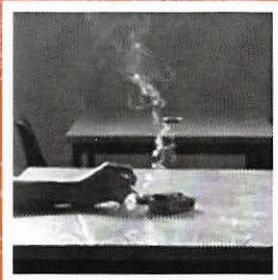
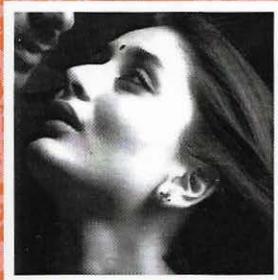


SB



Shakespeare Bulletin

The Journal of Early Modern Drama in Performance

Volume 35

Number 4

Winter 2017

The Taming of the Shrew

Presented by the **Synetic Theater** at **Synetic Theater**, Arlington, VA. February 15–March 19, 2017. Adapted by Paata Tsikurishvili and directed by Irina Tsikurishvili. Choreography by Zana Gankhuyag. Costume and set design by Anastasia Rurikova Simes. Lighting design by Brian Allard. Music directed by Irakli Kavsadze. Music composition and sound design by Konstantine Lortkipanidze. With Janine Baumgardner (Widow and Ensemble), Justin Bell (Lucentio), Katherine Frattini (Model and Ensemble), Chris Galindo (Tailor and Ensemble), Zana Gankhuyag (Gremio), Irakli Kavsadze (Baptista), Alex Mills (Grumio), Stephen Russell Murray (Hortensio), Ryan Sellers (Petruccio), Nutsa Tediashvili (Bianca), Irina Tsikurishvili (Katherine), and Scott Turner (Tranio).

ALEXA ALICE JOUBIN, *George Washington University*

Can we entertain the idea that *The Taming of the Shrew* can be performed and received as comedy in the post-Women's March US? If so, would the laughter be empathetic and solidary rather than callous? The answer lies in physical theater which is uniquely poised to activate elements of farce in the play. *Shrew* is one of the Shakespearean comedies that tends to clash with modern sensibilities and is therefore generally considered challenging to stage. The Synetic Theater's version reminds us that, after all, the foundation of this play is farce, a play-within-a-play to mock the worldview of Christopher Sly the drunkard and to entertain the impersonated lords who derive voyeuristic pleasure from watching Sly gawking at *Shrew*. The so-called play-within-a-play could also be a fanciful dream of the inebriated Sly.

The Synetic Theater's ninety-minute dance, musical, and visual feast rendered the comedy in vibrant colors—without spoken words. There was no induction or framing scene, though a fair amount of extratextual material had been introduced. Similar to Synetic's 2009 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which opened with the birth of the Indian boy who transformed into the adult Puck, *Shrew* opened with a funeral scene in a sober tone, with Baptista and his daughters mourning the passing of his wife. With a stroke of deliberate incongruity, the funeral quickly faded into a series of fast-paced scenes of frivolity and slapstick comedy, as whimsical and kittenish Bianca pranced among suitors and took selfies. The contrast between the opening and subsequent scenes painted Bianca in a negative light. Contrary to traditional images of a saintly, virginal Bianca in Shakespeare's text, Nutsa Tediashvili's Bianca was not a particularly likeable character.

Crucially, the production did not invite the audience to laugh at Katherine's expense. Far from it. We laughed with Irina Tsikurishvili's Katherine and Ryan Sellers's Petruccio as they tripped each other over and, in the final scene, as they schemed hand-in-hand for the wager money. The Synetic *Shrew* did not so much rehash Elizabethan ideologies of gender roles as explore the play's farcical undertone through the comical self-importance of the male characters around Katherine and through pantomime as a caricature.

As such, Paata Tsikurishvili's adaptation offered a sympathetic interpretation of Katherine's seemingly antisocial behaviors in the context of her fashion designer father Baptista's flamboyant lifestyle and her self-indulgent sister Bianca's Kardashiansque narcissism. Petruccio was no longer the lone antagonist. With their outsized personalities and retro 1990s costumes set against larger-than-life video projections by Riki Kim on the four gray columns center stage, Baptista and Bianca became the perfect provocateurs in Katherine's life. Katherine experienced a sense of entrapment in the socialite society in Paduawood, a thinly-veiled metaphor for contemporary Hollywood. Consequently, Katherine distanced herself from the world of Baptista and Bianca, especially the catwalk scene earlier on where Bianca pranced across the stage in exuberant outfits. Her body language and movements were diametrically opposed to those of Bianca who flirted with a large group of suitors who were after her family's wealth and fame. Bianca's suitors were portrayed in broad, comic strokes, including a cross-dressing Lucentio and a puppy-like Gremio. While the series of wooing scenes were clearly played for laughs, they also served to underscore Katherine's contempt, frustration, and possibly jealousy of Bianca's popularity.

At the core of Tsikurishvili's reimagined narrative was the relationship between Petruccio, a painter who loses the motivation to paint until he meets Katherine, and Katherine, a woman who discovers her true self and protects it at all costs. The visually-driven narrative in this stage production developed a clear trajectory that charted Katherine's evolution from a social outcast to a heartbroken wife upon discovering that wager money was behind Petruccio's marriage with her to a woman who rewrote the rules of the game by collaborating with Petruccio to win the wager in the final scene. The couple danced in competition against and eventually in unison with each other.

Synetic Theater took its name from the notions of kinetic synergy. While well-known for their Helen Hayes Award-winning series of silent Shakespeare performances since *Hamlet ... the Rest is Silence* (2002),

the company's adaptations are full of music, sound, and kinetic energy. Founded by Paata and Irina Tsikurishvili, a Georgian couple who immigrated to the U.S. in the 1990s, Synthetic Theater focused on telling classical stories through music and dance. In *Shrew*, music in most scenes highlighted the superficiality of Paduawood. Soulful violin permeated the extended, melancholic scenes where Petruccio painted alone at night.

Two elements stood out in the evolving relationship between Petruccio and Katherine. First, the musically enhanced, physically demanding banter between them mixed calculated cruelty with slapstick comedy to make the taming of Katherine a more palatable caricature. In the banquet scene in Petruccio's home, set up in the fashion of the Last Supper with a long table facing the audience and Petruccio sitting in the middle, Katherine found herself surrounded by lavish food but was unable to reach any dish. To Stomp beats, dishes were passed among Petruccio and his servants. Katherine hallucinated that the characters around her were humans with chicken heads. Her hallucination was represented by all the characters around her pulling out full-head masks resembling chicken heads in the middle of the dinner. As they swayed like chickens, they continued passing dishes around. In a few minutes they snapped back to reality and hid their masks under the table as if nothing had happened, leaving Katherine in a confused state. The Chaplinesque precision and dark humor added a layer of dramatic irony that is only possible in pantomime such as this.

Secondly, Tsikurishvili added a scene of self-recognition and conciliation between Petruccio and Katherine to convey the idea that true love prevailed. Katherine was annoyed by Petruccio's sudden burst of passion to paint all night after the "taming scene" and dinner at his house. She discovered by accident that she had been the source of Petruccio's new-found inspiration and subject of his new paintings. Standing in front of her portraits on the walls, Katherine was moved and fell in love with Petruccio, as her body language and facial expression made clear. The couple danced in unison as they threw paint at each other. A constructed sense of childlike innocence informed this scene.

The production reframed one of the most grueling questions raised by Shakespeare's narrative, namely the nature of Petruccio's taming and domestication of Kate, by tracing a new narrative arc that focused on the genuine love between Petruccio and Katherine, who turned out to be a match for each other both in terms of temper and their disapproval—and conversely clever manipulation—of Paduawood's fame-craving culture. The playbill suggested that the production was driven by the idea that "in spite of past disillusionments, disappointments, failings and selfishness,

love is still possible.” The adaptor and director enjoyed the advantage of not having to deal with the ideologically challenging verbal messages in Kate’s long “submission speech” which has been variously performed, historically, with an ironic wink or with a tone of defiance in an effort to redeem the now politically incorrect play. In the final scene, Katherine and Petruccio were in on the scheme to win the wager, turning the tables on Paduawood’s paparazzi by taking advantage of the culture of scandalous headlines. The couple walked off triumphantly, having delivered, as it were, what Paduawood craved (the couple’s marriage as a source of tabloid materials that can be monetized) while keeping their true selves intact.



The Spanish Tragedy

Presented by **The Broccoli Project** at the **Black Box Theater, University of Texas at Austin**, TX. April 20–23, 2017. Directed by Who Ray and David Higbee Williams. Music and puppeteer training by James Smith. Lighting by Laura Nagy. Tech by Dana Moore. With Kat Agudo (King of Spain/Isabella/Lorenzo’s Page/Watchman), Casey Allman (Balthazar/Ambassador/Serberine/Hangman/Jacques), Gabe Colombo (Ghost of Andrea), Laura Doan (Bel-Imperia/Spanish General/Bazardo/Watchman), Patrick Greer (Duke of Castile/Horatio/Pedringano/Ambassador), Austin Hanna (Hieronimo/Ambassador), Nicole Harrison (Revenge), and Bryson Kisner (Lorenzo/Pedro/Watchman).

ELIZABETH ZEMAN KOLKOVICH, *The Ohio State University,
Mansfield*

On opening night of a student production of *The Spanish Tragedy* at the University of Texas at Austin, its directors warned the audience about a “blood splatter zone” and “puppet sex.” Although these two delightful spoilers accurately previewed its most memorable parts, the performance was still filled with surprises. This swiftly moving and thoroughly enjoyable puppet version of Thomas Kyd’s revenge tragedy demonstrated the value of creative approaches to Renaissance drama.

Conceived and executed by a student group called “The Broccoli Project,” the performance began with a man singing the Muppets theme song. The company members and their friends had made all the puppets, and indeed many recalled Jim Henson’s style. Lorenzo’s dimwitted Page, not quite a frog but resembling Kermit, was a small green puppet with googly eyes and curly hair. Some puppet choices were irreverent,



PROJECT MUSE®

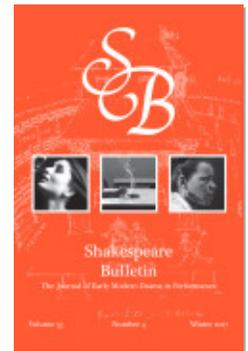
The Taming of the Shrew (review)

Alexa Alice Joubin

Shakespeare Bulletin, Volume 35, Number 4, Winter 2017, pp. 700-703 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/shb.2017.0052>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/679761>

Shakespeare Bulletin

Volume 35 Number 4 Winter 2017

Essays

- Speeches, Speech Order, and Performance in
Shakespeare's Printed Playtexts 521
MATT VADNAIS
- "O'erwhelmed with Noise": Sound-Houses and Sonic
Experiments in Ben Jonson's *Epicene* 541
BRIONY FROST
- Queer Slackers in Billy Morrisette's *Scotland, PA* 575
JARRED WIEHE
- Black Skin, Black Castes: Overcoming a Fidelity
Discourse in Bhardwaj's *Omkaara* 599
SAKSHAM SHARDA
- "The forms of things unknown": Shakespeare and the
Rise of the Live Broadcast 627
ERIN SULLIVAN

Performance Retrospective

- Taking *The Alchemist* Seriously: Polly Findlay's RSC
Production as Seen by a Theater Historian 663
ALAN C. DESSEN

Review Essay

- Basquiat Cases: *Hamlet*, *Doctor Faustus*, and *The
Alchemist* at the Royal Shakespeare Company 675
GRACE GODWIN

Performance Reviews

- King Lear*, WSC Avant Bard (Gunston Arts Center) 687
MUSA GURNIS

- Julius Caesar*, Royal Shakespeare Company (Royal Shakespeare Theatre) 689
- Antony and Cleopatra*, Royal Shakespeare Company (Royal Shakespeare Theatre)
- Titus Andronicus*, Royal Shakespeare Company (Royal Shakespeare Theatre)
- JUSTIN B. HOPKINS
- The Taming of the Shrew*, Synetic Theater 700
- ALEXA ALICE JOUBIN
- The Spanish Tragedy*, The Broccoli Project (Black Box Theater, University of Texas at Austin) 703
- ELIZABETH ZEMAN KOLKOVICH
- Timon of Athens*, Folger Theatre (Elizabethan Theatre) 707
- NOEL SLOBODA
- Julius Caesar*, The Public Theater's Free Shakespeare in the Park (Delacorte Theater) 711
- A Midsummer Night's Dream*, The Public Theater's Free Shakespeare in the Park (Delacorte Theater)
- Hamlet*, The Public Theater (Anspacher Theater)
- DAN VENNING

Second Looks

- The Winter's Tale*, Cheek by Jowl (Silk Street Theatre, Barbican) 721
- PASCALE AEBISCHER

Book Reviews

- Paul Menzer. *Shakespeare in the Theatre: The American Shakespeare Center.* 727
- PASCALE AEBISCHER
- Darren Tunstall. *Shakespeare and Gesture in Practice.* 731
- MIRANDA FAY THOMAS

**Editor**

Pascale Aebischer
College of Humanities
University of Exeter
Queen's Building
The Queen's Drive
Exeter EX4 4QH
UNITED KINGDOM
Email: sbeditor@ex.ac.uk

Performance Review Editor

Harry R. McCarthy
College of Humanities
University of Exeter
Queen's Building
The Queen's Drive
Exeter EX4 4QH
UNITED KINGDOM
Email: sbassistant@ex.ac.uk

Book Review Editor

Kathryn Prince
Department of Theatre
University of Ottawa
135 Séraphin-Marion
Ottawa ON K1N 6N5
CANADA
Email: kprince@uottawa.ca

Paul Prescott

Department of English and
Comparative Literary Studies
Humanities Building
University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 7AL
UNITED KINGDOM
Email: p.prescott@warwick.ac.uk

Editorial Assistant

Harry R. McCarthy
Email: sbassistant@ex.ac.uk

Website

www.press.jhu.edu/journals/shakespeare_bulletin/

Shakespeare Bulletin, a peer-reviewed journal of performance criticism and scholarship, provides commentary on Shakespeare and Renaissance drama through feature articles, theatre and film reviews, and book reviews. Begun in 1982 as the organ of the New York Shakespeare Society, which became the Columbia University Seminar, the journal formerly appeared bimonthly; since 1990 it has been appearing as a quarterly. In 1992, it incorporated *Shakespeare on Film Newsletter*, which began publication in 1976. *Shakespeare Bulletin's* theatre coverage serves as a record of production in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and throughout the world. Articles appearing in *Shakespeare Bulletin* are indexed in *The World Shakespeare Bibliography* and the *MLA Bibliography*. This journal is a member of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals.

Shakespeare Bulletin (ISSN 0748-2558) is published quarterly in Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter by Johns Hopkins University Press, 2715 N. Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218-4363. Periodicals postage paid at Baltimore, Maryland, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Shakespeare Bulletin*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Journals Division, 2715 N. Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218-4363.

Permissions. © 2017 by Johns Hopkins University Press. No portion of *Shakespeare Bulletin* may be reproduced by any process or technique without the formal consent of the publisher. Copies for personal or internal use may be made on the condition that the copier pay a fee of \$.20 per page through the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Dr., Danvers, MA 01970, for copying beyond that permitted by Section 107 or 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law. This consent does not extend to other kinds of copying, such as copying for general distribution, for advertising or promotional purposes, for creating new collective works, or for resale. 0748-2558/166 \$.20/page Direct all other permissions requests to Permissions Manager, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2715 N. Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218-4363; or visit www.press.jhu.edu/cgi-bin/permissions.cgi.

Subscriptions. For up-to-date pricing information, please visit the journal webpage at: http://www.press.jhu.edu/journals/shakespeare_bulletin/pricing.html. If applicable, please add state taxes or GST. *Prepayment is required for shipment.* All orders, address changes, and other business correspondence should be addressed to Johns Hopkins University Press, Journals Division, P.O. Box 19966, Baltimore, MD 21211-0966 (USA); telephone (410) 516-6987; fax (410) 516-3866; email jrnlcirc@press.jhu.edu; or tollfree 1-800-548-1784 (US and Canada only). Claims for replacement of missing issues must be received within three months of mailing (six months for foreign addresses). All notices of change of address should provide both the old and new address.

Submissions. All essays submitted for publication should conform to the current *MLA Style Manual*. For inquiries about specific departments, please contact the appropriate editor directly. Please note that book and performance reviews are assigned by the appropriate editor and should be requested and approved before any work is done. Articles may be sent directly to the editor, preferably by email as a Word attachment.

The paper used in this publication meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper). ☼

Editorial Board and Contributing Editors

- Stephen M. Buhler
University of Nebraska, Lincoln
- Mark Thornton Burnett
Queen's University Belfast, UK
- Samuel Crowl
Ohio University
- Alan C. Dessen
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
- Keir Elam
University of Bologna, Italy
- Michael D. Friedman
University of Scranton
- John Gillies
University of Essex, UK
- Katharine Goodland
*College of Staten Island, City University
of New York*
- Andrew James Hartley
University of North Carolina, Charlotte
- Barbara Hodgdon
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
- Courtney Lehmann
University of the Pacific
- Naomi C. Liebler
Montclair State University
- Jeremy Lopez
University of Toronto
- Genevieve Love
Colorado College
- Cary Mazer
University of Pennsylvania
- Kirk Melnikoff
University of North Carolina, Charlotte
- Lucy Munro
King's College London, UK
- Carol Chillington Rutter
University of Warwick, UK
- Richard Schoch
Queen's University Belfast, UK
- Greg M. Colón Semenza
University of Connecticut, Storrs
- Catherine Silverstone
Queen Mary, University of London, UK
- Kim Solga
Western University, Canada
- Tiffany Stern
*Shakespeare Institute, University of
Birmingham, UK*
- Fran Teague
University of Georgia
- Ayanna Thompson
George Washington University
- W. B. Worthen
Barnard College, Columbia University
- Ramona Wray
Queen's University Belfast, UK
- Paul Yachnin
McGill University, Canada

Emeritus Editorial Board

- Paul Bertram
Maurice Charney
H.R. Coursen
Harry Keyishian
Ryuta Minami
Paul Nelsen
Martin Orkin

Founding Editor

Isymour Isenberg

Previous Co-Editors

- James P. Lusardi and June Schlueter, *Lafayette College* (1983–2003)
Andrew James Hartley, *University of North Carolina, Charlotte* (2003–2013)