

## THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

1. Our first view of Katharina (1.1.47-105): What should an actress try to get across?
  - 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.
2. Our first view of Petruchio (1.2.23-114): What should an actor try to get across?
  - 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," i.e. use elaborate but powerful language to confront her. Why the emphasis on language? Does Katharine "rail in her rope tricks"? Language will be an important concern throughout the play.
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 is used in the play, and consider how its various shades of meaning relate to Kate's character.
4. 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 and Petruchio get married early, then go through a courtship	Bianca goes through a conventional courtship in which love overcomes parental objections, then marries
Kate is a bully	Bianca is a victim
Kate is a rebel	Bianca is obedient

Think also about the differences between these couples at the end, when things seem reversed. What has happened? (Anything like what goes on with the comparative love-lives of Adriana and Luciana?)

5. 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?
6. 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?
7. Compare the treatment in this play of the relationship between master and servant, between parent and child, and between man and woman.
8. In 5.5 we witness a turning point in Kate's experience. Talk 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?
9. 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?

1. 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)

2. Theater is of course a form of “suppose” or play-acting. The two love stories are after all only a play, a dramatic fiction staged for the “real” characters in the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew*. What does this frame story about the tinker Christopher Sly add to 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 Katharine (“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.

Many scholars believe that Sly reappeared in the later parts of the play and at the end. What do you think Shakespeare might have included in a final scene about him?

3. Any modern audience has to come to terms with the fact that Shakespeare ends his story about the taming of the shrew with Katharine'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 critics have argued back and forth about it for years:

“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)

"Kate has the uncommon good fortune to find Petruchio, who is man enough to know what he wants and how to get it." (Germaine Greer, 1970)

"One cannot help thinking a little wistfully that Petruchian discipline had something to say for itself." (Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, 1928)

"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)

"This *Shrew* was being played as Sly's dream, a male supremacist's fantasy of revenge upon women." (Royal Shakespeare Company programme note, 1978)

"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 play shows us a possibility of marriage as a rich, shared sanity." (David Daniell, 1986)

"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)

"Altogether disgusting to modern sensibility." (George Bernard Shaw)

"I believe Shakespeare was a feminist." (Michael Bogdanow, 1988)

"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." (R. B. Heilman, 1966)