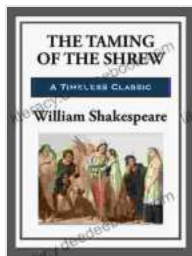


# "Shrewishly Subtle": The Taming of the Shrew in The Contemporary Shakespeare 18

Shakespeare's "The Taming of the Shrew" has been captivating audiences for centuries with its lively characters, witty dialogue, and exploration of gender roles. In recent years, the play has undergone numerous adaptations and modernizations, including "The Contemporary Shakespeare 18" production by the Public Theater in New York City. This adaptation, directed by Phylicia Rashad, sought to bring the play into a contemporary setting and challenge traditional interpretations of its themes.



## The Taming of the Shrew (The Contemporary Shakespeare Series Book 18) by A. L. Rowse

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

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This article will delve into the nuances of "The Contemporary Shakespeare 18" production, examining how it reimagines the characters, plot, and themes of the original play. Through a detailed analysis of the production's staging, performances, and directorial choices, we will explore how this adaptation sheds new light on the enduring themes of "The Taming of the Shrew," particularly in relation to gender roles, feminism, and the nature of love.

## **Modernizing the Classics: A New Setting**

One of the most striking aspects of "The Contemporary Shakespeare 18" production is its transposition of the play into a modern setting. The play is set in the vibrant streets of New York City, with skyscrapers and street vendors providing a backdrop to the action. This setting update serves several purposes. Firstly, it makes the play more accessible to contemporary audiences, removing the barrier of archaic language and customs. Secondly, it allows the production to explore the themes of the play in a more relevant and relatable context.

For example, the modernized setting highlights the power dynamics between men and women in a contemporary society. Kate's shrewish behavior, which in the original play is often seen as a product of her time, is given a new perspective in this adaptation. Her sharp tongue and independent spirit are seen as a form of resistance against the patriarchal norms that confine her. Similarly, Petruchio's taming methods, which in the original play are often seen as cruel and misogynistic, are reinterpreted as a misguided attempt to control and shape a woman who does not conform to traditional expectations.

## **Reimagining the Characters: Nuanced Portrayals**

The modernization of the setting is complemented by nuanced performances from the cast. The role of Kate is played by Sheri Foster, who brings a fierce intensity and vulnerability to the character. Her Kate is not merely a shrew, but a complex woman who yearns for independence and respect. Foster's portrayal captures the contradictions of Kate's character, showcasing her strength and fragility simultaneously.

Opposite Foster, Robert Stanton plays Petruchio as a charming but manipulative suitor. Stanton's Petruchio is not the traditional brute, but a more subtle character who uses his wit and charm to control Kate. His performance highlights the power dynamics between the two characters, as Petruchio gradually chips away at Kate's defenses and reshapes her into the woman he desires.

The supporting cast also delivers strong performances, with particular note going to Morgan Spector as Lucentio and Condola Rashad as Bianca. Spector's Lucentio is a sensitive and romantic young man, while Rashad's Bianca is a witty and independent woman. Together, they provide a counterpoint to the central relationship between Kate and Petruchio, offering a more nuanced perspective on love and marriage.

### **Challenging Gender Roles: A Feminist Perspective**

One of the most significant ways in which "The Contemporary Shakespeare 18" challenges traditional interpretations of "The Taming of the Shrew" is through its feminist perspective. The production highlights the ways in which women are marginalized and oppressed in a patriarchal society, and it questions the traditional roles that are assigned to women.

Kate's character is at the heart of this feminist exploration. Her refusal to conform to society's expectations of women makes her a subversive figure. By resisting Petruchio's attempts to tame her, she challenges the idea that women should be subservient to men. The production also highlights the double standards that exist for men and women, as Petruchio's manipulative behavior is often excused as a necessary means to control a "shrewish" woman.

While the production does not offer a simple solution to the complexities of gender roles, it invites audiences to question traditional assumptions and consider the ways in which women can resist and subvert the limitations that society places upon them.

## **The Nature of Love: A Complex Exploration**

In addition to its exploration of gender roles, "The Contemporary Shakespeare 18" also offers a nuanced examination of the nature of love. The relationship between Kate and Petruchio is a central focus of the production, and it is portrayed as a complex and evolving dynamic.

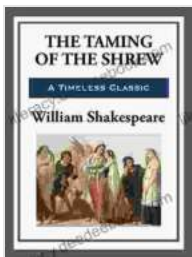
At first, their relationship is one of conflict and manipulation. Petruchio uses various methods to "tame" Kate, including sleep deprivation, social isolation, and public humiliation. Kate, in turn, resists his attempts to control her and asserts her independence. However, as the play progresses, a genuine connection begins to develop between them. Petruchio begins to understand and appreciate Kate's strength and intelligence, while Kate starts to admire Petruchio's wit and determination.

The production does not offer a clear-cut resolution to their relationship, but it suggests that love can exist even amidst conflict and misunderstanding. The play explores the complexities of love, challenging traditional notions of romance and suggesting that love can be multifaceted and ever-changing.

"The Contemporary Shakespeare 18" is a thought-provoking and engaging adaptation of "The Taming of the Shrew." Through its modern setting, nuanced performances, feminist perspective, and exploration of the nature of love, the production offers a fresh and innovative take on Shakespeare's

classic play. It encourages audiences to question traditional interpretations of the play and to consider its themes in a contemporary context.

The production is a testament to the enduring power of Shakespeare's work and its ability to speak to audiences across time and cultures. By reimagining the play in a modern setting, "The Contemporary Shakespeare 18" brings the play's themes and characters to life for a new generation of theatergoers, inviting them to engage with the play's timeless questions about gender, love, and the human condition.



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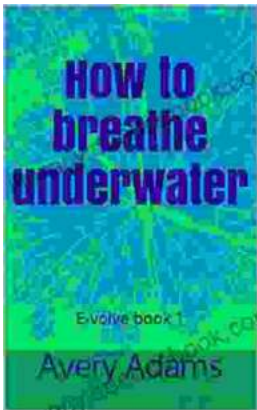
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