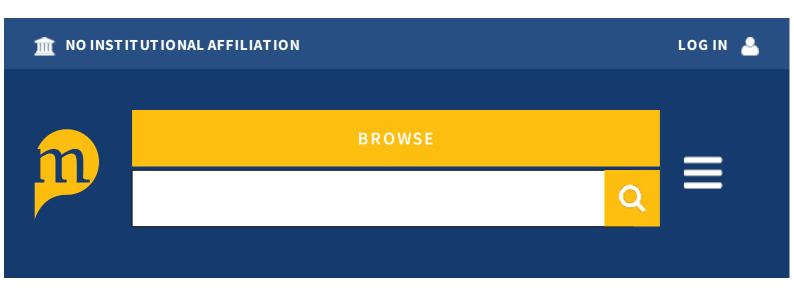
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Mary Pickford as Shakespearean Shrew:

Redefining the Image of America's

Sweetheart.



Mary Pickford as Shakespearean Shrew: Redefining the Image of America's Sweetheart

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Shakespeare Bulletin

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 28, Number 3, Fall 2010

pp. 331-345

10.1353/shb.2010.0013

ARTICLE

View Cit at ion

Abstract

In this article, Loftis examines Sam Taylor's 1929 *The Taming of the Shrew* as a failed revision of the original play. The film is all-talking and was released in the early stages of feature soundtrack cinema, and starred famous silent film actress, Mary Pickford. Loftis notes that Pickford had her own agenda: to revitalise and rebrand her career and hopefully become the new "America's Sweetheart". However, she tragically fails to change anything in the adaption, and in actual fact, reaffirms the image that was created before. Loftis begins by discussing Pickford's transition into 'talkies'. Previously, Pickford played many child roles, whereas her costume in this adaptation vastly changed, giving her a new sexualised image. Loftis continues

by discussing representations and re-workings of the Shakespearean Shrew, before turning to an examination of the ambiguous ending, as well as critical reception surrounding it. Though Taylor's adaptation attempted to be innovative, it ultimately ends up re-treading old ground, and ambiguity is reinstated by Pickford's portrayal of Katherine.

Keywords

Mary Pickford, America's Sweetheart, Katherine, The Taming of the Shrew, Adaptation, Sam Taylor, Shakespeare on film

Mary Pickford as Shakespearean Shrew: Redefining the Image of America's Sweetheart

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am Taylor's 1929 The Taming of the Shrew is a film of important failures. It declares itself a work of revision, yet it fails to revise. On every level the adaptation tries to bring something new to its audience. Advertised as "all talking" during the early years of feature-length sound films, it was proudly publicized as the first project to co-star silent film stars Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks. Yet the adaptation's most interesting "innovations" are the ones it did not advertise. The year before the film's premier, Pickford had decided to redefine her public image, hoping that she could change the nation's picture of "America's Sweetheart." Even as Pickford was giving her career a makeover, the film's treatment of its Shakespearean source text reveals a similar transformation: the film enters into a dialogue with the play's stage traditions, simultaneously endorsing and subverting earlier depictions of Katherina in much the same way that Pickford's makeover attempts to subvert, but ultimately endorses, her earlier image. If the textual "Shakespearean shrew" seemed vaguely defined to Elizabethan playgoers, raising anxieties and ambiguities about gender for the early modem audience, Pickford's performance of the Shakespearean shrew was equally ambiguous—and perhaps even more threatening-to film audiences of the 1920s. Although the film is attempting to remake Shakespeare's play, Pickford's Kate actually returns the gender ambiguity to Shakespeare's text that had been lost during so many eighteenth and nineteenth century stage performances. In the end, the film presents a battle of the sexes in which neither gender clearly triumphs. This ambiguous ending left critics unsatisfied, largely because neither the makeover of the star nor the refashioning of the text was successful in changing the public's vision of its shrew or its sweetheart.

Shahespean Bulletin 28.3: 331–345 © 2010 The Johns Hopkins University Press.





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