

SBReviews_13:

William Shakespeare. *The Taming of the Shrew*. Ed. Nicholas F. Radel & David Scott Kastan. New York: Barnes and Noble Shakespeare, 2008. ISBN-13: 978-1411400412; pp.335. US\$6.95.

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I am approaching the Barnes and Noble edition of *The Taming of the Shrew*, edited by Radel and Kastan, from a pedagogical perspective, conceding that this is an edition of the play meant for those with only a cursory knowledge of Shakespeare. The eight essays included in this text introduce the playwright to his readers, whether they are students learning in a classroom or individuals browsing the drama section of their local retail store. The Barnes and Noble Shakespeare series appears to be designed to compete with the Signet Classic Editions, the Folger Editions, and the Penguin Editions of Shakespeare. These inexpensive, concisely annotated, single-play texts are well suited for high school classrooms, general education of literature courses, or survey courses. The Barnes and Noble edition of *The Taming of the Shrew* is applicable to all of these situations and, in addition, offers a variety of introductory materials appropriate to a broad spectrum of classroom requirements.

Delving into the gender issues of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* presents challenges for both teachers and students. How do we make sense of the patriarchal culture from which the text emerges? How do we address the influence that gender studies has had on the recent critical and artistic interpretations of the text? Moreover, what does the continued popularity of the play say about today's gender politics? Nicholas F. Radel's introduction to the Barnes and Noble edition of *The Taming of the Shrew* grapples with these questions. He asserts that *Shrew* "is not a simple rehearsal of history. What makes it continue to be popular and compelling to playgoers and readers is not its antiquated vision of hierarchical family relations Rather, it is Shakespeare's brilliant handling of character and the play's witty – if sometimes disquieting – revelation of the complexities

of gender relations in the early modern period and perhaps our own” (3-4). Radel argues that *Shrew* addresses the social construction of patriarchal roles. For him, the play is as much about masculine anxieties and feelings of inadequacy as it is about the women’s unruliness. He sees Petruchio as a guide who is trying to teach Kate how they *both* might navigate these social strictures to take advantage of the benefits of marriage in their culture. He notes that the most successful method of playing this game in the text is language and illustrates how Kate and Petruchio accordingly refine their verbal wit throughout the play. His approach is of a middling sort, both acknowledging the unsettling gender politics of the play and trying to redeem the play for contemporary readers. Overall, the edition provides a nice starting point for those new to Shakespeare, giving them information that could foster productive discussions about the text.

In addition to Radel’s introduction, David Scott Kastan, the series’ general editor, provides adept essays that introduce both the Shakespeare’s world and his language. He uses examples from all of Shakespeare’s plays to support his claims, providing an overview of the playwright’s work. Kastan specifically focuses on *Shrew* in his essay on editing the text. Radel further discusses *Shrew* in detail in his essay about the early staging of the play, in his performance history of the play, and in an essay on famous adaptations of *Shrew*. I like that an instructor can choose from among these essays, and their critical approaches, to suit her classroom needs. As a teacher who emphasizes performance, I was particularly impressed by the “*The Taming of the Shrew* on the Early Stage,” “Significant Performances,” and “Inspired by *The Taming of the Shrew*” sections. While editions such as the Sourcebooks Shakespeare and Shakespeare in Performance have placed increased emphasis on the interplay between Shakespeare as literature and Shakespeare as theatre, it was nice to see this emphasis in a classroom-ready text. The diagrams of Shakespeare’s theater are useful for showing students the layout of the English Renaissance stage and explaining the original staging conventions to them (much more effective than makeshift drawings on the chalkboard). Finally, the thorough

and informative performance and adaptation histories had me scurrying to buy the Barnes and Noble editions of all the plays I will be teaching in my “Shakespearean Adaptation” course this spring.

The text, itself, is a conservative version based on the First Folio text. It aims to clarify the Early Modern text when necessary, modernizing spelling and punctuation, standardizing character names, and clarifying entrances and exits. Editorial stage directions are kept to a minimum, and their addition is signified with brackets.

The editors enhance this text with informative notes. When I taught single editions of Shakespeare in the past, I used the Signet Classics editions because they are inexpensive. While I appreciate the portability of the Signet series, I have repeatedly been disappointed by their minimal notes. I was smitten, then, with the thorough notes provided in the Barnes and Noble edition, which cost only a couple of dollars more. (In fact, the Barnes and Noble editions are cheaper than the Signet editions when they are purchased from the retailer’s web site). To illustrate my contention about the notes, when Petruchio calls Kate “Kate of Kate Hall” (188), the Signet edition glosses the phrase as “possible topical reference; several places have been proposed.” The Barnes and Noble edition, on the other hand, provides a more expansive gloss: “Perhaps a reference to Katherine Hall, a large house in southern England, or some specific place; most likely, however, an ironic way of saying ‘the house that Kate is in charge of.’” I like that in addition to providing more information, this gloss explains the phrase’s significance, and thereby assists students’ understanding of their reading of the scene. The Barnes and Noble edition glosses difficult words in the left margin, provides pithy annotations of words and phrases on the verso page, and offers longer notes in the back (such as a lengthy explanation of the various inferences of the word “Kate” in Act II, scene i). Overall, the explanatory information is presented in such a way that it is not overwhelming,

achieving a balance between the terseness of the Signet editions and the gregarious explanations of more scholarly editions as the Arden.

The only thing that I feel is missing from this edition is a selection of representative critical essays about *Shrew*, similar to the selections provided by the Signet, the Norton Critical editions, or the Bedford/St. Martin's texts and Contexts series. Especially with a controversial play like *Shrew*, I find it helpful to point students to a variety of critical responses. Nevertheless, this edition does have an annotated bibliography that gives young scholars a balanced representation of the available criticism. This bibliography includes classic articles from the 1960s to the mid-2000s, providing examples of such theoretical practices as New Criticism's close readings, cultural studies, and diverse approaches to gender, performance, and textual studies. Now that students can have access to most of these essays from their library's web sites, a good bibliography may be all that students really need.

Overall, I was impressed with the Barnes and Noble Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* as a pedagogical tool. Its strong, varied essay and clear, thorough notes are particularly attractive, and I believe this edition would be a welcome companion as high school and undergraduate students begin to navigate the gendered world of Shakespeare's Padua.