The opposition between women who are people and women who are something less does not only rest in the vague contrast between the women of the comedies and the women of tragedies. There are more explicit examples of women who may earn love, like Helena who pursued her husband through military brothels to marriage and honor in All’s Well, the women who must lose it through inertia and gormlessness, like Cressida. In The Taming of the Shrew Shakespeare contrasted two types in order to present a theory of marriage which is demonstrated by the explicit valuation of both kinds of wooing in the last scene. Kate is a woman striving for her own existence in a world where she is a stale, a decoy to be bid for against her sister’s higher market value, so she opts out by becoming unmanageable, a scold. Bianca has found the women’s way of guile and feigned gentleness to pay better dividends: she woos for herself under false colors, manipulating her father and her suitors in a perilous game which could end in her ruin. Kate courts ruin in a different way, but she has the uncommon good fortune to find Petruchio, who is man enough to know what he wants and how to get it. He wants her spirit and her energy because he wants a wife worth keeping. He tames her as he might a hawk or a high-mettled horse, and she rewards him with strong
sexual love and fierce loyalty. Lucentio finds himself saddled with a cold, disloyal woman, who has no objection to humiliating him in public. The submission of a woman like Kate is genuine and exciting because she has something to lay down, her virgin pride and individuality: Bianca is the soul of duplicity, married without earnestness or good will. Kate’s speech at the close of the play is the greatest defense of Christian monogamy ever written. It rests upon the role of a husband as protector and friend, and it is valid because Kate has a man who is capable of being both, for Petruchio is both gentle and strong (it is a vile distortion of the play to have him strike her ever). The message is probably twofold: only Kates make good wives, and then only to Petruchios; for the rest, their cake is dough.
Important Notice to Students: Materials used in connection with this course may be protected by Copyright Law (Title 17 U.S.C.). The Board of Education of the West Essex Regional School District, according to West Essex board policy 2531, requires that all administration, faculty, staff, and students using copyrighted materials for educational purposes do so in accordance with U.S. Copyright Law. The use of these materials on reserve is for students enrolled in the English I course.

Notice of Copyright:
This material may be protected by Copyright Law (Title 17 U.S.C.).

MLA Citation: