

**Taming the Unruly Idea:  
Or How I Created *Taming Mariella*  
By Dara Girard**

Take one controversial plot...say *The Taming of the Shrew* and one headstrong heroine...say Jane Austen's *Emma* and make her an ex-model turned photographer forced to work with an arrogant magazine owner, who happens to hate models—ex or otherwise—, and you have *Taming Mariella*. I hadn't meant to go in this direction. A writer doesn't intentionally take a self-centered



heroine and put her in a plot that many may believe to be 'irredeemably sexist' and/or 'misogynistic.' As a former Women's Studies major, I wasn't looking forward to the prospect of feminists finding yet another reason why romance novels should be banished. Granted, I don't believe that I can change the skewed viewpoints that exists (i.e. that women are too stupid to differentiate fantasy from real life, while men are. An ironic stance that many feminists take) but I certainly didn't want to create a piece of work for someone to hold up and say 'See? This is why domestic violence continues.' But the idea wouldn't go away and I was stubborn. I knew the story could work. I just needed to find a way how.

### The Heroine



*Create a sympathetic character.* That's the advice most 'how to write' books tell authors, especially romance authors. *Make sure that your heroine is someone that readers will instantly identify with and like.* Great advice but that wasn't going to help me with this story. I realized early on that I had a character that my readers may instantly dislike. A woman who is extremely beautiful, knows how to use her charms, gets what she wants and plans to live her life on her own terms. Fortunately, I could look to existing literature to help me. Emma Woodhouse, in Jane Austen's *Emma*, may be annoying, but she's interesting. Scarlett O'Hara, in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With The Wind*, is described as a number of unpleasant things, but she's interesting. That's how I knew I could save my heroine. Mariella Duvall may be proud and spoiled, but her flaws make her interesting and will draw readers into the story. My next question was, "How should I set up the story?"

## The Research

I proudly admit to being a lover of old movies. I will watch anything after 1930, which my poor father doesn't understand, but that's okay. So when I realized that the movie *McLintock*, with Maureen O'Hara and John Wayne, was loosely based on *The Taming of the Shrew* I settled down to see how the story was constructed and if I could get any tips. Tip One: Don't use a 1963 Western as serious research. Okay, I like Maureen O'Hara, but basing my book solely on this movie would have had readers tossing tomatoes at my house. If people thought the original play was chauvinistic, they would consider this version Neanderthal. It has one of the most popular (or perhaps *the* most popular) spanking scene on film. If I ever decide to write something in one of my books where a woman gets spanked, she's going to be enjoying it. So I knew this wasn't how I could use the plot. I decided to watch several other movies based on the same play, including the musical *Kiss Me, Kate*, the teen version *10 Things I Hate About You*, the African American version, *Deliver Us From Eva* and the BBC version in *Shakespeare Retold* where Kate is a vicious politician. They all had their unique spin and I enjoyed them. The latter being one of my favorite. But I was still floundering. I did not want my hero, Ian Cooper, to get involved with Mariella based on deception or money. So I went back to the original play.

## Learning from the Classics

Let's start from the beginning. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare wrote about Petruchio a man who comes to Padua in search of a rich wife, not caring about her temper or her looks. He instantly sets his attention on Katherina, a beautiful but unruly shrew. Using manipulations, he tames her wild spirit and turns her into a loving and willing wife. Whether you think his methods cruel or comical is left up to discussion. As I reviewed the play I learned that during their very first meeting they were evenly matched in words. Every insult she threw at him he used against her. This example stood out for me:

PETRUCCIO: Come, come, you wasp, i'faith you are too angry.

KATHERINE: If I be waspish, best beware my sting.

PETRUCCIO: My remedy is then to pluck it out.

KATHERINE: Ay, if the fool could find where it lies.

PETRUCCIO: Who knows not where a wasp does wear his sting? In his tail.

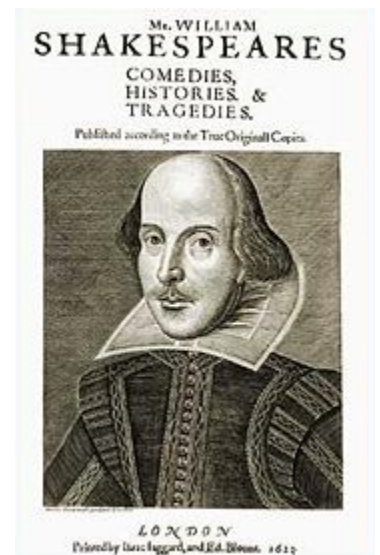
KATHERINE: In his tongue.

PETRUCCIO: Whose tongue?

KATHERINE: Yours, if you talk of tales, and so farewell.

PETRUCCIO: What, with my tongue in your tail?

The last line stands out because it shows how Petruchio changes Katherina's insults into sexual innuendo. And the sexual tension and passion of these two characters are revealed.



That's when I decided that I would base my book on this foundation—a verbal battle of wit. Petruchio is not typical hero material, but his contradictory nature makes him interesting. Although he is raw, foul and mercenary, he is also educated and as quick to laugh as he is to anger. Katherina is also a contradiction. She is foul with her tongue and her actions, but physically beautiful. As you read the play, you come to realize that during 'the taming' process, Petruchio was just as unhappy as Kate. However, many didn't like or see the comical courtship of these two and wanted to see Petruchio punished.

John Fletcher a popular playwright in his day, whose fame rivaled Shakespeare, wrote a sequel to *The Taming of the Shrew* that was also controversial, but would likely have feminists applauding. His play was titled *The Woman's Prize or the Tamer Tamed*. In this version, Petruchio has remarried--poor Katherina is dead--and his new wife Maria, causes more havoc in his life than his prior wife. She doesn't fall for his manipulations and brings him to his knees with the help of other wives. One of the tactics they use is abstaining from sex. A clever premise and possibly created to show that not all men were as anti-female as people assumed Shakespeare to be.

### **Putting it all together**

In *Taming Mariella* I combine both versions. The book consists of two wild, strong characters, with both taming their dominant 'singleness' in order to form the special bonds to make them a couple. It's a thorny love story without anyone's spirit being broken. Initially, both characters are selfish but through the course of the story they become selfless. What I loved most about writing this book was going from the fairytale premise of Mariella's sister Izzy in *The Glass Slipper Project* to one that was gender-based and full of emotion. I don't think I completely tamed my wild idea, but I do hope that readers find it interesting.

The images are from [Wikipedia](#). The first painting is by Augustus Egg titled *The Taming of the Shrew*, next is a movie poster for *McLintock*, picture of Shakespeare, and John Fletcher. I also used [SparkNotes](#) to research the back story and language of the play plus the original.