

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

1. How does this frame story about the tinker Christopher Sly in the Induction comment on the central love stories? Think about what the Lord has in common with Petruchio (a partiality to hunting, for one thing); what Sly has in common with Kate (“dreaming” for one thing); about the motive for the Lord’s “jest” on Sly; about Sly’s reasons for refusing, then accepting, his new identity; about the role of cross-dressing and sexuality.
2. What should an actress try to get across in our first view of Katherine? (1.1.47–105)
 - a. What were Baptista, Gremio and Hortensio talking about?
 - b. What is Baptista’s tone in 52–54 (“If either of you ...”)?
 - c. Is it his will to “make a stale” of Kate? (See also his line [2.1.129], “Ay, when that special thing is well obtained ...”). Note his claim that, “I will be very kind, and liberal / To mine own children” (98–99). Is he?
 - d. Kate certainly sounds like a shrew in this scene. Is she? How *does* she feel about finding a mate? (This is not the same question as, “What does she say she feels about finding a mate”) Compare what she says in 2.1.33 about dancing barefoot at Bianca’s wedding.
 - e. Meanwhile, what is Bianca doing (and feeling)? What makes Baptista suddenly turn to her and say, “Get you in”? Why does Kate call Bianca a “pretty peat” and what does she mean by lines 78–79? What about Bianca’s response (80–83) — does she mean it?
 - f. Lucentio and Tranio are standing apart, secretly eavesdropping during this entire scene; Tranio thinks of it as “some show to welcome us to town.” How does their presence affect your response to the Minola family squabbles?
 - g. What is Kate’s tone in her parting lines? Is her insistence on going a demonstration of her freedom? Questions of staying and going (and taking and leaving) will be important in later scenes too.
3. Tranio says that Kate is “froward” (1.1.69). Most editors give a brief gloss for the word, but its meaning is quite complex. Here’s the full OED definition of “froward”: “Disposed to go counter to what is demanded or what is reasonable; perverse, difficult to deal with, hard to please; refractory, ungovernable; also, in a wider sense, bad, evilly-disposed, ‘naughty’. (The opposite of *toward*.)” Note how often the word appears in the play, and consider how its various shades of meaning relate to Kate’s character.
4. What should an actor try to get across in our first view of Petruchio? (1.2.23–114)
 - a. What are his motives for coming to Padua? Compare Lucentio’s.

- b. What kind of relationship does he have with his servant? Compare Lucentio. What's with the lengthy, unfunny business about "knocking"? Compare Petruchio's description of his servant (36) with Hortensio's (46).
 - c. What is Petruchio's attitude toward love and marriage? Lucentio's?
 - d. How does he say lines 67–75 and 92–95? How serious is he? See also 198ff, where he talks about roaring lions, puffed-up seas, and angry boars.
 - e. Grumio says that Petruchio will "rail in his rope tricks" (i.e. in his rhetoric) and "throw a figure in her face," that is: use elaborate but powerful language to confront her. Why the emphasis on language? Does Kate "rail in her rope tricks"? Language will be an important concern throughout the play.
5. The play presents two stories about the relation between men and women (three, if we count Sly and the Hostess; or four if we count Hortensio's widow): "shrewish" Katharine and Petruchio "more shrew than she" (4.1.76), and sweet Bianca and romantic Lucentio. Think about the differences apparent at the beginning of the play:

Kate has no suitors	Bianca has many suitors
Kate is a bully	Bianca is a victim
Kate is rebellious	Bianca is obedient
Kate and Petruchio get married early, then go through a courtship	Lucentio courts Bianca in disguise, then marries her

Think also about the differences between these couples at the end, when things seem reversed. What has happened?

6. Compare the different strategies of Lucentio and Petruchio, both of whom "tutor" their wives-to-be. Trace the stages of Petruchio's taming process: his announced strategy (2.1.170ff), their first meeting, the wedding, the time at his country house — and his announced strategy there (4.1.177ff), the journey back, and the final confrontation, with Katherine's final speech. Think about the word "taming" as a description of the relation between men and women; note the images of animals wild and tamed which keep the metaphor before our ears. Compare Lucentio's educational tactics. Does Petruchio change at all in the course of the process? Does Lucentio?
7. One difference between the two stories is that while both begin in the rich university town of Padua, only Kate and Petruchio move to his country house before returning to the city. What kind of place is Petruchio's house? What goes on there? Note especially 4.1, in which Kate barely speaks. How has she changed? How does the change of locale affect your impression of the relationship?
8. Compare the treatment in this play of the relationship between

masters and servants, between parents and children, and between men and women.

9. In 4.5 we witness a turning point in Kate's experience. Think about this scene, about what Katharine does here and why, about the feeling of the exchange between her and Petruchio. Is she being beaten down here? Or is she waking up? At what point does she decide to change?
10. Lucentio mentions the "counterfeit supposes" (5.1.108) which have fooled Baptista, referring to the disguises and deceptions he and his friends have used in courting Bianca. The play includes a range of other "supposings" as well — not only external disguises and clothing changes, but also other kinds of pretending, pretense, and internal or psychological change. Keep track of the pretending and play-acting, especially in Kate and Petruchio's story. Petruchio, for example, plays a swashbuckling hero, a mad-cap bridegroom, a tender loving husband — and pretends that Kate is a sweet, obedient, and loving wife. Trace the development of playing and pretending in Kate; how does it parallel her other changes?
11. The practice of carefully observing social conventions (dressing and speaking properly in public, and so on) can be seen as a form of "suppose" or performing or pretending. This can be contrasted to more relaxed, private, "natural" behavior, which is more likely to be unsociable — as it is when Kate insists on speaking her mind even if that isn't socially acceptable. What's the price of disrupting convention? What's the reward for observing convention? What does Petruchio think about social conventions? Notice the distinction he makes between what a couple does in private and what they do publicly:

If she and I be pleased, what's that to you?
'Tis bargained 'twixt us twain, being alone,
That she shall still be curst in company.
I tell you 'tis incredible to believe
How much she loves me. (2.1.304–08)

12. Shakespeare ends his story about the taming of the shrew with Kate's long speech in which a spirited, independent woman argues that,

Such duty as the subject owes the prince,
Even such a woman oweth to her husband; (5.2.161–62)

and ends by telling the other women to

place your hands beneath your husband's foot.
In token of which duty, if he please,
My hand is ready, may it do him ease. (5.2.183–85)

How are we to interpret this? Was Shakespeare sexist? Ironic?

Directors and scholars have argued back and forth about the speech for years. Which of the following comments best articulates your own feelings about the final scene? Which would you disagree with most strongly?

“The last scene is altogether disgusting to modern sensibility. No man with any decency of feeling can sit it out in the company of a woman without being extremely ashamed of the lord-of-creation moral implied in the wager and the speech put into the woman’s own mouth.”

— George Bernard Shaw (1897)

“I can only regard the play as an incomplete tragedy. Katherine could not have acted the hypocrite so completely if she had not had a dagger in her possession and the confident assurance that she was going to stab her tyrant that night.”

— H. Jennie Baker (1913)

“One cannot help thinking a little wistfully that Petruchian discipline had something to say for itself.”

— Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (1928)

“The play is an early version of *What Every Woman Knows* — what every woman knows being, of course, that the woman can lord it over the man so long as she allows him to think he is lording it over her.”

— Harold C. Goddard (1951)

“Dame Peggy [Ashcroft] plays the last scene ... with an eager, sensible radiance that almost prompts one to regret the triumph of the suffrage movement.”

— Kenneth Tynan (1960)

“The truth is that Kate’s great victory is, with Petruchio’s help, over herself; she has come to accept herself as having enough merits so that she can be content without having the last word and scaring everybody off.”

— Robert B. Heilman (1966)

“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.”

— Germaine Greer (1970)

“There is, however, a larger question at stake. It is whether there is any reason to revive a play that seems totally offensive to our age and society. My own feeling is that it should be put back firmly and squarely on the shelf.”

— Michael Billington (1978)

“Shakespeare underwrote the idea that the state, whether it was the small state of the family or the larger state of the country, required and needed the unquestioned authority of some sort of sovereign.”

— Jonathan Miller (1981)

“Kate is less powerful, less wealthy, less cheerful, less in the playwright’s confidence — less everything than Petruchio. When the conflict with women is stressed but unequal, as it is here, we are surely justified in leveling the charge of sexism.”

— Linda Bamber (1984)

“The direction of the play, for Katherine and Petruchio, is towards marriage as a rich, shared sanity. That means asserting and sharing all the facts about one’s identity, not suppressing large areas. ... [By] the end of the play she shows that she shares with Petruchio an understood frame for both their lives. ... Her final step is when she shows to Petruchio that they, the two of them, can contain violence and rebellion in their own mutual frame.”

— David Daniell (1986)

“The scene isn’t about humiliation. Or about Kate falling in love with Petruchio. It’s about a third thing. It’s about being given a chance, for the first time in her life This man who has seemed to be her tormentor has given her, or has allowed her to take, the step that will save the rest of her life. That’s why it’s so wrong if the play is about dominance and a broken spirit. It’s about someone on the brink ... who found a way of saying ‘yes’ without being compromised.”

— Fiona Shaw (1987)

“I think it’s an irresponsible and silly thing to make that play into a feminist tract. It is not simply the high jinks of an intolerably selfish man who was simply destroying a woman to satisfy his own vanity, but a sacramental view of the nature of marriage.”

— Jonathan Miller (1988)

“The humiliation to which Kate is subjected is what happens in a world ruled and dominated by men, where any woman who challenges male supremacy has to be smashed down by any means possible, until she is submissive, pliant and occupies her rightful place in the world, which is to warm the slippers, cook the meals and come when called.”

— Michael Bogdanov (1989)

“The play enacts the defeat of the threat of a woman’s revolt: it does so in comic form, and often with apparent good humor — thus it offers the audience the chance to revel in and reinforce their misogyny while at the same time feeling good. It ends happily, so all must be right with the world.”

— Penny Gay (1994)