if the housewife's deficit in the former domain (her economic debt) entails her subjection in the latter (her political duty):

> Such duty as the subject owes the prince
> Even such a woman oweth to her husband.
> And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
> And not obedient to his honest will,
> What is she but a foul contending rebel,
> And graceless traitor to her loving lord?
> 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.
> (ll. 156–65)

[66] Orlin, 185.

The erasure of the economic value of the housewife's nonproductive domestic activity in Kate's speech is thus employed to secure a political analogy that disarms the perceived threat posed by this activity.

The political analogy between "the structure of authority in the family and the state" was not, of course, invented by Shakespeare. It was, as Susan Amussen points out, commonplace in both domestic manuals and political treatises of the period.[67] Yet there was, as Amussen also notes, a marked disparity between patriarchal theory and quotidian practice in the early modern household. Though "theoretically, the husband ruled his wife, and she obeyed him in all things," Amussen asserts, in practice the wife "was joined with him in the government of the household."[68] The political analogy restores the husband's sovereignty or mastery over his wife by devaluing her role in the household economy. Moreover, insofar as it succeeds in domesticating the housewife's relation to household cates by subordinating it to her husband's authority, the speech may be said to circumscribe this relation within the safe boundaries of vicarious consumption. Kate's role as a consumer has by the end of the play been successfully adjusted, made to conform, to her position as chattel (perpetually indebted to her husband for the things he provides her with, she may be said to belong to him). As Orlin argues, the role of things in the final "accommodation" that Petruchio and Kate reach is simply to "purchase the consent that perpetuates the gendered social contract"; they serve merely to "legitimate the social order."[69]

In the commodious conclusion of the comedy, all "jarring notes agree" (5.2.1) and the cut of the commodity has been sutured, or sewn up again. What commodity fetishism seeks, according to Baudrillard, is "the closed perfection of a system," a system that appears to know no lack.[70] Comedy is precisely such a system: "suturing all contradictions and divisions," it "gives ideology its power of fascination."[71] The effect that Kate's final signs of obedience produce in her audience is indeed one of fascination: "Here is a wonder, if you talk of a wonder," Lucentio utters. "And so it is," Hortensio responds; "I wonder what it bodes" (ll. 107–8). The "wonder" produced by Kate's symbolic labor, I would argue, is nothing other than a fascination with a "perfect closure effected by signs."[72] Kate's final chat is fetishized as a "labor of appearances and signs," as a symbolic labor that conceals its own economic motivation and erases all traces of the labor necessary to produce it.

I do not mean to suggest (following the play's so-called revisionist readers) that Kate's speech should be read ironically, as evidence of her deceit, any more than (with its antirevisionist readers) as evidence of her "true"

[67] S. D. Amussen, "Gender, Family and the Social Order, 1560–1725" in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), 196–217, esp. 196.

[68] Amussen, 201. Amussen cites the housewife's supervision of children and servants and her role in the household economy as instances of her joint governorship (203).

[69] Orlin, 185.

[70] Baudrillard, 93.

[71] Baudrillard, 101.

[72] Baudrillard, 96.

submission.[73] Both readings, it seems to me, leave Kate squarely within the framework of the medieval shrew tradition. In the former she remains a duplicitous shrew, while in the latter she becomes "a second Grissel" (2.1.288).[74] I maintain, rather, that *The Taming of the Shrew* recasts this tradition in entirely new terms, terms that map, through the commodity form itself, the market's infiltration and reorganization of the household economy during the early modern period. From this perspective Kate's "labor of signs" is of interest not because it marks her as a deep or complex subject but rather because it demonstrates the ways in which the housewife's subjectivity was constituted through its relation to status objects, or household cates.[75]

In the terms of this reading, it becomes less important to decide whether Petruchio succeeds in taming Kate than to point out, with Grumio, that in so doing, he is himself "Kated." Petruchio, no less than Kate, is subject to the logic of exchange, to the *perpetuum mobile* of commodity circulation. Grumio's insight also accounts for an ambiguity in my title: Are commodities in this play the subject or object of domestication? Slightly adapting Marx, we may answer this question as follows: The movement of subjects within the play takes the form of a movement made by things, and these things, far from being under their control, in fact control them.[76] Or we might choose to let Kate have the last word, recalling her answer to Petruchio's pronouncement that he has been "mov'd" to make her his wife: "Mov'd, in good time! Let him that mov'd you hither / Remove you hence. I knew you at the first / You were a movable" (2.1.195–97).

[73] Robert B. Heilman was the first to speak of "revisionist" readings of *Shrew* in his "The *Taming* Untamed, or, The Return of the Shrew," *Modern Language Quarterly* 27 (1966): 147–61. John C. Bean then divided *Shrew* criticism into both revisionist and antirevisionist camps in his "Comic Structure and the Humanizing of Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*."

[74] The duplicitous shrew was a common topos in medieval literature. In William Dunbar's "Tretis of the tua mariit Wemen and the Wedo," for example, the shrewd widow gets her way with her husband by feigning submission: " . . . I wes a schrew evir," she confides to her gossips, "Bot I wes schene [bright] in my schrowd [clothing] and schew me innocent; / And thought I dour wes and dane, dispitous and bald, / I wes dissymblit suttelly in a sanctis liknes: / I semyt sober and sueit, and sempill without fraud, / Bot I couth sexty dissaif [deceive] that suttillar wer haldin." The widow offers the following lesson to future shrews: "Be constant in your governance and counterfeit gud maneris, / [. . .] dowis ay in double forme, / [. . .] Be amyable with humble face, as angellis apperand, / [. . .] Be of your luke like innocentis, thoght ye haif evill myndis" (William Dunbar, *Poems*, ed. James Kinsley [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958], ll. 108–13 and 116–24).

Antirevisionist readings of the play remain equally within the medieval shrew tradition when reading Kate's final speech as evidence of her "true" submission, giving credit to Petruchio's assertion that he will turn Katherina into "a second Grissel." In Chaucer's version of the story, Griselde's humble origins and predilection for hard labor position her as the very antithesis of the high-born, slothful, duplicitous shrew and lead her to suffer gladly her aristocratic husband's cruel tests. In contrast to the shrew's proverbial duplicity, Chaucer stresses Griselde's unfeigned satisfaction with her degree; see Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. N. F. Blake (London: Edward Arnold, 1980).

[75] Orlin similarly proposes an alternative to traditional characterologic readings of the play, one that focuses on the "performance of things" (186).

[76] Cf. Marx's assertion that "[exchangers'] own movement . . . within society has for them the form of a movement made by things, and these things, far from being under their control, in fact control them" (167–68).