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### Across Cultures

Natália Pikli

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# Natália Pikli

## ACROSS CULTURES

### Shakespeare and the carnivalesque shrew

*The 'tongue' of Shakespearean shrews offers a crux of diverse cultural discourses, referring to early modern gossips and shrews, the examination of which proves instructive both in synchronic and diachronic aspects, across geographical borders. The present paper focusses on cultural phenomena surrounding the figure and the etymology of the 'shrew' in sixteenth-century England and Hungary which provide intriguing parallels, while showing – as the social contexts of written and printed materials of the age differ radically – a breach in the cultural memory of the two peoples after the sixteenth century, with a concomitant influence on the translation and reception of William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* in Hungary in the course of the following centuries. Besides examining the early modern contexts of the 'shrew' both in England and Hungary, with a special emphasis on popular printed texts, the paper also reflects on how Jan Assmann's tenets regarding cultural memory may be applied in such research, and makes use of Bakhtin's carnival theory as practised in early modern studies.*

**Keywords** Shakespeare; carnival; cultural memory; early modern popular culture; Jan Assmann

#### Methods and approaches: crossroads of cultures and disciplines

Shakespearean texts often foreground problems with a wide range of references, promoting research in fields outside the strictly literary. Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory and cultural texts provides a useful framework of reference, offering insights regarding the role which Shakespeare's canonised text, brought into relief by non-canonical variations of the same theme, plays in the cultural memory of different peoples. The varied cultural phenomena relating to shrews and shrew-taming cohere as Assmannian cultural texts: 'By "cultural texts" we understand all sign complexes, that is, not just texts, but also dances, rites, symbols, and the rest, that possess a particular normative and formative authority in the establishment of meaning and identity' (Assmann, 2006: 123). Sixteenth-century shrew-discourses, both in England and Hungary, illustrate a varying degree of normativity, i.e. the taming of shrews, while simultaneously highlighting images of carnivalesque subversion with 'women on top', i.e. victorious shrews.

Bakhtinian carnival theory has fuelled a great variety of historical and literary research, and together with Barber's (1967) *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, it launched both a cross-cultural anthropological and a more historical, ethnographically based approach to Shakespearean texts. The present study relies on the results of both, as carnivalesque phenomena seem to cross borders with ease in early modern Europe – and in this respect there seems little relevance in what lies underneath: a general anthropological need for misrule or specific regional demands. Carnival is an umbrella term for a number of ritual practices and events, showing a curious mingling of rural and urban customs. To give a clear-cut definition of it is close to impossible, as numerous studies devoted to the subject attest, not least in the sense that they have varying definitions of carnival. For a start we could say that carnival is the temporary suspension of set hierarchies, 'licensed misrule' (in itself a paradox), a celebration of exuberant life force, the victory of the physical, of Nature over human-made authorities. In the Middle Ages carnival served as a general term for ritual revels which more or less incorporated rites of misrule and social subversion, electing mock rulers, putting an emphasis on feasting. The victory of low-life signalled the inversion of hierarchy – the fool was crowned, boys were elected bishops; ecclesiastical and mundane power was ridiculed as old, barren, and meaningless. The memories of the Roman Saturnalia, the *mimus* of antiquity joined with folk customs to create a wondrous reversal of everyday life, a communal celebration of topsy-turvydom.

The figure of the shrew is *per definitionem* carnivalesque: it exemplifies gender and social inversion. In addition, she is often surrounded by the physicality of the carnival, i.e. scatological jokes, verbal and physical violence, focussing on the body, often in a highly comic manner. As Chaucerian and English medieval theatrical texts attest, the theatricality of the shrew is inherent in her role as a comically rigid figure: 'The worst thing about a shrew, it seems, is her inability *not* to be a shrew, her Bergsonian inflexibility' (Caroll, 1985: 49). Therefore it is no wonder that the shrew appropriates a significant part of popular comic literature.

However, such a wide-ranging and apparently timeless concept of the role of the shrew seems less profitable for the present study. Therefore, besides referring to the appearance of carnivalesque shrews in different early modern discourses, this article will focus on the word proper and its overlapping meanings, which are either retrieved or lost, i.e. 'remembered' or 'forgotten' in Shakespearean texts and contexts. Focussing on etymologies and different but related meanings is not a unique approach in Shakespeare studies. Patricia Parker's groundbreaking volume, *Shakespeare from the Margins*, already authenticated such an emphasis on words which 'not only "matter" but function in relation to a larger field of discourse – or conflicting discourses – in this period, in ways that involve not only language but institutions, practices and laws' (Parker, 1996: 3). Historical linguistics may offer a starting point for research in other fields, as the meanings of the 'shrew' listed and exemplified in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED, 1989) appear and disappear in Shakespearean texts and their Hungarian translations, thus illustrating the workings of cultural memory as embedded in the cultural history of a word.

The first section attempts to give a rough outline of the contemporary English context of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. Here, however, as quite a number of informative studies, articles (Heaney, 1998; Sloan, 2004) and collections (Dolan, 1996) treat the subject, secondary references will suffice for the most part. The main

focus will be on considerations of etymological meaning retrieval and the workings of cultural memory. The second section highlights the parallels and contrasts between sixteenth-century English and Hungarian contexts, relying on texts from popular (libellous or edifying) verse and high or courtly literature. Finally, the special phraseology associated with shrews will be examined in relation to their afterlife in nineteenth- and twentieth-century translations of the title of the play, hopefully shedding light on problems of translation related to cultural memory.

### Shakespeare's Kate in the light of medieval and early modern English shrews

Shakespeare's playtext, the most famous shrew-discourse of its age, stages the act of eluding. The English words which are derived from Latin *ludere* ('to play'), *eludere* ('to deceive') and *ludicrus* ('done in sport') aptly describe Shakespeare's *play* of *The Taming of the Shrew*, which is both *ludicrous* and *elusive* – resisting closure of any kind, playfully baffling the critics. It presents a crux that intrigues scholars: first of all, textual ones, as the relationship between the existing quartos of *The Taming of A Shrew* (1594; 1596) and the Folio text of *The Taming of The Shrew* (1623) has not yet been settled, and maybe never will be. Although the Arden editor prefers the idea of 'an abnormal bad quarto' (Morris, 1994: 32), he cannot exclude other possibilities: namely, either the quarto of *The Taming of A Shrew* being a source for the Folio text, or the existence of a lost 'Ur-Shrew'. This is especially true since the Induction scenes are incomplete in the Folio: Sly does not get the last word, as he would in more typical shrew-taming stories. We could say that the complete framework of the Sly story in the quartos relies more heavily on popular jestbooks and taming stories, where after having 'learned' what to do with a shrew, the man leaves for home to put theory into practice:

SLY: I know now how to tame a shrew,  
I dreamt upon it all this night till now,  
And thou hast wakt me out of the best dreame  
That ever I had in my life, But Ile to my  
Wife presently and tame her too  
And if she anger me.

(*The Taming of A Shrew*, Scene xix, Morris, ed., 1994: 305)

Dating the play poses insuperable difficulties as well: fortunately, we have an entry in the Stationers' Register on 2 May 1594, but it is unclear whether the entry refers to *A Shrew* or *The Shrew*, and although Henslowe's diary records a performance in 1594, the precise sequence of the three early comedies is subject for debate. Consideration of genre aspects may help us with hypotheses regarding the order of their conception as well as highlighting the peculiarly baffling nature of the play. *The Taming of the Shrew* is a transitional play, presenting a rather uneasy combination of popular and high culture both in structure and genre. The jestbook-like, carnivalesque quality of the low comedy of transforming a very Warwickshire-bred beggarly drunken tinker into a lord in the Induction fuses with the refined high comedy of Italian origin in Bianca's storyline (Ariosto's *I Suppositi*), while the main plot featuring

Petruchio and Katherina is set at the crossroads of high and low culture. For example, it merges the image of the tiny shrewmouse, who, according to popular belief, has a poisonous bite, with the untamed haggard and the princely falcon; it also mingles the Italian citylife of Padua, famous for its university, with the customs and phraseology of an English country home (food, hunting, hawking). As a consequence, interpretations often clash: Kate's last monologue is the Archimedean point on which conflicting readings rest, condemning the play as brutal brainwashing at one extreme and celebrating it as a romantic love-comedy, encompassing true and rewarding metamorphosis, at the other. Perhaps it is best not to adhere to any particular view at this point but merely to say that Shakespeare's play eludes a consistent reading; nevertheless, considering contemporary contexts may elucidate the peculiarly baffling nature of the play.

According to the *OED* (1989), the first meaning and etymology of the 'shrew' refers to the tiny shrewmouse, who suffered an ill reputation in early modern England. As Morris argues, popular superstition coincided with 'official' natural history, as seen in Edward Topsell's *The Historie of Four-Footed Beasts* (1607) (Morris, 1994: 120). The shrew was regarded as 'a rauening beast feyning it selfe to be gentle and tame, but being touched it biteth deepe, and poisoneth deadly', having 'a cruel mind', not loving and not loved as 'feared of al', and if killed, it was wedged in an ash tree, which becoming a 'shrew-ash' could 'cure her owne bites' (Topsell, as quoted in Morris: 120–1). Not only does Shakespeare's Katherina display or is accused of quite a number of these traits, Bianca also behaves like a shrew in the last scenes – after 'feigning to be gentle and tame'. Kate the Shrew is cured by the shrewish behaviour of Petruchio, her spirit killed in feigned gentleness in his country home. Nevertheless, an important contradiction needs to be highlighted here: Bianca becomes a shrew when an already wedded wife, thus corresponding to the majority of shrew-discourses of the age, while Katherina is named Curst and a Shrew already before marriage, which rather alludes to folk tales on taming shrewish young girls mostly before or at the beginning of their marriage (Brunvand, 1996). Furthermore, the figure of the unwedded Kate the Curst illustrates not merely the usual shrew-taming discourse, but also the carnivalesque idea of 'women on top'.

By the mid-thirteenth century a shift in meaning had occurred: probably because of the alleged malignancy of the animal, from merely referring to a species of rodents, 'shrew' came to mean 'a wicked, evil-disposed or malignant man', and by the end of the fourteenth century the word was regularly applied to the Devil. As Shakespeare's text records, both man and woman, Petruchio and Kate, were referred to as evil, malignant, satanic:

GREMIO

Why he's a devil, a devil, a very fiend.

TRANIO

Why, she's a devil, a devil, the devil's dam.

(III.2: 153–4)

Not only the Shakespearean text but other contemporary references prove that the idea of shrewishness was not confined to women: the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists examples from Holinshed, 1587, 'These are some of the policies of such shrews or close booted gentlemen', or Dekker, 1609, 'Such as were shrewes to their wiues'

(*OED*, 1989: 'Shrew'). However, the most famous shrew discourses had involved women, mostly in wedlock, since Chaucer's *Wife of Bath* and Noah's *Wife* in the Chester mystery play. They had entered the scene as typical 'English shrewish wives', i.e. counterparts to corresponding characters in French *fablieaux* and Hans Sachs's carnivalesque farces. The overlapping meanings of the 'shrew' (animal, devil, froward) were thus coexisting in the cultural memory of Shakespeare's age, which 'remembered' all of them. The publishing of the Folio of Shakespeare's plays fixed these meanings in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, which, by becoming an inalienable part of English cultural memory, canonised and thus stabilised the first meaning of the 'shrew' as a froward woman or wife, up to our day.

The relations of the Shakespearean text and the workings of Assmannian normative cultural texts offer challenging insights: the norms referring to female behaviour during the period show a strikingly rich crosscutting of high and low, popular and official. As a rule, shrewish wives needed to be tamed according to contemporary views. Then, just like now, a well-known illustration is the oft-quoted 'parallel' to Shakespeare's play, the anonymous verse tale or ballad of *Here Begynneth a Merry Jest of a Shrewd and Curste Wyfe, Lapped in Morelles Skin, for Her Good Behavyor* (printed by Hugh Jackson, 1550, reprinted in Dolan, 1996: 257–288). This is just one among many narratives where a shrewish wife is brutally punished: she is beaten severely, then, when bleeding and fainting, she is covered in the salted hide of an old horse, Morrell, previously killed by the husband, to whom she later has to make a show of obedience. Dolan's (1996) *The Taming of the Shrew: Texts and Contexts* collects similar versions, and provides a wide range of early modern debates concerning shrews; other historical studies also record a similarly mainstream view on the necessity of taming unruly women (Brown, 2003), often in parallel with the breaking of the unruly horse (Heaney, 1998). Nevertheless, other cultural texts may also be relevant. The following examples will show how the ideal wife is described in discourses crosscutting the high and the low, the popular and the official, with an added emphasis on silencing the unruly tongue of shrews.

Proverbs, according to Assmann (2006: 38), are 'normative texts' that 'answer the question: What shall we do?', they 'transmit practical knowledge and point the way to right action', i.e. mediate the common sense and serve as a guideline in behaviour. The popular proverbs and proverbial sayings of the age found in Dent (1981) (who expanded Tilley's and Whiting's collections of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century proverbs) attest to the association of shrewish women and unruly tongues: 'A woman's strength is in her tongue', 'Maidens should be seen and not heard'. The same attitude appears in the most authoritative and respectable text of the age, the Bible. In influential translations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Miles Coverdale Bible, 1535; Bishop's Bible, 1568; King James Bible, 1611) *The Book of Proverbs* warns against the *brawling, troublesome, chiding, angry, contentious woman*; the *flattering tongue of the straunge woman*, affirming that a *foolish woman is clamorous*. The most famous and characteristic verses from the Bishop's Bible may sum up this attitude: 'It is better to sit in a corner upon the house toppe, then with a brawling woman in a wide house' (Prov. 21:9), 'It is better to dwell in the wyldernesse, then with a chydying and angrye woman' (Prov. 21:19). Although the similarity in attitude is palpable in sayings that enjoy more or less authority, note that the word 'shrew' does not occur in either.

Hungarian proverbs also suggest that a good wife is silent, and simultaneously highlight a similar disposition towards unruly wives and horses: ‘Her tongue makes the wife be beaten’ (‘Nyelve vereti meg az asszonyt’), ‘Never believe a woman or a horse: the one will cheat, the other will kick you’ (‘Asszonynak és lónak sosem lehet hinni, az egyik megcsal, a másik megrúg’), ‘Believe a horse or a wife when they are already cold’ (‘Lónak, asszonynak akkor higgy, ha hideg’), ‘[It is in vain to] talk to a woman and pray with a horse’ (‘Asszonnal beszélni, lóval imádkozni [hiába beszél az ember annak a nőnek, aki makacs, önfejtő vagy értetlen]’), Nagy Gábor, 1976). Like its English equivalents, the first complete translation of the Bible into Hungarian by the Protestant Gáspár Károli in 1586–89 (printed 1589–90) lacks the contemporary Hungarian expression for the shrew (Simon bíró/Justice Simon) in *The Book of Proverbs* as well.

Elizabethan emblem books enjoyed great popularity – and also served as normative texts. Whitney’s emblem of the virtuous wife (page 93, *Uxoriarum virtutes*) depicts a woman silencing herself, her left hand completely covering her mouth (Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes*, 1586), besides displaying signs of being thrifty and a good housewife. Comic shrew-narratives from vulgar sources were also refashioned as emblems: the story from the popular jestbook, *Tales and Quick Answers*, c.1567, about a husband seeking his lost wife upstream, saying that her contrariness made her drowned body swim against the tide, appears in Whitney, page 158 (*Post fata: uxor morosa, etiam discors*). The only difference is that the husband is given a name, Colasmus, i.e. he is somewhat personalised as opposed to the anonymous ‘Husband’ of the jestbook, and a moral is expressed by his friends:

COLASMVS wife, in raging flood was drown’d  
 Who longe did seeke her corpes, againſt the ſtream:  
 His neighbours thought his fences were not found  
 And did deride his madnes moſt extreme:  
 Who call’d aloude, thy wife beneath did fall  
 Then downwarde seeke, or seeke thou not at all.

To whome, quoth he, the place belowe I ſee,  
 Yet in her life, gainſt reaſon ſhe did ſtrive:  
 And contrarie to euerie one, woulde bee;  
 Wherefore, I knowe this way ſhe needes muſt driue  
 Then leaue, quoth they, and let her ſtill be drown’d,  
 For ſuch a wife is better loſt then founde

(Whitney, 1586: 158)

These slight changes may also prove that emblem books worked as mediators between the great and small, learned and popular traditions, as Burke (1994) explains in *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, e.g. with respect to one group of mediators, the Franciscan and Dominican friars: ‘The friars drew on popular themes but often transmuted them. They told traditional tales but gave them a moral which was not necessarily traditional’ (Burke, 1994: 71).

Although the majority of shrew-discourses presented images of the shrewish wife as tamed or ridiculed, the opposing discourse of the ‘merry and victorious shrew’ could be found in carnivalesque rituals and practices, as well as in French *fablieaux*, not

to mention the triumphant ‘merry shrews’ of later Shakespearean comedy, like Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*. As Davies’s (1975) *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* attests, the idea of ‘women on top’ was not uncommon in the age. Furthermore, English festive female characters, like the Maid Marion of Morris dances, Maid Marian of Robin Hood games, and the May Queens were never subdued. Rather, they ritually celebrated triumphant femininity, in close association with rites of fertility. Laroque (1991: 211–12) associates Kate’s and Bianca’s undoings of the men with the rituals of Hock Monday. This carnivalesque subtext, extolling the eternal rebirth of nature, permeates more ‘official’ and moralising versions of shrew-discourses. It is detectable in Shakespearean plays, which themselves exist in a liminal position, on the borderline of high and low culture.

### **The shrew in Hungary: early modern vs. modern contexts**

The context of shrew-discourses or any printed and circulated material in sixteenth-century Hungary shows marked differences: although the first printing press had been established in Buda a century earlier (by András Hess, 1472), during the reign of the Renaissance ruler, King Mátyás, it worked for one year only, and the following decades were unfavourable for learning and cultural endeavours. Constant conflicts with the Ottoman Empire characterised the historical scene till the late seventeenth century, and after the Battle of Mohács in 1526, the country was divided into three regions: one belonging to the Hungarian king, the second under Ottoman rule, the third a semi-independent Protestant Transylvania, ruled by Dukes in an uneasy alliance with the Ottoman Turks. Although a new printing press was set up in Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca today, then the Transylvanian capital) by Gáspár Heltai in 1550, which printed most of the Hungarian texts extant from that period, political and devotional (Protestant vs. Catholic) matters claimed most of the attention among the elite. It is therefore a small miracle that we still have a considerable amount of popular printed material from early modern times. As Hargittay (1983) summarises, the number of printed texts from the sixteenth century is under 900, with almost five times more from the next century; this underlines how the spread of printing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries coincided with a balanced transmission of written and oral material. Although popular mocking verse mostly shows signs of oral transmission, the authors were not uneducated. Albeit in a clichéd form, biblical and mythological allusions and the phraseology of Humanist erudition often figure in these texts (Hargittay: 21–2). Still, as compared to early modern London, Hungarian authors and readers were in a far less favourable position.

As regards plays and the theatre, the sixteenth century could offer even less. No permanent theatres existed, the few Hungarian dramas of the age were either performed in grammar schools (plays mostly with a political or devotional slant) or not performed at all. Out of the three extant courtly love comedies of the age, only one is complete (and was never staged), and the others are in fragments. Bálint Balassi (1554–94), the most famous Renaissance soldier-poet of the age, who had received a Humanist education wrote *A Fine Hungarian Comedy Concerning the Love of Thyrsis and Angelica, Sylvanus and Galathea* (1588), a pastoral love comedy, based on his



contemporary Cristoforo Castelletti's pastoral comedy *Amarilli* (1580, in Balassi's possession was the third edition published in Venice, 1587). However, the facts that the complete text was found in 1958, in a until then unknown handwritten codex (Fanchali-Jób Codex) and, worse, that we have only a four-leaf-long printed fragment from the 1610s, are eloquent on the hardships any popular or 'profane' text concerning love had to face. It mostly survived in manuscripts, stacked away as shameful material, and could hardly reach a printed stage, no matter how popular it was – as schools and religious institutions on both Catholic and Protestant sides banned and persecuted such 'flowery verse' (*virágének*). Authors of the age were creating either mocking, libellous or Humanist-Renaissance works in a frame of mind that was similar to that of the writers from other nations. But, in the Hungarian-speaking territories, the circumstances under which these writings could be printed and read were far less favourable. Therefore, sixteenth-century Hungary offers little material – and only three poems on marriage and a long poem on love (called 'a fine history' *széphistória*, a popular genre of the age) will be considered here.

Disregarding the unfavourable circumstances for the dissemination of such material, we need to consider that the recipients of the popular shrew-narratives both in Hungary and England greatly outnumbered the elite. As Brown shows (2003: 3), with reference to Gurr and Harbage, over 95% of the Elizabethan population were considered non-elite. Thus, the genres of jesting of any kind – let us recall that Brown includes in them all oral, written, even pictorial and ritual forms – must have reached a wider audience than the more sophisticated narratives. In addition, we need to remember that although most of the stories present the taming and punishing of the shrew, i.e. her necessary subordination, they do depict and circulate the image of the victorious shrew, who triumphs – even if for only a limited period of time.

The Hungarian 18-stanza-long poem about norms for women's behaviour in marriage by Benedek Tatár (or Tar?), *A Praise of Marriage (Házasságrul való dicséret*, written in 1541, preserved in Bártfai-Songbook, 1593) starts by dilating on the idea of a good wife as God's gift. However, 11 stanzas depict the dangers of women's unruly behaviour and marital mismatches, with the concomitant humiliation of the husband, nicknamed an 'ass'. Another edifying anonymous popular poem of the age, *Adhortatio mulierum (Admonition to Women*, mid-sixteenth century, Codex Lugossy), stages the long list of behavioural norms in marriage. It shows the newly wed young husband teaching the beautiful wife, whom he loves as much as himself ('Kit úgyan szeret, mint önnönmagát'). He instructs her to say little or nothing, to walk behind the husband to market, to respect the clothes she is given, not to chat away in the market, to be thrifty, not to visit the alehouse, and to keep the house clean – norms mostly corresponding to early modern English ones. Still, each stanza ends with a shaming nickname for either the man or the wife if there is a breach of these norms – among them for example the contemporary phrase for a shrewish woman, 'Simon bíró/Justice Simon', and 'a bottomless basket' (cf. the English 'leaky vessel') for the wife and 'a woman's ass' and 'mare-leader' for the husband. The poem ends with a promise of mutual respect and shared wealth, provided the wife adheres to these norms, thus earning the final nickname for the husband as a 'great happy man'. However, the 'carrot' is soon followed by the 'stick' – the next stanza offers the wife the shame of the stick and the cane, i.e. wife-beating, and it seems ironical that by now the cane is associated with beauty and a slender build – instead of the young wife:

Vow you not to do so, may God not save you  
 From the stick and the rod, your back not be spared,  
 Neither your rosy cheeks from shameful disgrace,  
 The length of your back from fine slender cane.

(Ha nem fogadod, Isten ne mentsön,  
 Bottul, pálcától az te hátadat,  
 Piros orcádat szégyönvallástul,  
 Hátadnak hosszát szép sudár pálcátul.)

(Jankovich, Kőszeghy and Szentmártoni Szabó, 2000, 37, my translation)

Although the young wife remains silent throughout the verse, and even the narrator or scribe appearing in the last stanza does not add a comment, the strongly patriarchal assertions are undermined by the lively images depicting all the ways in which an unruly wife may humiliate her husband. The carnivalesque idea of ‘women on top’ is retrieved and foregrounded by these negations, even though no more than temporarily. Consequently, Bakhtin’s (1968) tenet of the medieval carnivalesque double vision may be extended to encompass later phenomena in popular texts. As he explains (Bakhtin: 61), medieval and (with Rabelais) early modern audiences could perceive the oneness of the world and ‘realize the essential relationship and the links holding together its elements, which in the seventeenth century were to appear heterogeneous, and in the eighteenth completely incompatible’. Affirmation and negation operated not in an exclusive but a complementary relation. To take one striking example, the same tune could be used for singing both such a long libellous, mocking verse as Christoph Ambrust’s *Song on the Nature of Wicked Women’s Morals* (*Gonosz asszonyemberek erkelcsekről való ének*) and a moving devotional canticle of a Protestant song-writer, András Szkhárosi Horváth’s *Loathsome Now are All the Things of this World* (*Rettenetes ez világnak mostan minden dolga*), both from the mid-sixteenth century.

The Hungarian normative framework for wives and women corresponds to the English one in the sixteenth century: they were required to meet the three most important norms, those of obedience, patience, and silence. Female frowardness endangered the reputation of the husband, therefore it was persecuted. A good wife was, as noted, considered a gift from the Lord: for sixteenth-century Hungarian speakers ‘to find good luck’ or ‘to get good luck from the Lord’ referred to marriage (Péter, 2008: 95). However, women could not be silenced so easily: the ecclesiastical legal records up to the nineteenth century are full of husbands complaining about their wives’ sharp and insulting tongue (*Magyar néprajz*, 2000: 629–35). Sixteenth-century edifying or mocking verse attests to the same norms and ideals – the tongue of women and their unruliness must be controlled, otherwise ‘Justice Simon drives the horses’, i.e. rules in the household.

All the three above-mentioned poems on marriage and women contain this mysterious phrase of ‘Justice Simon’, which has become so obsolete by now that its etymology is hopelessly vague. Szilágyi (1987: 25–6) states that the phrase takes its origin from the German ‘Sie-mann’ (she-man), meaning a shrew ruling a man, and that its obvious similarity to the Christian name ‘Simon’ led to a convergence. The certainty that German exerted quite an influence on the Hungarian language may support his view, together with the fact that even one of the authors, Ambrust, was

bilingual by birth, as was almost everybody in his German-dominated Transylvanian hometown, Nagyszében. Here, Hungarian, German and, in most cases, Romanian as well were spoken by almost all citizens. He mentions in the long title of his invective against women, written against his landlady in Augsburg, that he had translated his own verse from German into Hungarian. In any case, the mysterious ‘Justice Simon’, so prevalent in sixteenth-century popular verse, almost completely disappears by the end of the eighteenth century.

Ambrust’s long verse, elaborating on the hideous female morals with a great number of biblical and mythological allusions, curiously proves that the supposed devilishness and sharp tongue of women were also a commonplace in this part of Europe. Referring to ‘an ancient saintly pious’ authority, he differentiates between two kinds of devils tormenting men: some live in hell, some walk the earth – ‘the latter ones we know well as women’ (‘Vagyon – úgymond írásában egy régi szent jámbor –/Kétféle ördeg, kik az embert kínozzák:/Pokolbeli ördegek és felden való ördegek,/Mi ezeket jól ismerjük asszonyembereknek’). In a later stanza a ‘wise sage’ asks his friend why women talk so fast, and gets the answer that female tongues are made of ram’s tail, which never stops; thus, the obvious association of the black ram and Satan is foregrounded in the reader’s mind. (‘Egy tudós belcs kérdi vala egyszer egy barátját:/Asszonyoknak mérthogy igen sebes nyelvek volna?/Monda néki: attul vagyon nyelveknek gyorsasága,/Bakfarkból lett az ő nyelvek, ki mindenkor mozogna.’)

By contrast, courtly, more ‘refined’ literature on love, has a more liberal view regarding ‘women on top’. *The History of Euryalus and Lucretia*, 1577, printed at the end of the century in Kolozsvár, was the most famous ‘fine history’ of the age (which as a genre included all the long narrative poems concerning love, roughly corresponding to English romance narratives). The author is unknown, he only gave the date and place of composition of the work, but his Humanist erudition and Renaissance joy of love and life are undeniable. The story is based on one of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini’s (later Pope Pius II) short stories, and although it has its baser references, like associating riding horses and women in a sexual context, the poem’s main concern is love. The narrator depicts women as basically ‘untameable, unbridleable’ and so clever that ‘they rather guard the guardians’ (*Tertia Pars*, stanza 6).

After the sixteenth century, however, English and Hungarian cultural memories regarding ‘shrews’ start to diverge. While Shakespeare’s play seems to have fixed and canonised the overlapping meanings inherent in the word ‘shrew’ and discourses of shrew-taming, unfavourable circumstances in Hungarian cultural history induced ‘forgetting’. By the time the first Hungarian translations of Shakespeare began in the late eighteenth century with Kazinczy’s prose-*Hamlet*, phrases like ‘Justice Simon’ and sixteenth-century libellous or edifying poems had mostly disappeared from Hungarian cultural memory. Early nineteenth-century Hungarian-speaking theatre was in the process of formation, first with travelling companies performing in inns or German-speaking theatres, then with the first permanent theatre-houses in larger commercial towns, till the Hungarian National Theatre was given a permanent place in Pest in 1837. The companies demanded plays. Strikingly, Shakespearean stories, heavily adapted and translated mostly from German, occupied the stage for the most part. *The Taming of the Shrew* was one of the first (performed in 1808) and most popular plays of the period, though in a hardly recognisable form. In his foreword to the canonical nineteenth-century translation of the play, Csiky lists the titles under which it was performed

previously: *The Second Gassner or the Bridled Backtalker, Fabian the Exorcist, The Bridled Wilful One, Wedding Banquet Over Hill and Dale, The Tamed One, Love Can Do Everything, The Exorcist-Hussar Officer (Második Gészner, vagyis a megzabolázott feleselő, Ördögűző Fábán, A megzabolázott akaratos, Hegyen-völgyön lakodalom, A megszelidített, A szerelem mindent tehet, Az ördögűző huszártiszt)*. However, from 1837 and its first performance in the National Theatre, one title claimed dominance over others: *The Unruly/Jibbing Lady (A makrancos hölgy)*. Although it first referred to Komlóssy's translation of Holbein's German adaptation of the Shakespearean play, the canonical translation from English by József Lévy (Shakespeare, 1886) retained this title. His translation was published by the Kisfaludy Society, the most prestigious literary academic society of the nineteenth century. This was therefore seen as the canonical translation till the mid-twentieth century, when Zoltán Jékely re-translated the play, but kept the same title<sup>2</sup>.

Not only modern-day translators but general audiences feel uneasy at the title; while unruliness and a jibbing nature nicely correspond to the parallel between unruly horses and women or wives to be bridled, the term 'lady' hardly describes Shakespeare's heroine: it rings as an operetta term to our ears, sounds too sentimental, too lady-like (Shakespeare, 2000, Translator's Notes: 1). Not to mention that this title completely lacks the more vulgar idea of 'taming' as referring to women. The translator, Nádasdy, offers an alternative in a subtitle to his recent translation (in the first publication in a theatre journal, *Színház* Vol. 33, Issue 12, December 2000), i.e. 'The Bridling of the Harpy'; however, even he returns to the canonical 'unruly lady' when his translation is published in a book (Shakespeare, 2001). The phrases which could describe the complex cultural heritage inscribed in the word 'shrew' are either obsolete in Hungarian, like 'Justice Simon', or too context tied. The 'lady' did not sound sentimental in the nineteenth century when it first became popular and later over-used in Romantic literature; the 'harpy', however, is a late twentieth-century slangish expression for a shrew. Although the translated playtext can and does play with all the phraseological variations and synonyms for a 'curst' and shrewish woman, expressing all the characteristics of shrews (froward, devilish, etc.), the title remains inadequate in Hungarian. Several performances use variations, like 'Unruly Kate' (Gyula Castle Theatre, 2001, dir. R. Alföldi) or even 'The Taming of the Beast' as a subtitle (Kosztolányi Theatre, 2006, dir. A. Urbán), but these variations cannot claim canonical status yet.

As a closing touch or, arguably, fundamental dimension, we might add that even the inadequately translated title retrieves some meanings associated with the English 'shrew', even if these meanings are available only to scholars of language and literature. The etymology of the Hungarian word *hölgy* (lady) shows the same correspondence between slender young women and little rodents: in Finno-Ugric times it referred to a weasel. But by the fourteenth century it could refer to the animal, a lady of high standing, or a bride (*A magyar nyelv történeti-etimológiai szótára*, 1970). However, the animal-related meaning had become obsolete by the nineteenth century, as well as the hidden sixteenth-century subtext in the Christian name 'Kata' or 'Kató' (short for Katherina) – in the sixteenth century it was used mostly for prostitutes (Sloan, 2004 also refers to the easy association of loose-tongued and loose-bodied, i.e. loose or light women in the early modern English context). A 1505 short verse, preserved on the verso of the cover in an account-book in Sopron, by the notary Johan Kreuzl, displays a goldmine of correspondences between sixteenth-century

English and Hungarian shrew-discourses, thus attesting to similarities in early modern cross-cultural contexts. Consequently, this short poem might serve as a fitting epilogue to the ‘unruly’ contexts and memories of ‘unruly women’:

To the fire with you, old shrew,  
Caper higher, mare,  
Your man is home, prance, Kata.  
In your fine loose-bodied gown,  
Buttoned sandals,  
Heigh-ho, heigh-ho, flower mine!

(Zsúpra aggnó, szökk fel kabla,  
Hazajött firjed, tombj, Kata,  
A te szíp palástodban,  
Gombos sarudban,  
Haja, haja, virágom!)

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### Note

- 1 The sixteenth-century Hungarian texts are given in my modernised translation, which relies on the transcriptions and explanations in *Régi magyar irodalmi szöveggyűjtemény II/ Anthology of Old Hungarian Literature II* (Jankovich, Kőszeghy and Szentmártoni Szabó, 2000).
- 2 Shakespeare, 1982. Jékely’s translation has been republished in all Hungarian editions of Shakespeare’s complete works since the 1950s.

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**Natália Pikli** is senior lecturer at the Department of English Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary. She holds an MA both in English and Hungarian language and literature and a PhD in Renaissance and Baroque English literature (Eötvös L. University). Her primary specialisation is Shakespearean drama and early modern popular culture, with a special emphasis on carnival theory and laughter. She has published several articles both in English and Hungarian in relation to the grotesque and carnival as seen in Shakespeare's works. She is also a member of the research team 'English Literature in Hungarian Cultural Memory' at the Department of English Studies. Her current research also includes the relationship between Shakespeare and postmodern English and Hungarian literature. *Address:* Natália Pikli, PhD, Senior Lecturer, Department of English Studies, Eötvös Lóránd University, Budapest, Rákóczi út 5, 1088 Hungary. [email: [pikli.natalia@btk.elte.hu](mailto:pikli.natalia@btk.elte.hu)]

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