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Strange Bedfellows: “The Churching of Women and *The Taming of the Shrew*

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Strange bedfellows indeed. Shakespeare provides us no children here, and consensus agrees that the three offstage marriages remain unconsummated until after the play’s end. No consummations, no children; no children, no Churching. While any connection between *The Book of Common Prayer*’s (1559) ceremony for “The Thanksgiving of Women after Childbirth, Commonly Called the Churching of Women” and *The Taming of the Shrew*, seems tenuous I find significant resonances between these two texts. From its opening *The Taming of the Shrew* predicates itself on conforming to social expectations. Both Sly and Katherina must learn to adapt themselves if they are to attain their desires. The physical changes that each experiences through their individual sequesterations force them to examine their exclusion or inclusion in a new community based on one’s adherence to societal norms. Similarly, social expectations for both husband and wife surrounding childbirth and “The Thanksgiving” call for conforming to new circumstances and playing appropriate roles. I suggest that the play’s presentation of spousal

relationships, responsibilities, and duties parallels the social and religious constructs of a required and commonplace church ritual in the Early Modern Period. In Sly's sequestration his bedding serves as prolepsis to what society expects of a woman like Katherina and thus exists a parody of social and religious observations in complying with "The Thanksgiving" while Katherina's sequestration from and return to Padua forms not only a parallel but also a paraphrase of those customs. These texts speak thus speak to one another not only through their shared emphases on changes in physical situations that require adapting to new circumstances and conforming to new roles—marriage and spousal obligations, for example—but also through shared links among space, place, and language.

### I. Social and Religious Constructs

A woman's *rite de passage* after childbirth was a central part of the woman's and the community's life cycle in Early Modern England.<sup>1</sup> Social customs included the woman's thirty days of rest following the child's birth, when she was known as the "woman in the straw." That privileged time not only reflects the Levitician origins of the subsequent religious service but also folk beliefs about "green," or sick, women stemming doubtlessly from earlier pollution beliefs.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This section is indebted to David Cressy's excellent study, "Purification, Thanksgiving, and the Churching of Women" in *Birth, Marriage & Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford UP: 1997), 197-229.

<sup>2</sup>The "Thazria" observes that motherhood in itself is not sinful rather that "The more acceptable view is the Law deals solely with the physical secretions attendant on child-birth. The mother becomes unclean through conditions attendant of parturition, but not the child." See *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* 2ed, Dr. J. H. Hertz, C. H., ed., (London: Soncino ) 5729-1968, 439.

The newly delivered mother, in theory, was sequestered for a month, having no contact with the outside world beyond the gossips and her female servants who attended to her during the labor and birth and who served as her companions over the period. She also abstained from any contact with her husband, especially sexual intercourse. In her “absence” the husband assumed her domestic duties. What had been her domain now became his, and gendered roles became inverted for a brief period of time. At the end of this time, however, life returned to normal but not without ceremonies to acknowledge that return.

The first acknowledgment came in the form of a religious service, and while controversy existed over adherence to and the form of the religious service during the Reformation and later, evidence suggests that observance occurred in one form or another. The Churching of Women is a brief Anglican service derived from the Latin liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church. Its specific title varies in the Sarum Missal from “*ordo ad purificandum mulierem*” to “*benedictio mulieris post partum ante ostium ecclesie*.”<sup>3</sup> The former suggests ties to Leviticus, Chapter 12, which declares a woman impure for a period of thirty-three days after the birth of a son, sixty-six after a daughter, after which time she was to appear with the appropriate offerings before the priest who would make atonement for her.<sup>4</sup> The latter emphasizes thanksgiving for the woman’s safe delivery from the perils of childbirth as the service’s language demonstrates. While the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* calls the service “The Order of the Purificacion of Weomen,” the 1552 and subsequent versions used the more benign “The Thanksgiving of Women after Childbirth,

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<sup>3</sup>As cited in Cressy, p. 205.

<sup>4</sup>The “Thazria” states that “no satisfactory explanation why the period is doubled when a female child is born. It cannot be because a female was regarded as more defiling than a male, since the mother’s purification was the same for either sex” (460).

Commonly Called the Churching of Women” as not only a move away from the ritual’s ties with Judaism but also from the liturgy of Roman Catholicism. This service took place thirty days after childbirth and consisted of four stages in the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, the version Shakespeare would have best known. The 1559 rite differs marginally from the 1549 version but demonstrates a significant change in the woman’s centrality. In the earlier version when the woman entered the church, she knelt “downe in come convenient place, nygh unto the quier doore,” a place that drew less attention to her presence<sup>5</sup>. The priest then offered a blessing of God’s goodness in granting a safe delivery followed by a recitation of Psalm 121. The 1559 version shows two distinct changes. Here when the woman entered, she knelt “nigh unto the place where the table standeth,” moving her near the altar, and omitted the blessing.<sup>6</sup> The two converge with the recitation of Psalm 121 followed by a responsory asking for God’s mercy. Next the priest led the congregation in the Our Father and then another responsory, one that acknowledged the woman’s centrality in the service. The rite concluded with the priest offering a prayer of deliverance and beseeching that “she . . . may both faithfully live and walk in her vocation, according to thy will in this life present . . . .”<sup>7</sup> The woman then presented “accustomed offeringes,” which in the Early Modern period was either the chrisom cloth that had swaddled the infant at its baptism or a cash equivalent. At that point the set service resumed, and

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<sup>5</sup>[http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Purification\\_Women\\_1549.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Purification_Women_1549.htm).

<sup>6</sup>[http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Churching\\_Women\\_1559.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Churching_Women_1559.htm). The rite’s prefatory instructions in both versions conclude with “And the priest standing by her shall say these words words, or such like as the case shall require,” and adding in 1559 “Then shall the priest say this [121] Psalm.” Despite both giving the priest an option (“such like”) in his words, the 1559 version specifies Psalm 121 as the words of choice.

<sup>7</sup>[http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Churching\\_Women\\_1559.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Churching_Women_1559.htm).

if a communion service, the woman took Holy Communion. As David Cressy observes, the churching “signaled her new status as a mother (after a first birth), or confirmed her status as a breeding woman.”<sup>8</sup> The service also acknowledged the woman’s return to and acceptance by the religious community in a formal ceremony.

The ensuing secular celebration also focused on her and called attention to her return to society. These occasions were often quite lavish depending on the family’s status. Those of means provided food and drink on a scale equivalent to wedding festivities, christenings, and wakes. Those of lesser means repaired to the tavern for their pleasure. Whatever form the secular celebration took, it affirmed “her formal public reappearance” and made her the center of attention in the social world as the religious service had done in the church.<sup>9</sup>

## II. Sly and Parody

Parallels with the social customs of the Churching of Women begin in the Induction with the inversion of Sly’s condition from tinker to lord. More significant, however, is Sly’s circumstance. According to the game the Lord and his attendants play on him, Sly has lain in his bedchamber for some time—seven years at one point, fifteen at another—attended only by his male servants. Upon accepting the notion that he might indeed be a lord, Sly offers a thanksgiving: “Now Lord be thanked for my good amends!” to which the assembled reply “Amen,” an echo of

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<sup>8</sup>229.

<sup>9</sup>229.

the priest's invocation on the woman's entry into the church (Ind. 2. 91, 92).<sup>10</sup> Sly's wife has forgone his company during his illness and teasingly hints at her sexual longing by saying that "the time seems thirty [years] to [her] / Being all this time abandoned [i.e. banished] from [his] bed" (114-115). Taking up that hint, Sly requests that she now come to bed. Demurring, given her/his reality of being Barthol'mew the page, she reminds Sly and the audience of his illness and the need for abstinence:

Thrice noble lord, let me entreat of you  
 To pardon me yet for a night or two,  
 Or, if not so, until the sun be set,  
 For your physicians have expressly charg'd,  
 In peril to incur your former malady,  
 That I should yet absent me from your bed.

(Ind. 2. 118-123)

Not wishing "to fall into [his] dreams again," Sly agrees "in despite of the flesh and blood" (Ind. 2. 118-119). Just as the postpartum woman must abstain for thirty days, our wife feels she has abstained for thirty years. Instead they will watch a play, one elaborating on the Lord's thesis that inversions of circumstances will mandate a choice to continue in one's new role.

As with Bartle'mew serving Sly, we find Petruchio attending to Katherina's needs on their arrival at his country estate. In a reversal of cultural practice, he cuts her meat for her (albeit she gets none)—normally the woman's role. During the thirty day sequestration, however, the

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<sup>10</sup>All references to *The Taming of the Shrew* are to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, G. Blakemore Evans, ed., (Boston: Houghton. 1974).

gendered role reversed. Another parodic inversion occurs. Rather than Katherina having her gossips and female attendants surrounding her, Petruchio supplies her with his—Grumio, Curtis, and the other servants—along with his dear friend Hortensio, who set the match between them originally. Given the importance of Churching in a woman’s life, we might hypothesize that among the wealthier folk her appearance might occasion a new gown, hence Petruchio’s engaging the tailor and haberdasher to come in to her rather than her going forth until the proper time.

The Induction’s two scenes provide a parodic inversion of postpartum customs; Sly’s lying abed not only recalls the “woman in the straw” but prohibitions against sexual congress. Further, Sly’s wife now plays his role of running the estate. Although we leave Sly there in his sequestration, it prepares us for Katherina’s. Further, both situations parallel the tripartate structure of the green world comedies. Granted, Sly faces only the thirdborough, and Katherina flees no punitive law as must Hermia in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* or death threat as does Rosalind in *As You Like It*; Petruchio provides a guise of duress, however, when he invents their being “beset with thieves.” At the same time Sly and Katherina move into unstable worlds within which they must cope. The Lord and Petruchio, by way of contrast, know and rule their estates. Sly and Katherina must learn the rules of the game by undergoing tests and trials before either returns to his or her society.<sup>11</sup> Assuming we accept her conversion (or at least agree that she plays the game to get her way), we can see in her separation from and return to Padua a renewal and rebirth analogous to woman’s participation in and conformity with folk ways and religious

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<sup>11</sup>Sly obviously returns only in *The Taming of a Shrew*. That return, however, underscores the importance of lessons learned. He will return home to tame his wife. Katherina returns to Padua as the tamed wife. Whether she is playing a role or not, she has learned how to win at the game.

ritual. Metaphorically, Katherina undergoes a life-altering change during her sequestration from Padua. She adopts a new way of thinking and acting, one in accord with patriarchal norms and reemerges in Padua as the new wife restored to her husband and whose marriage can now be consummated.

### III. Churching and Katherine's Return

Katherina's reemergence takes place in two stages: first, the settings forth to Bianca's wedding and bridal feast, and, second, her final speech.<sup>12</sup> Both contain significant echoes to the language of Churching. Petruchio initiates the second setting forth with the catachistic moon/sun debate. Although the psalm mentions the sun and moon in its sixth line, Petruchio's invoking of both calls attention to the heavens and the lifting of one's eyes in acknowledgement. Taken together both implied actions form a paraphrase of the first half line of Psalm 121, the recitation of which immediately follows Churching's invocation:

I HAVE lifted up mine eyes unto the hills: from whence cometh my help.

My help cometh even from the Lord: which hath made heaven and earth.

He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: and he that keepeth thee will not sleep.

Behold, he that keepeth Israel: shall neither slumber nor sleep.

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<sup>12</sup>Two settings forth occur in the play. In the first Petruchio states their humble attire means no shame, "For 'tis the mind that makes the body rich; / And as the sun breaks through the darkest clouds, / So honor peereth in the meanest habit" (4.33.172-174). Doing so recalls the theme of appearance versus reality as when Tranio comments of Petruchio's odd wedding attire noting "Yet oftentimes he goes by mean apparell'd" (3.2.73). It also introduces a debate that not only brooks no disagreement but will lead to the appearance versus reality that shrouds Katherine's final speech.

The Lord himself is thy keeper: the Lord is thy defense upon thy right hand.

So that the sun shall not burn thee by day: neither the moon by night.

The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: yea it is even he that shall keep thy soul.

The Lord shall preserve thy going out, and thy coming in: from this time forth and for evermore.<sup>13</sup>

More significance lies in the second half line: “from whence cometh my help.” While the first line of the 1549 prayer book reads, “I HAVE lifted up mine eyes unto the hilles, from whence cummeth my helpe?,” the 1559 version, the one with which Shakespeare would most likely had acquaintance, lacks the interrogatory.<sup>14</sup> Posed as a question, the line takes on a catechistic quality asking the speaker to iterate the source of her well-being or deliverance in the case of Churching. Taken as a declaratory statement, it proclaims “our help” lies beyond ourselves and asks that we acknowledge the fact. Both versions fit Petruchio’s taming plans. We need but recall his taming soliloquy at 4.1 where he states he has a way “To make her come, and know her keeper’s call” doing all “in reverend care of her” (194, 204). Not only must Katherina follow his lead—as the woman undergoing churching must follow the Priest’s—but for them to continue to Padua, she must, as Hortensio instructs her, “Say as he says, or we shall never go” (4.5.11). She must reply and accept the now catechized psalm Petruchio offers her. Indeed Katherina’s “going out” and “coming in” lie in her lord’s power.

Katherina’s next test occurs upon their meeting Vencentio. Initially she agrees he appears

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<sup>13</sup>[http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Churching\\_Women\\_1559.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Churching_Women_1559.htm).

<sup>14</sup>The 1552 version omits the interrogatory as well. Later versions, however, restore it.

a “Young budding virgin” but under correction begs “Pardon, old father, my mistaking eyes / That have been so bedazzled with the sun, / That every thing I look on seemeth green” (4.5.45-47).

The context suggests “young and green,” hence new, in the relationship between Katherina and Petruchio. Taken in context with Churching, however, a more subtle reading obtains. As a sequestered “green woman,” Katherina needs to wait her time to reemerge. This reading coincides with “new” as well, for she emerges as new from the church rite. In a sermon Hugh Latimer speaks of “a woman before the time of her purification, that is to say, as long as she is a *green woman . . .*” and goes on to say that observation of the purification ritual allows women to return to acts of other women and to company with her husband.<sup>15</sup> That Petruchio concludes the encounter with Vencentio by referring to “our first merriment . . .” suggests a first outing after her sequestration as well (4.5.76).

The moon/sun catechism figures further. Not only does it suggest the “heavens” of the Globe, it recalls the psalm’s sixth line. While I grant assuming that Shakespeare would draw on Churching in the heat of writing the play might raise skepticism, contemporary circumstances suggest otherwise. Assuming the importance of a woman’s reintegration and reacceptance into the social community, the likelihood of Ann Hathaway Shakespeare’s not undergoing churching seems remote at best. Shakespeare’s participation appears logical as well. His younger sibling Edmund was born in 1580, and Shakespeare then at sixteen probably attended his mother’s churching given the rite’s centrality to the community. Only three years later in 1583 his first

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<sup>15</sup>My emphasis. Cited in Cressy, 207.

child, Susanna, arrived, while Hamnet and Judith came along in 1585.<sup>16</sup> Although the composition of *Shrew* occurred almost ten years later, we cannot easily dismiss a connection between the texts. In fact, almost twenty years after *Shrew* Shakespeare makes a woman's churching a centerpiece in *The Winter's Tale*. If we accept the 1610-1611 date for *The Winter's Tale* composition, the birth of Shakespeare's first grandchild, Elizabeth, might be in play for this specific reference to Churching. When Hermione defends herself at trial, she itemizes her losses, the conclusion of which is that she has been

with immodest hatred

The child-bed privilege denied, which 'longs

To women of all fashion; lastly, hurried

Here to this place, i' th' open air, before

[She has] got strength of limit.

(3.2.102-106)<sup>17</sup>

She begins the series by listing her first, second, and third losses—Leontes's favor, her separation from Mamillius, Perdita's supposed doom—yet culminates them with her being denied her due after childbirth. Two significances obtain: first, the syntactic norm in a series places highest emphasis on ultimate item; second, her specifying the thirty days “in the straw” brings us back to pollution taboos and the shame she garners from appearing in public prior to her purification rite. That Shakespeare specifies Churching amongst Hermione's greatest losses attests to his

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<sup>16</sup>See “Appendix B. Records, Documents, and Allusions” in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, G. Blakemore Evans, ed., (Boston: Houghton, 1974), 1827-28.

<sup>17</sup>*The Riverside Shakespeare*, G. Blakemore Evans, ed., (Boston: Houghton, 1974).

familiarity with the rite and its importance to all involved. Leontes fails to play his proper role.

Another factor weighs in for the relationship between Churching and *Shrew*. The religious foment in London during this period was rife. Given the Marprelate controversy and theater's involvement in it, a lack of awareness of religious controversy on Shakespeare's part strikes me as unlikely.<sup>18</sup> While not a direct part of Marprelate, Churching plays a central role in the period's religious controversy. As Cressy notes, a widely read Puritan document called *The Admonition to the Parliament* attacked Churching, admonishing that the rite "smelleth of Jewish purification."<sup>19</sup> That Psalm 121 figured as a major text for attack brings it to the forefront as well. Cressy again—"Puritans could not denounce these words of David [Psalm 121], but claimed . . . they were 'childishly abused' [and] leapt on the phrase about the sun and the moon to ridicule the service as vain and superstitious."<sup>20</sup> Even Milton weighed in sometime later. According to Cressy, Milton's first wife underwent the rite, but Milton lambasted the psalm's sixth line saying, "sunburning and moonblasting, as if she had been traveling not in her bed but in the deserts of Arabia."<sup>21</sup> Given the religious controversy fomenting in London and the likely lived participation in community demands for celebration after childbirth suggest a plausible connection between the texts.

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<sup>18</sup>See Juliet Dusinberre's recent studies—"Touchstone and Kemp in *As You Like It*," *The Shakespeare Newsletter* 52:4 No. 255 (Winter 2002-2003), pp. 93 ff. and "Topical Forest: Kemp and Martext in *Arden*," Ann Thompson and Gordon McMullan (eds.), in *Arden: Editing Shakespeare: Essays in Honour of G. R. Proudfoot* (London: Thomas Learning, The Arden Shakespeare, 2002), 239-51.

<sup>19</sup>Cited in Cressy, 208.

<sup>20</sup>209.

<sup>21</sup>Cited in Cressy, 209. By the 1662 prayer book, Psalms 116 and 127 replaced 121.

#### IV. Festive Culminations

The fifth act returns us to Padua and a combination of events that recall both the Sly induction and the beginning of the play proper. The contretemps that arises over Vencentio's arrival prompts Petruchio to say "Prithee Kate, let's stand aside and see the end of this controversy" affording them the opportunity to become an audience to the bit of theater playing out before them (5.1.61-62). In the Induction we have the Lord as audience to Sly's performance; here we have the Pedant acting that role. We also have Sly and his lady witnessing the play proper. When we move into it, we find another contretemps in our first encounter with Baptista, Katherina, Bianca, and the suitors. Here Tranio suggests that their arrival may be "some show to welcome us to town," thus creating yet another audience for another play (1.1.47). The world turns topsy-turvy once more in making Katherina and Petruchio the sober watchers of events rather than being the objects of others' gaze as they have been heretofore.

Before attending Bianca's bridal, Katherina must undergo a penultimate test. On her requesting, "Husband, let's follow, to see the end of this ado," Petruchio demands a kiss—in the streets of Padua (5.1.142).<sup>22</sup> She demurs, not because she is ashamed of Petruchio but because such a public act constitutes improper, if not immoral, behavior for a proper married woman. She relents under Petruchio's threat of returning home yet again. Her words of compliance bear special note: "Nay, I will give thee a kiss; now pray thee, love, stay" (5.1.148). If we recall the

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<sup>22</sup>Katherina's first use of "husband" occurs in 4.1 when Petruchio berates and beats the servants for the supposedly burnt mutton. Asking that he ". . . be not so disquiet" suggests that Katherina attempts initially to play the intercessor for the servants in her role as mistress of the household.

aftermath of the wedding ceremony, several people—including Katherina—“entreat” Petruchio to stay. On his refusal, she offers a challenge proleptic to the demand for the kiss on the street: “Now if you love me stay,” a conditional challenge at best (3.2.204). She then goes on to assert her willfulness and determination to have her way by her repetition of “will.”<sup>23</sup> By way of contrast, in agreeing to the public kiss, Katherina’s use of “will” expresses a willingness to participate in the occasion, and her entreaty modulates into “pray, love, stay.” The conditional challenge in verb form becomes the direct address pet name.

Katherina and Petruchio now begin where they left off, with their interrupted nuptial in the company of family and friends. Bianca’s bridal celebration serves more, I suggest, as a Churching of Katherina. When the women depart the men’s company, we may recall a woman’s sequestration after childbirth and the company of her gossips until her formal return to the community. As each husband sends for his wife, Shakespeare alters the verb each uses; we move from “bid” to “entreat” to “command.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers “to press, entreat, beg, ask” for “bid”; “to beseech or implore” for “entreat”; and “to order, enjoin, bid with authority or influence” for “command”—each appropriate to the particular individual. That Shakespeare wishes to make a distinction among the verb use is clear when Petruchio comments on Hortensio’s “entreat” “O ho, entreat her! / Nay then she must needs come” (5.2.87-88). Petruchio’s “command” works with the concept of the social demand for a woman’s Churching—a rite which she must undergo. Further, she must enter the church and then have the priest

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<sup>23</sup>See David Bevington, *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, updated 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (New York: Longman, 1997), lxxxii for his discussion of the distinction between “shall” and “will” during this time. As he notes that while “will” was “beginning to encroach on *shall* for the expression of futurity in the second and third persons . . . its use . . . usually retains . . . its original meaning [of] intention, determination, or willingness” (his emphasis).

acknowledge her. At Katherine's return Baptista swears by his "holidam." Frances E. Dolan glosses this usage as "originally an oath by the holy relics but confused with an oath to the Virgin Mary," a religious induction to Katherine's new presence in masculine company.<sup>24</sup> Baptista acknowledges her as "another daughter" as though she were new born.

I cite Katherine's submission speech at length:

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 labor, both by sea and land;  
 To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,  
 Whilst thou li'st 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.

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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.

.....

But now I see our lances are but straws,

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<sup>24</sup>*The Taming of the Shrew: Texts and Contexts*, (Boston: Bedford Books, 1996), p.136.

Our strength as weak, our weakness past compare,  
 That seeming to be most which we indeed least are.  
 Then vail your stomachs, for it is no boot,  
 And place your hands below your husband's foot;  
 In token of which duty, if he please,  
 My hand is ready, may it do him ease.

(5.2.146-54, 161-64,173-79)

In it we find numerous parallels to the plentiful period treatises on marriage (especially *An Homely of the state of Matrimonie*). Katherina refers to a husband as “thy lord, thy king, thy governor.” Further on, her language rehearses Psalm 121. A woman’s husband serves as her “keeper” who “watch[es] the night in storms, the day in cold” neither slumbering nor sleeping (Psalm 121, l.4).<sup>25</sup> That he watches by day and night echoes “the sun shall not burn thee by day: neither the moon by night” and Katherina’s earlier trial (Psalm 121, l. 6). He suffers her not to move for she “li’st warm at home, secure and safe.” Her references to war and peace suggest his defense and preservation of her. The psalm ends with “The Lord shall preserve thy going out, and thy coming in: from this time forth for evermore.” Certainly Petruchio has achieved this state given the settings forth, return, and threats thereto, culminating in Katherina’s coming in at the play’s end.

In her closing lines, Katherina “In token” of her duty to her husband offers to place her hand below Petruchio’s foot if it please him. Directorial choice of action here varies although it is

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<sup>25</sup>Here we might recall Katherina’s neither slumbering nor sleeping while at Petruchio’s country home.

not uncommon to have Katherina kneel while offering her hand. I suggest this movement provides yet another tie with Churching. When the woman enters the church, she kneels near the table until the priest invites her into the rite, a raising up if you will. It also places her at the center of attention. Katherina's submission speech provides both; she returns to company, and she becomes the center of attention.<sup>26</sup> This speech, I suggest, becomes her Churching, her purification—by conforming to masculine desire for obedience—yet she becomes the newborn daughter—she has delivered herself, as it were, and as a result returns welcome to society, community, her husband, and consummation of her marriage. Whereas Bianca earlier usurped Katherina's bridal celebration, Katherina here achieves the revenge she promised in act two.

The idea of the marriage's consummation works with the concept of Churching as well. Cressy observes that in Robert Herrick's "Julia's *Churching, or Purification*" the wife "is restored to her husband, as his bride, his wife, his lover and companion."<sup>27</sup> While Herrick post-dates Shakespeare, the poem forms a parallel with Katherina's Churching. Herrick writes:

Put on thy *Holy Fillitings*, and so  
 To th'Temple with the sober *Midwife* go.  
 Attended thus (in a most solemn wise)  
 By those who serve the Child-bed misteries.  
 Burn first thy incense; next, when as thou see'st  
 The candid Stole thrown ore the *Pious Priest*;

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<sup>26</sup>Another sly reference to birth practice may lie in Katherina's observation that "Our lances are but straws" calling a last bit of attention to the "woman in the straw," her sequestration, and now her return.

<sup>27</sup>223.

With reverend Curtsies come, and to him bring  
 Thy free (and not decurted) offering.  
 All Rites well ended, and with faire Auspice come  
 (As to the breaking of a Bride-Cake) home:  
 Where ceremonious *Hymen* shall for thee  
 Provide a second *Epithalamie*.  
*She who keep chastly to her husbands side*  
*Is not for one, but every night his Bride:*  
*And stealing still with love, and feare to Bed,*  
*Brings him not one, but many a Maiden-head.*<sup>28</sup>

Katherina has no chrisom to offer, but she offers herself, her hand as in matrimony, into her lord's care. Her interrupted nuptial celebration comes to completion through ceremony and rite—both private and public. Certainly, Petruchio's "Come, Kate, we'll to bed" suggests strange bedfellows no more (5.2.184). Having completed her *rite de passage*, Katherina returns from her sequestration and reemerges as not only a proper wife and community member but as the center of attention at what is now her celebration.

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<sup>28</sup>*Herrick: Poems*, L. C. Martin, ed. (London: Oxford, 1965), p. 286. Given my earlier argument, I shall not elaborate on the connections between the actions Herrick gives us and *Shrew*. However, one cannot help but note Herrick's mention, as parish priest, of the "free (and not decurted) offering" to the "Pious Priest"