Insights
A Study Guide to the Utah Shakespeare Festival

The Taming of the Shrew
The articles in this study guide are not meant to mirror or interpret any productions at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. They are meant, instead, to be an educational jumping-off point to understanding and enjoying the plays (in any production at any theatre) a bit more thoroughly. Therefore the stories of the plays and the interpretative articles (and even characters, at times) may differ dramatically from what is ultimately produced on the Festival’s stages.

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Cover photo: Leslie Brott (left) and Kieran Connolly in The Taming of the Shrew, 2004.
# The Taming of the Shrew

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Shakespeare: Words, Words, Words

By S. S. Moorty

“No household in the English-speaking world is properly furnished unless it contains copies of the Holy Bible and of The Works of William Shakespeare. It is not always thought that these books should be read in maturer years, but they must be present as symbols of Religion and Culture” (G.B. Harrison, Introducing Shakespeare. Rev. & Exp. [New York: Penguin Books, 1991], 11).

We, the Shakespeare-theater goers and lovers, devotedly and ritualistically watch and read the Bard’s plays not for exciting stories and complex plots. Rather, Shakespeare’s language is a vital source of our supreme pleasure in his plays. Contrary to ill-conceived notions, Shakespeare’s language is not an obstacle to appreciation, though it may prove to be difficult to understand. Instead, it is the communicative and evocative power of Shakespeare’s language that is astonishingly rich in vocabulary—about 29,000 words—strikingly presented through unforgettable characters such as Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear, Othello, Rosalind, Viola, Iago, Shylock, etc.

In the high school classroom, students perceive Shakespeare’s language as “Old English.” Actually Shakespeare’s linguistic environment, experience, and exposure was, believe it or not, closer to our own times than to Chaucer’s, two hundred years earlier. Indeed, the history and development of the English language unfolds as follows: Old English, 449-1100; Middle English 1100-1500; and Modern English 1500-present. Shakespeare was firmly in the Modern English period.

At the time Shakespeare wrote, most of the grammatical changes from Old and Middle English had taken place; yet rigid notions about “correctness” had not yet been standardized in grammars. The past five centuries have advanced the cause of standardized positions for words; yet the flexible idiom of Elizabethan English offered abundant opportunities for Shakespeare’s linguistic inventiveness. Ideally it is rewarding to study several facets of Shakespeare’s English: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, wordplay, and imagery. The present overview will, however, be restricted to “vocabulary.”

To Polonius’s inquisitive question “What do you read, my lord?” (Hamlet, 2.2.191) Hamlet nonchalantly and intriguingly aptly replies: “Words, words, words” (2.2.192). This many-splendored creation of Shakespeare’s epitomizes the playwright’s own fascination with the dynamic aspect of English language, however troubling it may be to modern audiences and readers. Shakespeare added several thousand words to the language, apart from imparting new meanings to known words. At times Shakespeare could teasingly employ the same word for different shades of thought. Barowne’s single line, “Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile” (Love’s Labour’s Lost, 1.1.77), as Harry Levin in his General Introduction to The Riverside Shakespeare (9) explains, “uses ‘light’ in four significations: intellect, seeking wisdom, cheats eyesight out of daylight.”

Another instance: Othello as he enters his bedroom with a light before he smothers his dear, innocent Desdemona soliloquizes: “Put out the light, and then put out the light” (Othello, 5.2.7) Here ‘light’ compares the light of Othello’s lamp or torch to Desdemona’s ‘light’ of life.

In both instances, the repeated simple ordinary word carries extraordinary shades of meaning. “Usually such a tendency in a Shakespeare play indicates a more or less conscious thematic intent.” (Paul A. Jorgensen, Redeeming Shakespeare’s Words [Berkeley and Los Angeles; University of California Press, 1962], 100).
Living in an age of the “grandiose humanistic confidence in the power of the word” (Levin 9), Shakespeare evidently felt exuberant that he had the license to experiment with the language, further blessed by the fact that “there were no English grammars to lay down rules or dictionaries to restrict word-formation. This was an immeasurable boon for writers” (Levin 10). Surely Shakespeare took full advantage of the unparalleled linguistic freedom to invent, to experiment with, and to indulge in lavishly.

However intriguing, captivating, mind-teasing, beguiling, and euphonious, Shakespeare’s vocabulary can be a stumbling block, especially for readers. “In the theater the speaking actor frequently relies on tone, semantic drive, narrative context, and body language to communicate the sense of utterly unfamiliar terms and phrases, but on the page such words become more noticeable and confusing” (Russ McDonald, The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare: An Introduction with Documents [Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1996], 184).

Unlocking the meaning of Shakespeare’s vocabulary can prove to be an interesting challenge. Such words include those which “have dropped from common use like ‘bisson’ (blind) or those that the playwright seems to have created from Latin roots . . . but that did not catch on, such as conspectuities’ (eyesight or vision) or ‘unplausible’ (doubtful or disapproving). Especially confusing are those words that have shifted meaning over the intervening centuries, such as ‘proper’ (handsome), ‘nice’ (squeamish or delicate), ‘silly’ (innocent), or ‘cousin’ (kinsman, that is, not necessarily the child of an aunt or uncle” (McDonald 184). Because of semantic change, when Shakespeare uses ‘conceit,’ he does not mean ‘vanity,’ as we might understand it to be. Strictly following etymology, Shakespeare means a ‘conception’ or ‘notion,’ or possibly the ‘imagination’ itself.

Perhaps several Shakespeare words “would have been strange to Shakespeare’s audience because they were the products of his invention or unique usage. Some words that probably originated with him include: ‘auspicious,’ ‘assassination,’ ‘disgraceful,’ ‘dwindle,’ ‘savagery.’” Certainly a brave soul, he was “a most audacious inventor of words.” To appreciate and understand Shakespeare’s English in contrast to ours, we ought to suspend our judgment and disbelief and allow respect for the “process of semantic change, which has been continually eroding or encrusting his original meaning” (Levin 8).

Shakespeare’s vocabulary has received greater attention that any other aspect of his language. Perhaps this is because it is the most accessible with no burdensome complications. Whatever the cause, Shakespeare’s language will forever be challenging and captivating.
Not of an Age, but for All Mankind

By Douglas A. Burger

After an enormous expenditure of money and effort, Shakespeare’s Globe Theater has risen again, four centuries later, on London’s south bank of the Thames. Designed as a faithful reconstruction of the original, it uses the building methods of the time and traditional materials (oak timbers, plaster walls, wooden pegs, water-reeds for thatching the roof). From above, the shape seems circular (actually, it is twenty-six sided) with three covered tiers of seats surrounding a central area which is open to the sky. There the “groundlings” may stand to see the action taking place on the stage, which occupies almost half of the inner space. There are no artificial lights, no conventional sets, no fancy rigging.

Seeing a Shakespeare play in the afternoon sunlight at the new Globe must come very close to the experience of those early-day Londoners, except, of course, that we in the twentieth-century behave better. We don’t yell insults at the actors, spit, or toss orange peels on the ground. We also smell better: the seventeenth-century playwright, Thomas Dekker, calls the original audience “Stinkards . . . glued together in crowds with the Steames of strong breath” (Shakespeare’s Globe: The Guide Book [London: International Globe Center, 1996], 42). And we are safer. The first Globe burned to the ground. The new theater has more exits, fire-retardant insulation concealed in the walls, and water-sprinklers that poke through the thatch of the roof.

That hard-headed capitalists and officials would be willing, even eager, to invest in the project shows that Shakespeare is good business. The new Globe is just one example. Cedar City’s own Utah Shakespeare Festival makes a significant contribution to the economy of southern Utah. A sizable percentage of all the tourist dollars spent in England goes to Shakespeare’s birthplace, Stratford-on-Avon, which would be a sleepy little agricultural town without its favorite son. The situation seems incredible. In our whole history, what other playwright could be called a major economic force? Who else—what single individual—could be listed along with agriculture, mining, and the like as an industry of a region? Why Shakespeare?

The explanation, of course, goes further than an attempt to preserve our cultural traditions. In an almost uncanny way, Shakespeare’s perceptions remain valuable for our own understandings of life, and probably no other writer remains so insightful, despite the constantly changing preoccupations of audiences over time.

The people of past centuries, for example, looked to the plays for nuggets of wisdom and quotable quotes, and many of Shakespeare’s lines have passed into common parlance. There is an old anecdote about the woman, who on first seeing Hamlet, was asked how she liked the play. She replied, “Oh, very nice, my dear, but so full of quotations.” She has it backwards of course. Only the King James Bible has lent more “quotations” to English than Shakespeare.

Citizens of the late nineteenth century sought in the plays for an understanding of human nature, valuing Shakespeare’s character for traits that they recognized in themselves and in others. The fascination continues to the present day as some of our best-known movie stars attempt to find new dimensions in the great characters: Mel Gibson and Kenneth Branagh in Hamlet, Lawrence Fishburn in Othello, Leonardo de Caprio in Romeo + Juliet, to name just a few.

Matters of gender, class, and race have preoccupied more recent audiences. Beatrice sounds a rather feminist note in Much Ado about Nothing in her advice to her cousin about
choosing a husband: Curtsy to your father, but say “Father, as it please me.” Coriolanus presents a recurring dilemma about class relations in its explorations of the rights and wrongs involved in a great man’s attempt to control the masses. Racial attitudes are illuminated in Othello, where the European characters always mark the hero by his race, always identify him first as the “Moor,” are always aware of his difference. London’s new/old Globe is thus a potent symbol of the plays’ continuing worth to us. The very building demonstrates the utter accuracy of the lines written so long ago that Shakespeare is not “of an age” but “for all time.”
Elizabeth’s England

In his entire career, William Shakespeare never once set a play in Elizabethan England. His characters lived in medieval England (Richard II), France (As You Like It), Vienna (Measure for Measure), fifteenth-century Italy (Romeo and Juliet), the England ruled by Elizabeth’s father (Henry VIII) and elsewhere—anywhere and everywhere, in fact, except Shakespeare’s own time and place. But all Shakespeare’s plays—even when they were set in ancient Rome—reflected the life of Elizabeth’s England (and, after her death in 1603, that of her successor, James I). Thus, certain things about these extraordinary plays will be easier to understand if we know a little more about Elizabethan England.

Elizabeth’s reign was an age of exploration—exploration of the world, exploration of man’s nature, and exploration of the far reaches of the English language. This renaissance of the arts and sudden flowering of the spoken and written word gave us two great monuments—the King James Bible and the plays of Shakespeare—and many other treasures as well.

Shakespeare made full use of the adventurous Elizabethan attitude toward language. He employed more words than any other writer in history—more than 21,000 different words appear in the plays—and he never hesitated to try a new word, revive an old one, or make one up. Among the words which first appeared in print in his works are such everyday terms as “critic,” “assassinate,” “bump,” “gloomy,” “suspicious,” and “hurry;” and he invented literally dozens of phrases which we use today: such un-Shakespeare expressions as “catching a cold,” “the mind’s eye,” “elbow room,” and even “pomp and circumstance.”

Elizabethan England was a time for heroes. The ideal man was a courtier, an adventurer, a fencer with the skill of Tybalt, a poet no doubt better than Orlando, a conversationalist with the wit of Rosalind and the eloquence of Richard II, and a gentleman. In addition to all this, he was expected to take the time, like Brutus, to examine his own nature and the cause of his actions and (perhaps unlike Brutus) to make the right choices. The real heroes of the age did all these things and more.

Despite the greatness of some Elizabethan ideals, others seem small and undignified, to us; marriage, for example, was often arranged to bring wealth or prestige to the family, with little regard for the feelings of the bride. In fact, women were still relatively powerless under the law.

The idea that women were “lower” than men was one small part of a vast concern with order which was extremely important to many Elizabethans. Most people believed that everything, from the lowest grain of sand to the highest angel, had its proper position in the scheme of things. This concept was called “the great chain of being.” When things were in their proper place, harmony was the result; when order was violated, the entire structure was shaken.

This idea turns up again and again in Shakespeare. The rebellion against Richard II brings bloodshed to England for generations; Romeo and Juliet’s rebellion against their parents contributes to their tragedy; and the assassination in Julius Caesar throws Rome into civil war.

Many Elizabethans also perceived duplications in the chain of order. They believed, for example, that what the sun is to the heavens, the king is to the state. When something went wrong in the heavens, rulers worried: before Julius Caesar and Richard II were overthrown, comets and meteors appeared, the moon turned the color of blood, and other bizarre astronomical phenomena were reported. Richard himself compares his fall to a premature setting of the sun; when he descends from the top of Flint Castle to meet the conquering
Bolingbroke, he likens himself to the driver of the sun’s chariot in Greek mythology: “Down, down I come, like glist’ring Phaeton” (3.3.178).

All these ideas find expression in Shakespeare’s plays, along with hundreds of others—most of them not as strange to our way of thinking. As dramatized by the greatest playwright in the history of the world, the plays offer us a fascinating glimpse of the thoughts and passions of a brilliant age. Elizabethan England was a brief skyrocket of art, adventure, and ideas which quickly burned out; but Shakespeare’s plays keep the best parts of that time alight forever.

(Adapted from “The Shakespeare Plays,” educational materials made possible by Exxon, Metropolitan Life, Morgan Guaranty, and CPB.)
History Is Written by the Victors

William Shakespeare wrote ten history plays chronicling English kings from the time of the Magna Carta (King John) to the beginning of England's first great civil war, the Wars of the Roses (Richard II) to the conclusion of the war and the reuniting of the two factions (Richard III), to the reign of Queen Elizabeth's father (Henry VIII). Between these plays, even though they were not written in chronological order, is much of the intervening history of England, in the six Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI plays.

In writing these plays, Shakespeare had nothing to help him except the standard history books of his day. The art of the historian was not very advanced in this period, and no serious attempt was made to get at the exact truth about a king and his reign. Instead, the general idea was that any nation that opposed England was wrong, and that any Englishman who opposed the winning side in a civil war was wrong also.

Since Shakespeare had no other sources, the slant that appears in the history books of his time also appears in his plays. Joan of Arc opposed the English and was not admired in Shakespeare's day, so she is portrayed as a comic character who wins her victories through witchcraft. Richard III fought against the first Tudor monarchs and was therefore labeled in the Tudor histories as a vicious usurper, and he duly appears in Shakespeare's plays as a murdering monster.

Shakespeare wrote nine of his history plays under Queen Elizabeth. She did not encourage historical truthfulness, but rather a patriotism, an exultant, intense conviction that England was the best of all possible countries and the home of the most favored of mortals. And this patriotism breathes through all the history plays and binds them together. England's enemy is not so much any individual king as the threat of civil war, and the history plays come to a triumphant conclusion when the threat of civil war is finally averted, and the great queen, Elizabeth, is born.

Shakespeare was a playwright, not a historian, and, even when his sources were correct, he would sometimes juggle his information for the sake of effective stagecraft. He was not interested in historical accuracy; he was interested in swiftly moving action and in people. Shakespeare's bloody and superb king seems more convincing than the real Richard III, merely because Shakespeare wrote so effectively about him. Shakespeare moved in a different world from that of the historical, a world of creation rather than of recorded fact, and it is in this world that he is so supreme a master.
Mr. Shakespeare, I Presume
by Diana Major Spencer

Could the plays known as Shakespeare’s have been written by a rural, semi-literate, uneducated, wife-deserting, two-bit actor who spelled his name differently each of the six times he wrote it down? Could such a man know enough about Roman history, Italian geography, French grammar, and English court habits to create Antony and Cleopatra, The Comedy of Errors, and Henry V? Could he know enough about nobility and its tenuous relationship to royalty to create King Lear and Macbeth?

Are these questions even worth asking? Some very intelligent people think so. On the other hand, some very intelligent people think not. Never mind quibbles about how a line should be interpreted, or how many plays Shakespeare wrote and which ones, or which of the great tragedies reflected personal tragedies. The question of authorship is “The Shakespeare Controversy.”

Since Mr. Cowell, quoting the deceased Dr. Wilmot, cast the first doubt about William of Stratford in an 1805 speech before the Ipswich Philological Society, nominees for the “real author” have included philosopher Sir Francis Bacon, playwright Christopher Marlowe, Queen Elizabeth I, Sir Walter Raleigh, and the earls of Derby, Rutland, Essex, and Oxford--among others.

The arguments evoke two premises: first, that the proven facts about the William Shakespeare who was christened at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon on April 26, 1564 do not configure a man of sufficient nobility of thought and language to have written the plays; and, second, that the man from Stratford is nowhere concretely identified as the author of the plays. The name “Shakespeare”—in one of its spellings—appears on early quartos, but the man represented by the name may not be the one from Stratford.

One group of objections to the Stratford man follows from the absence of any record that he ever attended school—in Stratford or anywhere else. If he were uneducated, the arguments go, how could his vocabulary be twice as large as the learned Milton’s? How could he know so much history, law, or philosophy? If he were a country bumpkin, how could he know so much of hawking, hounding, courtly manners, and daily habits of the nobility? How could he have traveled so much, learning about other nations of Europe in enough detail to make them the settings for his plays?

The assumptions of these arguments are that such rich and noble works as those attributed to a playwright using the name “Shakespeare” could have been written only by someone with certain characteristics, and that those characteristics could be distilled from the “facts” of his life. He would have to be noble; he would have to be well-educated; and so forth. On these grounds the strongest candidate to date is Edward de Vere, seventeenth earl of Oxford.

A debate that has endured its peaks and valleys, the controversy catapulted to center stage in 1984 with the publication of Charlton Ogburn’s The Mysterious William Shakespeare. Ogburn, a former army intelligence officer, builds a strong case for Oxford—if one can hurdle the notions that the author wasn’t Will Shakespeare, that literary works should be read autobiographically, and that literary creation is nothing more than reporting the facts of one’s own life. “The Controversy” was laid to rest—temporarily, at least—by justices Blackmun, Brennan, and Stevens of the United States Supreme Court who, after hearing evidence from both sides in a mock trial conducted September 25, 1987 at American University in Washington, D.C., found in favor of the Bard of Avon.

Hooray for our side!
A Nest of Singing Birds

Musical development was part of the intellectual and social movement that influenced all England during the Tudor Age. The same forces that produced writers like Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, John Donne, and Francis Bacon also produced musicians of corresponding caliber. So numerous and prolific were these talented and imaginative men—men whose reputations were even in their own day firmly established and well founded—that they have been frequently and aptly referred to as a nest of singing birds.

One such figure was Thomas Tallis, whose music has officially accompanied the Anglican service since the days of Elizabeth I; another was his student, William Boyd, whose variety of religious and secular compositions won him international reputation.

Queen Elizabeth I, of course, provided an inspiration for the best efforts of Englishmen, whatever their aims and activities. For music, she was the ideal patroness. She was an accomplished performer on the virginal (forerunner to the piano), and she aided her favorite art immensely in every way possible, bestowing her favors on the singers in chapel and court and on the musicians in public and private theatrical performances. To the great composers of her time, she was particularly gracious and helpful.

Singing has been an integral part of English life for as long as we have any knowledge. Long before the music was written down, the timeless folk songs were a part of our Anglo-Saxon heritage. The madrigals and airs that are enjoyed each summer at the Utah Shakespeare Festival evolved from these traditions.

It was noted by Bishop Jewel in 1560 that sometimes at Paul’s Cross there would be 6,000 people singing together, and before the sermon, the whole congregation always sang a psalm, together with the choir and organ. When that thundering unity of congregational chorus came in, “I was so transported there was no room left in my whole body, mind, or spirit for anything below divine and heavenly raptures.”

Religious expression was likely the dominant musical motif of the Elizabethan period; however, the period also saw development of English stage music, with Morley, John Wilson, and Robert Johnson setting much of their music to the plays of Shakespeare. The masque, a semi-musical entertainment, reached a high degree of perfection at the court of James I, where the courtiers themselves were sometimes participants. An educated person of the time was expected to perform music more than just fairly well, and an inability in this area might elicit whispered comments regarding lack of genteel upbringing, not only in the ability to take one’s part in a madrigal, but also in knowing the niceties of musical theory. Henry Peacham wrote in The Compleat Gentleman in 1662 that one of the fundamental qualities of a gentleman was to be able to “sing your part sure, and...to play the same upon your viol.”

Outside the walls of court could be heard street songs, lighthearted catches, and ballads, all of which indicates that music was not confined to the cathedrals or court. We still have extant literally hundreds of ballads, street songs, and vendors’ cries that were sung or hummed on the street and played with all their complicated variations on all levels of Elizabethan society.

Instruments of the period were as varied as the music and peoples, and the instrument and songbooks which remain in existence today are indicative of the high level of excellence enjoyed by the Elizabethans. Songbooks, mainly of part-songs for three, four, five, and six
voices exist today, as do books of dance music: correntos, pavans, and galliards. Records
from one wealthy family indicate the family owned forty musical instruments, including
twelve viols, seven recorders, four lutes, five virginals, various brasses and woodwinds, and
two “great organs.” To have use for such a great number of instruments implies a fairly large
group of players resident with the family or staying with them as invited guests, and the
players of the most popular instruments (lutes, virginals, and viols) would be playing from
long tradition, at least back to King Henry VIII. In short, music was as necessary to the
public and private existence of a Renaissance Englishman as any of the basic elements of life.

The Utah Shakespeare Festival musicians perform each summer on authentic replicas
of many of these Renaissance instruments. The music they perform is authentic from the
Elizabethan period, and the instruments are made available for audience inspection and
learning.
Actors in Shakespeare’s Day
By Stephanie Chidester

The status of the actor in society has never been entirely stable but has fluctuated from
the beginnings of the theatre to the present day. The ancient Greeks often considered actors
as servants of Dionysus, and their performances were a sort of religious rite. Roman actors,
often slaves, were seen as the scraps of society, only one step above gladiators. In medieval
Europe, both the theatre and the actor, suppressed by the Catholic Church, were almost
non-existent but gradually re-emerged in the form of the liturgy and, later, the Mystery
plays. The actors of Shakespeare’s age also saw fluctuations in reputation; actors were
alternately classified as “vagabonds and sturdy beggars,” as an act of Parliament in 1572
defined them, and as servants of noblemen.

As early as 1482, noblemen such as Richard, duke of Gloucester (later Richard III), the
earl of Essex, and Lord Arundel kept acting companies among their retainers. But other
than these select groups protected by nobles, actors lived lives of danger and instability
because when they abandoned their respectable trades, they also left behind the comfort
and protection of the trade guilds.

However, life soon became much more difficult for both of these classes of actors. In
1572, Parliament passed two acts which damaged thespians’ social status. In the first one,
the Queen forbade “the unlawful retaining of multitudes of unordinary servants by liveryes,
badges, and other signs and tokens (contrary to the good and ancient statutes and laws of
this realm)” in order to “curb the power of local grandees” (Dennis Kay, Shakespeare: His
result of this was that some of the actors, now considered superfluous, were turned away.

To make matters even worse, these actors faced yet another impediment: the “Acte for
the punishment of Vacabondes” (Kay, 88), in which actors were declared “vagabonds
and masterless men and hence were subject to arrest and imprisonment” (Thomas Marc
Parrott and Robert Hamilton Ball, A Short View of Elizabethan Drama [New York: Charles
Scribner’s Sons, 1943], 46).

However, there were still nobles, such as the earl of Leicester and the earl of Sussex, who
endorsed players; the protector would usually seek royal permission for these actors to
perform in London or, less frequently, some other less prestigious town. Thus the actors
were able to venture forth without fear of arrest. It is through these circumstances that
Shakespeare ends up an actor in London.

There are many theories—guesses really—of how Shakespeare got into the theatre.
He may have joined a group of strolling players, performed around the countryside, and
eventually made it to London, the theatrical hub of Britain. Another theory suggests that he
began as a schoolmaster, wrote a play (possibly The Comedy of Errors) and then decided to
take it to London; or, alternately, he could have simply gone directly to that great city, with
or without a play in hand, to try his luck.

An interesting speculation is that while he was young, Shakespeare might have participated
in one of the cycles of Mystery plays in Stratford: “On one occasion the Stratford
corporation laid out money for an entertainment at Pentecost. In 1583 they paid 13s 4d
‘to Davi Jones and his company for his pastime at Whitsuntide.’ Davi Jones had been
married to Elizabeth, the daughter of Adrian Quiney, and after her death in 1579 he took as
his wife a Hathaway, Frances. Was Shakespeare one of the youths who trimmed themselves
for the Whitsun pastime?” (S. Schoenbaum, William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary
But however he got into the theatre and to London, he had made a very definite impression on his competitors by 1592, when playwright Robert Greene attacked Shakespeare as both actor and author: “‘There is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tiger’s heart wrapt in a Player’s hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and . . . is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country’” (G. B. Harrison, *Introducing Shakespeare* [New York: Penguin Books, Inc., 1947], 1).

We don’t often think of Shakespeare as primarily an actor, perhaps because most of what we know of him comes from the plays he wrote rather than the parts he played. Nevertheless, he made much of his money as an actor and sharer in his company: “At least to start with, his status, his security derived more from his acting skill and his eye for business than from from his pen” (Kay, 95). Had he been only a playwright, he would likely have died a poor man, as did Robert Greene: “In the autumn of 1592, Robert Greene, the most popular author of his generation, lay penniless and dying. . . . The players had grown rich on the products of his brain, and now he was deserted and alone” (Harrison, 1).

While Shakespeare made a career of acting, there are critics who might dispute his acting talent. For instance, almost a century after Shakespeare’s death, “an anonymous enthusiast of the stage . . . remarked . . . that ‘Shakespear . . . was a much better poet, than player’” (Schoenbaum, 201). However, Shakespeare could have been quite a good actor, and this statement would still be true. One sign of his skill as an actor is that he is mentioned in the same breath with Burbage and Kemp: “The accounts of the royal household for Mar 15 [1595] record payments to ‘William Kempe William Shakespeare & Richarde Burbage servantes to the Lord Chamberlain’” (Kay, 174).

Another significant indication of his talent is the very fact that he played in London rather than touring other less lucrative towns. If players were to be legally retained by noblemen, they had to prove they could act, and one means of demonstrating their legitimacy was playing at court for Queen Elizabeth. The more skilled companies obtained the queen’s favor and were granted permission to remain in London.

Not all companies, however, were so fortunate: “Sussex’s men may not have been quite up to the transition from rural inn-yards to the more demanding circumstances of court performance. Just before the Christmas season of 1574, for example, they were inspected (‘perused’) by officials of the Revels Office, with a view to being permitted to perform before the queen; but they did not perform” (Kay, 90). Shakespeare and his company, on the other hand, performed successfully in London from the early 1590s until 1611. It would be a mistake to classify William Shakespeare as only a playwright, even the greatest playwright of the English-speaking world; he was also “an actor, a sharer, a member of a company” (Kay, 95), obligations that were extremely relevant to his plays. As a man of the theatre writing for a company, he knew what would work on stage and what would not and was able to make his plays practical as well as brilliant. And perhaps more importantly, his theatrical experience must have taught him much about the human experience, about everyday lives and roles, just as his plays show us that “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players” (*As You Like It*, 2.7.149-50).
Shakespeare’s Audience: A Very Motley Crowd

When Shakespeare peeped through the curtain at the audience gathered to hear his first play, he looked upon a very motley crowd. The pit was filled with men and boys. The galleries contained a fair proportion of women, some not too respectable. In the boxes were a few gentlemen from the royal courts, and in the lords’ box or perhaps sitting on the stage was a group of extravagantly dressed gentlemen of fashion. Vendors of nuts and fruits moved about through the crowd. The gallants were smoking; the apprentices in the pit were exchanging rude witticisms with the painted ladies.

When Shakespeare addressed his audience directly, he did so in terms of gentle courtesy or pleasant raillery. In *Hamlet*, however, he does let fall the opinion that the groundlings (those on the ground, the cheapest seats) were “for the most part capable of nothing but dumb shows and noise.” His recollections of the pit of the Globe may have added vigor to his ridicule of the Roman mob in *Julius Caesar*.

On the other hand, the theatre was a popular institution, and the audience was representative of all classes of London life. Admission to standing room in the pit was a penny, and an additional penny or two secured a seat in the galleries. For seats in the boxes or for stools on the stage, still more was charged, up to sixpence or half a crown.

Attendance at the theatres was astonishingly large. There were often five or six theatres giving daily performances, which would mean that out of a city of one hundred thousand inhabitants, thirty thousand or more spectators each week attended the theatre. When we remember that a large class of the population disapproved of the theatre, and that women of respectability were not frequent patrons of the public playhouses, this attendance is remarkable.

Arrangements for the comfort of the spectators were meager, and spectators were often disorderly. Playbills seem to have been posted all about town and in the theatre, and the title of the piece was announced on the stage. These bills contained no lists of actors, and there were no programs, ushers, or tickets. There was usually one door for the audience, where the admission fee was deposited in a box carefully watched by the money taker, and additional sums were required at entrance to the galleries or boxes. When the three o’clock trumpets announced the beginning of a performance, the assembled audience had been amusing itself by eating, drinking, smoking, and playing cards, and they sometimes continued these occupations during a performance. Pickpockets were frequent, and, if caught, were tied to a post on the stage. Disturbances were not infrequent, sometimes resulting in general rioting.

The Elizabethan audience was fond of unusual spectacle and brutal physical suffering. They liked battles and murders, processions and fireworks, ghosts and insanity. They expected comedy to abound in beatings, and tragedy in deaths. While the audience at the Globe expected some of these sensations and physical horrors, they did not come primarily for these. (Real blood and torture were available nearby at the bear baitings, and public executions were not uncommon.) Actually, there were very few public entertainments offering as little brutality as did the theatre.

Elizabethans attended the public playhouses for learning. They attended for romance, imagination, idealism, and art; the audience was not without refinement, and those looking for food for the imagination had nowhere to go but to the playhouse. There were no newspapers, no
magazines, almost no novels, and only a few cheap books; theatre filled the desire for story discussion among people lacking other educational and cultural opportunities.

The most remarkable case of Shakespeare’s theatre filling an educational need is probably that of English history. The growth of national patriotism culminating in the English victory over the Spanish Armada gave dramatists a chance to use the historical material, and for the fifteen years from the Armada to the death of Elizabeth, the stage was deluged with plays based on the events of English chronicles, and familiarity with English history became a cultural asset of the London crowd,

Law was a second area where the Elizabethan public seems to have been fairly well informed, and successful dramatists realized the influence that the great development of civil law in the sixteenth century exercised upon the daily life of the London citizen. In this area, as in others, the dramatists did not hesitate to cultivate the cultural background of their audience whenever opportunity offered, and the ignorance of the multitude did not prevent it from taking an interest in new information and from offering a receptive hearing to the accumulated lore of lawyers, historians, humanists, and playwrights.

The audience was used to the spoken word, and soon became trained in blank verse, delighting in monologues, debates, puns, metaphors, stump speakers, and sonorous declamation. The public was accustomed to the acting of the old religious dramas, and the new acting in which the spoken words were listened to caught on rapidly. The new poetry and the great actors who recited it found a sensitive audience. There were many moments during a play when spectacle, brutality, and action were all forgotten, and the audience fed only on the words. Shakespeare and his contemporaries may be deemed fortunate in having an audience essentially attentive, eager for the newly unlocked storehouse of secular story, and possessing the sophistication and interest to be fed richly by the excitements and levities on the stage.
Shakespeare Snapshots
By Ace G. Pilkington

It is hard to get from the facts of Shakespeare's life to any sense of what it must have been like to have lived it. He was born in 1564 in Stratford-on-Avon and died there in 1616. The day of his birth is not certain, but it may have been the same as the day of his death—April 23—if he was baptized, as was usual at the time, three days after he was born. He married Anne Hathaway in the winter of 1582 83, when he was eighteen and she was twenty-six. He became the father of three children. The first was Susannah, who was born around May 23, close enough to the date of the wedding to suggest that the marriage was not entirely voluntary. Shakespeare's twins, Hamnet and Judith, were baptized on February 2, 1585. Hamnet died of unknown causes (at least unknown by us at this distance in time) in 1596. Shakespeare's career as actor, theatre owner, manager, and, of course, playwright began in the vicinity of 1590 and continued for the rest of his life, though there are clear indications that he spent more and more time in Stratford and less and less in London from 1611 on. His work in the theatre made him wealthy, and his extraordinary plays brought him a measure of fame, though nothing like what he deserved or would posthumously receive.

It's hard to get even the briefest sense of what Shakespeare's life was like from such information. It is probably impossible ever to know what Shakespeare thought or felt, but maybe we can get closer to what he saw and heard and even smelled. Perhaps some snapshots—little close-ups—might help to bring us nearer to the world in which Shakespeare lived if not quite to the life he lived in that world. In Shakespeare's youth, chimneys were a new thing. Before that, smoke was left to find its way out through a hole in the roof, often a thatched roof, and there were even some who maintained that this smoky atmosphere was better than the newfangled fresh air that chimneys made possible—along with a greater division of rooms and more privacy.

In the year of Shakespeare's birth, Stratford had more trees than houses—"upwards of 400 houses as well as 1,000 elms and forty ashes" (Peter Thomson, Shakespeare's Professional Career [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 1). Peter Levi says, "The town was so full of elm trees that it must have looked and sounded like a woodland settlement. For example, Mr. Gibbs's house on Rothermarket had twelve elms in the garden and six in front of the door. Thomas Attford on Ely Street had another twelve. The town boundaries were marked by elms or groups of elms (The Life and Times of William Shakespeare [New York: Wings Books, 1988], 7). Shakespeare's "Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang" becomes a far more majestic image with the picture of Stratford's elms in mind. And the birds themselves had a sound which modern ears no longer have a chance to enjoy. "We must realize that it was ordinary for . . . Shakespeare to hear a dawn chorus of many hundreds of birds at once. . . . as a young man thirty years ago I have heard a deafening dawn chorus in the wooded Chilterns, on Shakespeare's road to London" (Levi 10).

Exactly what Shakespeare's road to London may have been or at least how he first made his way there and became an actor is much debated. He might have been a schoolmaster or fifty other things, but he may well have started out as he ended up—as a player. We can then, in John Southworth's words, "Picture a sixteen-year-old lad on a cart, growing year by year into manhood, journeying out of the Arden of his childhood into ever more unfamiliar, distant regions, travelling ill-made roads in all weathers, sleeping in inns, hearing and memorising strange new dialects and forms of speech, meeting with every possible type and character of person; learning, most of all perhaps, from the audiences to which he played in guildhalls and inns" (Shakespeare the Player: A Life in the Theatre [Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2000], 30). At some time in his life—in fact, many times—Shakespeare must have known theatrical tours very like that.

In London itself, the new Globe, the best theatre in (or rather just outside of) the city, was in an
area with a large number of prisons and an unpleasant smell. “Garbage had
preceded actors on the marshy land where the new playhouse was erected: ‘flanked with
a ditch and forced out of a marsh’, according to Ben Jonson. Its cost . . . included the
provision of heavy piles for the foundation, and a whole network of ditches in which
the water rose and fell with the tidal Thames” (Garry O’Connor, William Shakespeare: A
Popular Life [New York: Applause Books, 2000], 161). The playgoers came by water, and
the Globe, the Rose, and the Swan “drew 3,000 or 4,000 people in boats across the Thames
every day” (161). Peter Levi says of Shakespeare’s London, “The noise, the crowds, the
animals and their droppings, the glimpses of grandeur and the amazing squalor of the poor,
were beyond modern imagination” (49).

England was a place of fear and glory. Public executions were public entertainments.
Severed heads decayed on city walls. Francis Bacon, whom Will Durant calls “the most
powerful and influential intellect of his time” (Heroes of History: A Brief History of
Civilization from Ancient Times to the Dawn of the Modern Age [New York: Simon &
Schuster, 2001], 327), had been “one of the persons commissioned to question prisoners
under torture” in the 1580s (Levi 4). The opportune moment when Shakespeare became
the most successful of playwrights was the destruction of Thomas Kyd, “who broke under
torture and was never the same again,” and the death of Christopher Marlowe in a tavern
brawl which was the result of plot and counterplot—a struggle, very probably, between
Lord Burghley and Walter Ralegh (Levi 48).

Shakespeare, who must have known the rumors and may have known the truth, cannot
have helped shuddering at such monstrous good fortune. Still, all of the sights, smells, and
terrors, from the birdsongs to the screams of torture, from the muddy tides to the ties of
blood, became not only the textures and tonalities of Shakespeare’s life, but also the infor-
mation and inspiration behind his plays.
Ghosts, Witches, and Shakespeare
By Howard Waters

Some time in the mid 1580s, young Will Shakespeare, for reasons not entirely clear to us, left his home, his wife, and his family in Stratford and set off for London. It was a time when Elizabeth, “la plus fine femme du monde,” as Henry III of France called her, had occupied the throne of England for over twenty-five years. The tragedy of Mary Stuart was past; the ordeal of Essex was in the future. Sir Francis Drake's neutralization of the Spanish Armada was pending and rumors of war or invasion blew in from all the great ports.

What could have been more exciting for a young man from the country, one who was already more than half in love with words, than to be headed for London!

It was an exciting and frightening time, when the seven gates of London led to a maze of streets, narrow and dirty, crowded with tradesmen, carts, coaches, and all manner of humanity. Young Will would have seen the moated Tower of London, looking almost like an island apart. There was London Bridge crowded with tenements and at the southern end a cluster of traitors’ heads impaled on poles. At Tyburn thieves and murderers dangled, at Limehouse pirates were trussed up at low tide and left to wait for the water to rise over them. At Tower Hill the headsman’s axe flashed regularly, while for the vagabonds there were the whipping posts, and for the beggars there were the stocks. Such was the London of the workaday world, and young Will was undoubtedly mentally filing away details of what he saw, heard, and smelled.

Elizabethan people in general were an emotional lot and the ferocity of their entertainment reflected that fact. Bear-baiting, for example, was a highly popular spectator sport, and the structure where they were generally held was not unlike the theatres of the day. A bear was chained to a stake in the center of the pit, and a pack of large dogs was turned loose to bait, or fight, him. The bear eventually tired (fortunately for the remaining dogs!), and, well, you can figure the rest out for yourself. Then there were the public hangings, whippings, or drawing and quarterings for an afternoon’s entertainment. So, the violence in some of Shakespeare’s plays was clearly directed at an audience that reveled in it. Imagine the effect of having an actor pretend to bite off his own tongue and spit a chunk of raw liver that he had carefully packed in his jaw into the faces of the groundlings!

Despite the progressing enlightenment of the Renaissance, superstition was still rampant among Elizabethan Londoners, and a belief in such things as astrology was common (Ralph P. Boas and Barbara M. Hahna, “The Age of Shakespeare,” Social Backgrounds of English Literature, [Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1931] 93). Through the position of stars many Elizabethans believed that coming events could be foretold even to the extent of mapping out a person’s entire life.

Where witches and ghosts were concerned, it was commonly accepted that they existed and the person who scoffed at them was considered foolish, or even likely to be cursed. Consider the fact that Shakespeare’s Macbeth was supposedly cursed due to the playwright’s having given away a few more of the secrets of witchcraft than the weird sisters may have approved of. For a time, productions experienced an uncanny assortment of mishaps and injuries. Even today, it is often considered bad luck for members of the cast and crew to mention the name of the production, simply referred to as the Scottish Play. In preaching a sermon, Bishop Jewel warned the Queen: “It may please your Grace to understand that witches and sorcerers within these last few years are marvelously increased. Your Grace’s
subjects pine away, even unto death; their color fadeth; their flesh roteth; their speech is
benumbed; their senses bereft” (Walter Bromberg, “Witchcraft and Psychotherapy”, The

Ghosts were recognized by the Elizabethans in three basic varieties: the vision or purely
subjective ghost, the authentic ghost who has died without opportunity of repentance, and
the false ghost which is capable of many types of manifestations (Boas and Hahn). When
a ghost was confronted, either in reality or in a Shakespeare play, some obvious
discrimination was called for (and still is). Critics still do not always agree on which of these
three types haunts the pages of Julius Caesar, Macbeth, Richard III, or Hamlet, or, in some
cases, why they are necessary to the plot at all. After all, Shakespeare’s ghosts are a capricious
lot, making themselves visible or invisible as they please. In Richard III there are no fewer
than eleven ghosts on the stage who are visible only to Richard and Richmond. In Macbeth
the ghost of Banquo repeatedly appears to Macbeth in crowded rooms but is visible
only to him. In Hamlet, the ghost appears to several people on the castle battlements but
only to Hamlet in his mother’s bedchamber. In the words of E.H. Seymour: “If we judge by
sheer reason, no doubt we must banish ghosts from the stage altogether, but if we regulate
our fancy by the laws of superstition, we shall find that spectres are privileged to be visible
to whom they will (E.H. Seymour “Remarks, Critical, Conjectural, and Explanatory
on Shakespeare” in Macbeth A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare [New York: Dover

Shakespeare’s audiences, and his plays, were the products of their culture. Since the validity
of any literary work can best be judged by its public acceptance, not to mention its lasting
power, it seems that Shakespeare’s ghosts and witches were, and are, enormously popular.
If modern audiences and critics find themselves a bit skeptical, then they might consider
bringing along a supply of Coleridge’s “willing suspension of disbelief.” Elizabethans simply
had no need of it.
Shakespeare’s Day: What They Wore

The clothing which actors wear to perform a play is called a costume, to distinguish it from everyday clothing. In Shakespeare’s time, acting companies spent almost as much on costumes as television series do today.

The costumes for shows in England were so expensive that visitors from France were a little envious. Kings and queens on the stage were almost as well dressed as kings and queens in real life.

Where did the acting companies get their clothes? Literally, “off the rack” and from used clothing sellers. Wealthy middle class people would often give their servants old clothes that they didn’t want to wear any more, or would leave their clothes to the servants when they died. Since clothing was very expensive, people wore it as long as possible and passed it on from one person to another without being ashamed of wearing hand-me-downs. However, since servants were of a lower class than their employers, they weren’t allowed to wear rich fabrics, and would sell these clothes to acting companies, who were allowed to wear what they wanted in performance.

A rich nobleman like Count Paris or a wealthy young man like Romeo would wear a doublet, possibly of velvet, and it might have gold embroidery. Juliet and Lady Capulet would have worn taffeta, silk, gold, or satin gowns, and everybody would have had hats, gloves, ruffs (an elaborate collar), gloves, stockings, and shoes equally elaborate.

For a play like Romeo and Juliet, which was set in a European country at about the same time Shakespeare wrote it, Elizabethan everyday clothes would have been fine—the audience would have been happy, and they would have been authentic for the play. However, since there were no costume shops who could make clothing suitable for, say, medieval Denmark for Hamlet, or ancient Rome for Julius Caesar, or Oberon and Titania’s forest for A Midsummer Night’s Dream, these productions often looked slightly strange—can you imagine fairies in full Elizabethan collars and skirts? How would they move?

Today’s audiences want costumes to be authentic, so that they can believe in the world of the play. However, Romeo and Juliet was recently set on Verona Beach, with very up-to-date clothes indeed; and about thirty years ago, West Side Story, an updated musical version of the Romeo and Juliet tale, was set in the Puerto Rican section of New York City.

Activity: Discuss what the affect of wearing “special” clothes is—to church, or to a party. Do you feel different? Do you act different? How many kinds of wardrobes do you have? School, play, best? Juliet and Romeo would have had only one type of clothing each, no matter how nice it was.

Activity: Perform a scene from the play in your everyday clothes, and then in more formal clothes. Ask the participants and the spectators to describe the differences between the two performances.
Synopsis: *The Taming of the Shrew*

Before the play begins, a lord and his huntsmen discover Christopher Sly, a beggar, asleep and drunk. They play a trick on him when he wakes up by pretending that Sly is the lord and they are his servants. To help him recover from his “amnesia,” they present the following play:*  

Baptista, a rich gentleman of Padua, has two daughters. The elder, Katherina or Kate, is so bad-tempered that she is known throughout Padua as Kate the Shrew (an Elizabethan word for an unpleasant woman). Baptista’s younger daughter, Bianca, is gentle and sweet, and has two suitors, Hortensio and Gremio. However, Baptista won’t let Bianca get married until someone agrees to marry Katherina first.  

Two visitors to Padua arrive with their servants. The first, Lucentio, instantly falls in love with Bianca, and disguises himself as a teacher so he can see her more often. The second visitor, Petruchio, has come to Padua in search of a rich wife and hears that Kate is rich and pretty, but has an awful temper. Petruchio resolves to marry this famous wildcat and teach her how to be an agreeable wife. Baptista, with some misgivings, gives his permission.  

Then follows the famous wooing scene. Whatever Katherina says, Petruchio is gentle with her and tells her he’s determined they shall marry. They fight—she loudly and angrily, showing why she was called a shrew. He, on the other hand, praises her sweet and courteous words. At that point, Baptista arrives and Petruchio announces that he and Katherina are to be married Sunday.  

On Sunday, Petruchio arrives late for the wedding, dressed like a clown, and behaves rudely in church. But the marriage is performed anyway. Then Petruchio refuses to stay for the wedding dinner and sets out for his house with Katherina.  

They have an awful journey, with Petruchio behaving like a maniac. When the newlyweds arrive home, Petruchio is even stranger. He throws the dinner on the floor, pretending that the food is not good enough for Kate, and then dismantles the bed, saying it’s a mess as well. In other words, he behaves just like Katherina used to.  

The next day Petruchio behaves the same way, yelling at the servants and forbidding them to give his new wife anything to eat or let her rest. By this time, she is willing to be nice to her husband, because she is both very tired and very hungry. She also finds herself sticking up for the servants, when before her marriage she’d found fault with everything and everyone. Petruchio tempts her with some food but, since she isn’t quick enough to say thank you, takes it away again.  

He then decides to take her back for a visit to Baptista and orders a new gown for her. (Her old one had got spoiled on the journey.) Again Petruchio finds fault with it, and won’t let Kate wear her new clothing, but says they’ll travel in their old clothes.  

Next Petruchio orders his horses be readied, saying it was only seven o’clock. Kate corrects him, saying it is noon. Petruchio replies: Are you still disagreeing with me? Until you agree, we’re not leaving. Petruchio, you see, is trying to teach Kate that life is more comfortable if people agree with each other.  

Finally they set out and have another disagreement Petruchio saying the moon is shining and Kate arguing it is the sun. He threatens to take her back to his house unless she agrees with him and Kate, weary of all this arguing, says he can call it the moon if he wants.  

Petruchio has one last test for her: they meet an old man and Petruchio calls him a “fair maiden,” looking at Kate. She agrees the old man is fair, and then Petruchio contradicts her again. So she changes her opinion to agree with him and they continue their journey.
When Petruchio and Kate arrive in Padua, they go to Baptista’s to celebrate Bianca’s marriage to Lucentio, and the marriage of one of Bianca’s former suitors, Hortensio, to a rich widow.

Petruchio bets Lucentio and Hortensio that Kate is more agreeable than their wives. The other two husbands agree, sure of winning. Lucentio sends his servant in search of Bianca, but she sends back word that she was busy. Then Hortensio sends for his wife, but the widow replies that if Hortensio wants her, he should come to her. Petruchio then command Kate to come, and, to everyone’s amazement, Kate comes immediately, bringing the other two wives, then proceeds to instruct the women on how to have a happy marriage.

The play ends happily, with everyone agreeing that Petruchio and Kate have made a happy marriage.

*The action to this point is called The Induction and is not included in many productions.
Characters: The Taming of the Shrew

Christopher Sly: A drunken tinker, Sly is brought unconscious to a rich nobleman’s house, where the nobleman and his household dress him in finery, give him good food and even a “wife,” and convince him he is the lord of the house. When a troupe of traveling players arrives at the house, it is for him that they perform The Taming of the Shrew.

Baptista Minola: A wealthy gentleman of Padua and Katherina and Bianca’s father, Baptista is a harried father, having difficulty marrying his two daughters because the older one is a notorious shrew. He is not, however, an object of sympathy. He ignores the question of his daughters’ happiness in seeking mates for them, and Katherina may be a shrew chiefly because of the way he treats her.

Vincentio: An old merchant of Pisa and Lucentio’s father, Vincentio is extremely fond of his son and is grief-stricken when he discovers that Lucentio may have come to harm. He arrives in Padua amidst much confusion and is almost jailed as an imposter before Lucentio arrives and clears matters up.

Lucentio: A young student in love with Bianca, Lucentio changes clothes with his servant and offers himself as Bianca’s tutor, thus ensuring he can woo Bianca privately. He ultimately does win her hand, although both he and Bianca are immature and no match for Petruchio and Katherina.

Petruchio: A gentleman of Verona, Petruchio arrives in Padua looking for a wife and is soon pointed toward Katherina, whom he roughly courts and quickly marries. His character has two levels. On the surface, he appears to be rough and unfeeling, but underneath it all he is intelligent and understanding—and deeply in love with his new wife. Certainly he is somewhat less than gentle, but he has a keen sense of humor and is the perfect match for Katherina.

Gremio: An elderly and wealthy suitor of Bianca, Gremio gets “Cambio” (the disguised Lucentio) the pose as tutor to her, on the understanding that he will woo her on his behalf; however, Lucentio woos and wins her for himself.

Hortensio: Another suitor for Bianca’s hand and an honest friend of Petruchio, Hortensio is basically a good man but perhaps a bit foolish. He continues his suit of Bianca without encouragement from her, but finally abandons it, declaring “kindness in women, not their beauteous looks, / Shall win my love” (4.2.41-42).

Tranio: Lucentio’s lighthearted and mischievous servant, Tranio changes clothes and positions with Lucentio so his master can woo Bianca. He accepts this with some reluctance initially, but soon warms to the role.

Biondello: Lucentio’s servant, Biondello assumes the role of Tranio’s servant when Tranio assumes the role of their master.

Grumio: Petruchio’s comic servant, Grumio is rather dense, but not stupid. He has a keen sense of humor and a great love of jokes and tricks.

Curtis: Petruchio’s servant.

Katherina: Baptista’s daughter and Bianca’s older sister, Katherina is known throughout Padua as “Kate the Curst”; however, she has a much deeper character than the term would imply. She appears mean to Bianca, but only because she has continually been second in her father’s affections. The transformation which she undergoes after she marries Petruchio is not one of character, but one of attitude. She alters dramatically from the bitter and accused shrew to the obedient and happy wife when she discovers that her
husband loves her enough to help her, in contrast to those who treated her badly. Beneath the surface the shrew is not a shrew at all.

**Bianca:** Baptista’s daughter and Katherina’s younger sister, Bianca is an unkind sister and later a disobedient wife. She fosters her father’s attitude of favoritism for herself and dislike for Katherina by playing the part of a noble victim. Her disregard for the wishes of her new husband, Lucentio, leads to grim speculation as to what her behavior may be when they have been married longer. Ironically, as the play ends, she is more of a shrew than her sister.

**Widow:** The third wife in this play of comparisons, the Widow marries Hortensio after he finds he has lost Bianca to Lucentio. At Lucentio’s banquet she loses her husband a wager when she does not come obediently when he calls.
About the Play

*The Taming of the Shrew* was written sometime between 1590 and 1594. It is rooted in other popular stories of the time. A play titled *The Taming of a Shrew* was popular in London at the same time as Shakespeare's own play. Humorous “he verses she” battle stories have been popular throughout history from the Greek play *Lysistrata* to our modern romantic film comedies, like *The Proposal*.

Shakespeare touches on this theme again with another of his popular comedies, *Much Ado about Nothing*.

In Shakespeare's full script, the story of Kate and Petruchio's love is presented as a play within a play. A group of players put on the show as part of a prank they are pulling on tavern drunkard called Christopher Sly. This device allows Shakespeare to bring an Italian comedy closer to home by having it presented as if in England. Padua is located in northern Italy and was know as a place of easy living with rich food and materialistic people. Shakespeare used Italy for several of his plays involving deceit, romance, and little sinful pleasures.

As appealing and humorous as the play is, it touches on some very important themes for Shakespeare's time, and our own, including the delicacy of father-daughter relationships, the nature and dangers of physical, verbal, and emotional abuse, the plausibility of love at first sight, and what really makes a happy marriage.

In the last fifty years the play has become a battleground for feminists, some of whom feel Petruchio's treatment of Kate is cruel and debasing; however, few can argue that Kate did not deserve at least a small taste of her own medicine. Once the play has ended it becomes the audience's part to decide who are the winners and who are the losers in this battle of the sexes.
How Many Ways to Tame a Shrew?
By Diana Major Spencer

Have you heard the one about the guy who was taking his bride back home in a wagon? As they bump along the rutted road, the horse stumbles. “That’s number one,” says the man. Further on, the horse stumbles again. “That’s number two,” he says. When the horse stumbles a third time, the man says, “That’s number three,” and shoots the horse. The wife says, “Husband, your anger is too harsh!” The husband replies, “That’s number one!”

The story I heard as the new bride of a man from Boston undoubtedly differs in detail from the version you heard, but its outline and punchline are about the same. Also, most people who attend a Shakespeare festival will probably have heard some version of the story. That’s the way folklore works: We hear a story, we pass it along, sometimes to someone who’s already heard something like it. Like a childhood game of Rumor, the story continues around the table (or neighborhood, or region, or world), adapting itself at each telling to the concerns of its teller.

In fine shrew-taming tradition, the tale implies a threat of violence toward the bride if she challenges her husband, lord, and master. Some versions, such as the 1550 ballad “A Merry Jeste of a Shrewde and curst Wyfe lapped in Morelles Skin for Her Good Behavior,” present the violence graphically: The husband locks the wife in the cellar, rips off her clothes, beats her bloody and senseless with wooden rods, then wraps her in the salted skin of an old workhorse named Morel. As the salt burns into her open wounds, the wife promises obedience and becomes a perfect wife. In “The Wife Wrapt in Wether’s Skin” (cited in Jan Harold Brunvald, “The Folktales Origin of The Taming of the Shrew” [Shakespeare Quarterly, 17, August 1996]), the husband thrashes a sheep’s hide he has placed on the his wife’s back. In other versions, the husband shoots his dog and his horse or beats a cat or basket or pack his wife is holding, all of which bring the wife to submission (Brunvand 345).

Now, have you heard the one about “how her horse fell, and she under her horse; . . . in how miry a place, how she was bemoil’d, how he left her with the horse upon her, how he beat me because her horse stumbled, how she waded through the dirt to pluck him off me [number one?]; how he swore, how she pray’d that never pray’d before” (4.1.70–84)? Or about Petruchio striking a servant bringing water, and Kate saying, “Patience, I pray you, ’twas a fault unwilling [number two?] (4.1.156)? Or about Petruchio throwing food around—especially the choler-engendering, over-roasted mutton—and Kate saying, “I pray you, husband, be not so disquiet. / The meat was well, if you were so contented [number three?]” (4.1.169-70)?

In this “tale,” which you may have recognized as Kate’s arrival at Petruchio’s “Taming School” in The Taming of the Shrew, the horse indeed stumbles, the husband indulges his temper, and the wife pleads for patience, but the violence is diverted from the bride and the animals to the servants and inanimate objects like dishes and food, bedclothes, and clothing. Also important is Petruchio’s response to Kate’s attempts to calm him: “Sit down, Kate, and welcome” (4.1.142); “Be merry, Kate” (4.1.149); “Come, Kate, and wash, and welcome heartily” (4.1.154); “I tell thee, Kate, ’twas burnt and dried away / . . . Be patient, tomorrow’s shall be mended” (4.1 170, 176). His words to her are gentle and solicitous, though abundantly interspersed with robust and colorful epithets for the servants.

In spite of the differences, the tales have much in common. Folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand, most celebrated for his recent collections of urban folklore (The Vanishing Hitchhiker, among others), believes these tales to be part of a complex of oral narratives he calls “The Taming of the Shrew Complex.” For his 1961 Indiana University dissertation, The Taming of the Shrew: A Comparative Study of Oral and Literary Versions, Brunvand assembled more than 400 literary and oral texts from
thirty different nations around the world. Most have never been published, but were made available to him from folklore archives.

A primary problem with source studies, he says, is that literary scholars focus primarily on literary sources. Any edition of Shakespeare’s plays describes how he transformed a passage from Plutarch, for example, into a speech by Julius Caesar or an earlier Hamlet or King Lear into his own great tragedies. Sometimes a mysterious “lost play” is offered as a source, and sometimes, more rarely, as in the introduction to *Much Ado about Nothing* in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, a scholar will write, “There is no specific source for the Beatrice and Benedick underplot” (Anne Barton [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974], 329).

Barton’s sentence continues, “but it is important to remember that several years earlier, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare had already experimented with the idea of an unconventional couple who arrive at love and understanding by way of insult and aggression” (329). Instead of admitting “no specific source” for this plot, however, Barton’s introduction to *The Taming of the Shrew*, also in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, posits “a different play, now lost” (106) as a source for both Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*, and the inferior *The Taming of a Shrew*, published in 1594. Richard Hosley, in a Huntington Library Quarterly article, concludes that “the basic situation of the play proper is taken from the anonymous ballad of A Shrewde and Curste Wyfe,” modified so that beating a virago into submission is replaced by “the humanist tradition of inducing a spoiled young wife to mend her ways—perhaps specifically by the Shrewd Shrews and Honest Wives of Erasmus” (“Sources and Analogues of *The Taming of the Shrew*” [27, 1963–64], 207).

In contrast, Brunvand suggests, not a lost play, but an oral tradition with specific plot details in specific order, some of which occur in neither the ballad nor *The Taming of a Shrew*: “The wealthy father with good and bad daughters, the warnings to the suitor about the shrew, the bizarre wedding behavior, the trip home on horseback, the taming, and the later return trip to the father’s home where a wager is laid are all traits commonly found in the folktales” (347). A few pages further he adds, “It seems completely beyond reason to suppose that Shakespeare somehow knew a foreign manuscript containing only some traits of the story and then individually made up the same elaborations for his comedy that are found in numerous folk tales. It is more logical to assume that through some medium the playwright must have encountered the popular tradition” (349).

We know that Shakespeare read widely; we even know which books he read. But why should books be his only source? The Bianca plot is clearly traceable to *The Supposes* (1566), George Gascoigne’s English translation of Ariosto’s *I Suppositi*. But what about the Katherina-Petruchio plot? It’s an old joke? No problem. Unless Shakespeare lived with his books under a rock, he would have been completely in tune with the stories and “accepted truths” of his day—those, for instance, shared in taverns with an elbow to the ribs; those told by men about women, the weather, and taxes; those represented as the wisdom of the old to solve the problems of the young—maybe even how to tame a shrew.
Shakespeare on the Sly
By Cheryl Smith

Although *The Taming of the Shrew* is one of Shakespeare’s most delightful and provocative comedies, it is also one of his most problematic. Chief among its complexities is the puzzle of the Induction, which begins the script with Christopher Sly’s transformation into a lord, yet disappears only after a few scenes later, never to be completed. In the Induction, a wealthy lord stumbles upon a drunken tinker outside an alehouse and decides to trick the unsuspecting stranger into thinking he is truly a wealthy lord who has been slumbering for fifteen years and hence dreaming that he was a poor tinker. The lord dresses the drunkard in fine garments and places him in a bed covered in rich bed linens. When Sly awakens, his luxurious environment convinces him that the lord is telling the truth. After Sly has assumed his new identity, everyone proceeds to a play about the taming of a shrew.

Audiences generally love the Christopher Sly scenes, but Shakespeare’s clever Induction frames only half of the play within the play, where Shakespeare introduces characters who, after Act One Scene One, are never heard from or seen again. In response to this abrupt loss of plot and character, some productions of the play use variations of *The Taming of a Shrew*, an earlier anonymous play written around 1594, which concludes with a return to Sly as the drunken tinker, who vows to go home and tame his own wife. Whereas Kate’s plot is clearly most crucial to the overall experience of the play, Sly’s sets the tone and warms the audience to the future scenes. Therefore, directors will occasionally choose to bring the play full circle by including scenes from “A” Shrew in “The” Shrew to complete the Sly plot at the conclusion of Shakespeare’s play, thereby exploring both the taming of the “shrew” and the taming of the “tinker.”

*The Taming of the Shrew* has two fundamental themes: transformation and taming. Not surprisingly, the two themes are inextricably bound because in most cases one (taming) causes the other (transformation). The first transformation audiences see is that of Christopher Sly in the Induction. Upon waking in fine garments and being surrounded by a slew of servants and a “wife,” he finally believes his “true identity” when he mutters the following lines: “Am I a lord, and have I such a lady? / Or do I dream? Or have I dreamed till now? / I do not sleep: I see, I hear, I speak, / I smell sweet savors and I feel soft things. / Upon my life, I am a lord indeed, / And not a tinker nor Christopher Sly” (Ind.2.66–71, all quotes from the Penguin 2000 edition).

This transformation is important because it prepares audiences for the larger, more important change in Kate. We know for certain that Kate has been transformed when she is the only wife who obeys her husband’s command to “come to me” (5.2.100). She immediately returns and asks of Petruchio, “What is your will, sir, that you send for me?” (5.2.106). This, in turn, wins Petruchio his bet and creates the opportunity for Kate to begin her monologue about the importance of being an obedient wife. Both Sly’s and Kate’s transformations, however, are dependent on their “tamings,” and, again, the Induction prepares audiences for the presentation of this crucial theme.

Although Kate’s taming is obvious to audiences since it is the central plot of the play, Sly’s is more subtle. Kate is forced to endure severe hardships like hunger and humiliation before she understands how to obtain what she wants: All she has to do is behave. And as soon as Kate tells Petruchio that she knows the sun is, in fact, the moon (“I know it is the moon” 4.5.17), audiences realize that Kate is “tamed.” Petruchio subdues her by showing that obedience is more powerful than disobedience, a fact most characters by the end of the play come to believe. Petruchio’s “We three are married, but you two are sped” (5.2.191) shows audiences that Kate’s taming will provide Petruchio and Kate with a happy life, whereas Lucentio and Hortensio will have problems in their relationships with their own disobedient wives.
Sly's taming, on the other hand, is not so obvious, for he is transformed in a directly opposite manner. Instead of being tamed through food deprivation, exhaustion, and humiliation, Sly is transformed through luxury. Kate, a spoiled rich girl, experiences the life of a poor beggar before she commits to change, while Sly, a penniless, drunken tinker, experiences the life of wealth before he believes the stories he is told, and the drunkard is tamed into a lord. Just as Kate's utterance about the sun shows audiences that she is subdued, Sly's verbal metamorphosis from prose into rhyme signals his taming. Before Sly believes the Lord's tales that he is rich, he speaks in prose, which in Shakespeare's plays is most often used for working-class characters; only after he believes that he is a lord does he begin to speak in verse. Unlike Kate, though, who is truly tamed, Sly is not actually a lord, which is proven when he slips back into prose before he begins to watch the play. His true origins are betrayed by his language, which always indicates character.

The Induction, then, is a vital part of *The Taming of the Shrew* because it prepares audiences for the transformations and tamings that are about to occur in the play. But the Induction holds an even more important role in the play. While the lord is attempting to transform Sly, the Induction brilliantly transforms Shakespeare's audience. The play's Induction tames audiences by changing them into members of a unique and wonderful world available only to them at that particular moment in time. When the Induction is finished, audiences are no longer aware of their real lives—only the fictional lives they are watching onstage. And perhaps this is why Shakespeare never concluded his Induction. He may have wanted to keep audiences in his world for as long as he could, taming and transforming them as thoroughly as possible. All the same, the ending Induction from “A” Shrew shows Sly's full transformation from tinker to lord and back to tinker, which reminds audiences to take from the play advice which will make their lives richer and fuller. Therefore, one of the primary problems with *The Taming of the Shrew* is a catch-22. To finish the Induction shows audiences how to enrich their lives; not to finish it suspends audiences forever in Shakespeare's world. To end with Christopher Sly, or not to end with Christopher Sly: That truly is the question.
Look More Closely at the Period
By Ace G. Pilkington

It is clear that *The Taming of the Shrew* is (among other things) about the war between the sexes, and it is equally clear that Shakespeare's audience would instantly have recognized the subject, finding it entertaining and topical. Modern critics who assume *The Taming of the Shrew* is a male chauvinist play and that a Renaissance crowd would have found such a story suited their social opinions and theatrical expectations should look more closely at what was happening during the period.

Shakespeare himself creates an abundance of women who will not be dominated, from Rosaline in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* to Katherine in *Henry VIII*, with Portia, Rosalind, Viola, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford, two Helenas, Beatrice, Paulina, and many more in between. Around 1611, Shakespeare’s own company produced a sequel to *The Taming of the Shrew* called *The Woman’s Prize, or The Tamer Tamed* by John Fletcher, Shakespeare’s sometime collaborator and eventual successor as playwright of the King’s Men. According to Ann Thompson, “Fletcher was... putting the play into its traditional context of the war of the sexes, a context in which normally... a story about a husband outwitting... his wife is capped... by one in which a wife outwits her husband, the overall moral being that... the best marriages are based on equality and mutual respect” (Ann Thompson, ed., “Introduction” in *The Taming of the Shrew* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1984], 18).

There was so much fun to be had from watching the battle that playwrights sometimes stepped into the real world for inspiration. For instance, an anonymous author responded to Joseph Swetnam's savage 1615 pamphlet *Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Inconstant Women* with the 1620 comedy *Swetnam the Woman-Hater Arraigned by Women*. Nor were all the women of the period the submissive victims they are sometimes taken to be. Lawrence Stone writes, “There are plenty of examples of Elizabethan women who dominated their husbands” (*The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* [New York: Harper & Row, 1977], 199). There were also women who were quite capable of expressing their opinions of men. Modesta Pozzo, for example, under the pen name of Moderata Fonte, produced a dialogue (published in 1600 but written at least eight years earlier) called *The Worth of Women: Wherein Is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men*. Of male dominance, she writes, “When it’s said that women must be subject to men, the phrase should be understood in the same sense as when we say that we are subject to natural disasters, diseases, and all the other accidents of this life: it’s not a case of being subject in the sense of obeying, but rather of suffering an imposition; not a case of serving them fearfully, but rather of tolerating them in a spirit of Christian charity” (ed. and trans. Virginia Cox [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997], 59).

Obviously, the situations in Shakespeare’s society and the issues in his play are more complicated than some critics imagine. It is well to remember that Shakespeare and many members of his audience, schooled in Latin literature, expected more complicated entertainments than certain modern audiences do. Gilbert Highet puts the matter in perspective when he discusses the complex metres employed in Latin poetry but developed from Greek singing and dancing, “Greek dancing was infinitely subtler than our own pounding three-to-the-bar and four-to-the-bar dances. It contained many more half-steps and cross-rhythms, and, with its complex interweaving movements of arms and draperies, it would make even our classical ballets seem naive. Therefore the best... Greco-Roman lyric metres are much more intricate and subtle than any... in... modern languages” (*Poets in a

By using an induction that makes the main story of The Taming of the Shrew a play within a play and by loading that main story with performances and deceptions, Shakespeare has made an extremely complex structure, “leaving us,” as Ann Thompson says, “asking such questions as ‘Is Katherina’s performance as a dutiful wife nearer to “the real Katherina” than her performance as a shrew?’ or ‘Do we ever see “the real Petruchio” as opposed to Petruchio playing the role of shrew-tamer?’ or even ‘Is the whole thing a dream or fantasy in the mind of Christopher Sly?’” (31). Nor is this the end of the complications. Petruchio is not only a shrew-tamer, but also, in a performance especially designed to educate Kate, a shrew. This, as his servants make clear, is not his normal behavior, but it does hold a mirror up to his new bride, eventually causing her to intercede on behalf of the seemingly mistreated servants.

Olwen Hufton is partially right to maintain that “The shrew is tamed by words, by hunger, by deprivation of sleep and by her growing realization of the constraints on her sex, but not by beating. Petruchio is an agent of the civilizing process” (The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe 1500-1800 [New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1996], 52). But Petruchio has announced that he is bound by a far more rigid educational protocol than the public standard of how husbands were to treat wives. In the play’s most famous metaphor, he compares taming Kate to a falconer’s taming of a hawk, a process that most Elizabethan men and women would have known firsthand. Violence was out of the question, and the end to be attained was a mutually beneficial partnership, keeping in mind that the hawk could simply fly away if it were unhappy.

As John W. Crawford says of the time, “There were in England as well as on the continent women of brilliant intellect and . . . profound learning. . . . Even more remarkable . . . was a common feeling among men of higher station that intellectual accomplishments were both proper and even desirable in a woman” (“Education of Renaissance Women: Negative Changes Under James I” in The learning, Wit, and Wisdom of Shakespeare’s Renaissance Women [Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1997], 17). Shakespeare and the characters in The Taming of the Shrew endorse this view; no one questions that Kate and Bianca should have tutors or that those tutors should teach classical literature. Petruchio, who could easily find a wealthy and docile wife, says that he values Katherina for her spirit and works to teach her with copious examples, herculean efforts, and abundant praises how to be herself in the midst of games and shows. Even Kate’s infamous last speech is taken from Aristotle’s Politics and Economics and does not invoke divine law (as the bad quarto does). Besides, that speech is part of one last game where Kate shows up her sister and wins a bet for her husband. Ultimately, The Taming of the Shrew presents the same message that John Fletcher claimed for its sequel: “To teach both Sexes due equality; And as they stand bound, to love mutually” (ed. George B. Ferguson [London: Mouton & Co., 1966], 148).
Male Chauvinism?

A friend once complained to me that *The Taming of the Shrew* was merely the story of a spirited woman turned into a Stepford wife. The term comes from Ira Levin’s novel, where women are replaced by docile android replicas with limited vocabularies and insatiable desires to clean house. There are, of course, Shakespeare critics who hold such views. G. I. Duthie describes Katherina as a “spirited woman who is cowed into abject submission by the violence of an egregious bully” (Shakespeare, London: Hutchinson & Co., 1966, 147). Objecting that the creator of Portia, Rosalind, and Viola is unlikely to send such a message elicits the response: “These women must change their costumes if they are to express sentiments otherwise unfitting for a heroine. They must pretend to be men to reveal their wisdom or to show a happy aggressiveness in the courting game. Without the manly disguise . . . women who express ‘masculine’ traits are unequivocally threatening” (Myra Glazer Shottz, “The Great Unwritten Story: Mothers and Daughters in Shakespeare” in *The Lost Tradition*, ed. by Cathy N. Davidson and E. M. Broner, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1980, 44-45).

How then are Shakespeare and Petruchio to be rescued from the charge of male chauvinism? One might begin by pointing to the many women in Shakespeare’s plays who exhibit “masculine” traits without adopting male attire or becoming monsters: Cordelia leads an army to *King Lear*; Helena, though a “right maid” for her cowardice, chases her lover through the forest night in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*; another Helena outwits and ultimately catches Bertram in marriage in *All’s Well That Ends Well*, in part because of her skill in the “masculine” profession of physician; Beatrice expresses a desire to eat Claudio’s “heart in the market place” in *Much Ado about Nothing*; and Paulina is the only member of Leontes’ court courageous enough to call the King mad in *The Winter’s Tale*. All these “spirited” women marry without taming. Why, then, is Kate different?

Perhaps it is because *The Taming of the Shrew* itself is different, starting with the Induction and making what happens between Katherina and Petruchio a performance designed to deceive Christopher Sly. Although most productions of Shrew cut the Induction (as the Utah Shakespeare Festival has done this summer), the play within the play is still part of Shakespeare’s text and his intent, and this pointedly artificial structure should help us to see the actors in the main plot as role players whose actions shift with their situations. Further, inside the play within the play are yet other “productions.” Bianca’s suitors–Lucentio and Hortensio–disguise themselves to woo her, and Lucentio, who pretends to be the emissary of Gremio, directs his own actors–Tranio and a chance-met Pedant–in a comedy designed to end with Lucentio’s wedding to Bianca. Meanwhile, Petruchio and his servants play out a drama which might be called Petruchio the Shrew.

Indeed, there is scarcely a scene which does not involve a deceptive performance for an on-stage audience. The Induction draws attention to the tricks of actors and to the acting that others do, “And if the boy have not a woman’s gift / To rain a shower of commanded tears, / An onion will do well for such a shift” (The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare, ed. Sylvan Barnet, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972, 1.124-6). Preceded by those lines, Kate’s words to Bianca, “A pretty peat! It is best / Put finger in the eye, and she knew why” (1.1.78-79), show Bianca as a boy actor who plays the role of a girl who pretends to cry. Kate accuses her sister of playing teacher’s or father’s pet, and much of Kate’s shrewish behavior may be attributed to her frustration with the success of Bianca’s role playing. That Kate’s assessment of her sister’s nature is accurate is clear from Bianca’s words to her tutors, “I’ll not be tied to hours nor pointed times, / But learn my lessons as I please myself” (3.1.19-20), from her marrying without her father’s knowledge, and from her behavior at the play’s end.
Enter Petruchio to act many parts—fortune hunter, wealthy suitor, swaggering master, true lover, shrew tamer, and (in the pursuit of this last) shrew, a title which initially belonged to men anyway, the word appearing first (the Oxford English Dictionary indicates) in 1250 and not being applied to women until 1386. That Petruchio is not an “egregious bully” is obvious from his servants’ reactions to his new persona. After Grumio recounts Petruchio’s return from the wedding, Curtis says, “By this reck’ning he is more shrew than she” (4.1.77), an unlikely exclamation if shrewishness is Petruchio’s usual humor. And Grumio responds, “Ay, and that thou and the proudest of you all shall find when he comes home” (4.1.78-79), a warning that makes no sense unless Petruchio’s behavior is new-minted for shrew taming. Grumio’s own penchant for wisecracking and for interrupting and expanding on his master’s speeches is one of the best arguments against Petruchio the brute. What domestic tyrant would keep so rebellious a servant?

If any doubt of Petruchio’s nature remains, his soliloquy at the end of Act 4, Scene 1 removes it. Here he explains the theory of his taming, using the extended metaphor of training a hawk. The comparison with the art of falconry is especially significant, since the falconer undertakes only to redirect the hawk’s natural impulses; it is impossible to break such a bird’s spirit. Petruchio speaks of “a way to kill a wife with kindness” (4.1.197), and his words to Katherina are almost always gentle. He praises her wit and beauty in phrases that must ring in her ears with a refreshing strangeness. This is, of course, precisely the wrong way to break her. If that were his intention, he would be better advised to make her worthlessness clear to her, until in very weariness and despair she does as she is told. Instead, he treats her as a lady who deserves the best of everything, while acting himself as the very mirror of her shrewishness. As Robert Speaight writes, “it is only to the others that he is rough” (Shakespeare: The Man and His Achievement, London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1977, 59).

There are indications that Kate’s “spirit” is precisely what first attracts Petruchio. He is, after all, a young man of wealth and social position, and Italy offers many beautiful, docile, well-dowered young ladies for him to marry. Why then does he seize on Kate and pursue her so peremptorily? When he hears, for instance, that she has broken a lute over Hortensio’s head, Petruchio says, “Now by the world, it is a lusty wench! / I love her ten times more than e’er I did. / O how I long to have some chat with her!” (2.1.160-63). Unlike Lucentio, who is taken in by Bianca’s performance, Petruchio seizes on Kate’s essential nature as a starting point for their relationship. In a stage-play world, Petruchio’s is the safer course. Nor is there any question but that Petruchio is well aware of the kind of world in which he lives. He acts and speaks repeatedly against “outward shows.” He says, in answer to the criticism of his wedding attire, “To me she’s married, not unto my clothes: / Could I repair what she will wear in me, / As I can change these poor accoutrements, / ‘T were well for Kate, and better for myself” (3.2.116-19). And again to Kate, when it is her dress that is at issue, “Our purses shall be proud, our garments poor; / For ‘tis the mind that makes the body rich” (4.3.170-71). Even his insistence that Kate treat an old man as a young woman can be a glance at an actors’ world where such changes of role are possible.

And so we come to the last large speech in the play, the one delivered by Kate in praise of male supremacy, the one that makes many members of modern audiences squirm and think of Stepford wives. It is important that this speech is spoken by a “woman,” not by Petruchio while Kate nods defeated acquiescence. It is also important that in the speech Kate boasts of her “mind . . . as big . . . heart as great . . . reason haply more” (5.2.172-74). But most important of all in this play within a play is the on-stage audience. Kate does not speak these words in soliloquy or alone to Petruchio or as the play’s epilogue to the real audience, but to her family and friends as a means of winning a bet for her husband and besting her sister in public.

There is only one other speech in all of Shakespeare which has quite this male chauvinist ring
to it, and it too is spoken in sisterly rivalry by a woman who demonstrably does not mean what she says. It is Luciana’s sermon to her sister, Adriana, in The Comedy of Errors (very possibly written just before or at the same time as Shrew), where she says that men “Are masters to their females, and their lords” (2.1.24). Luciana speaks in a private quarrel, and she reverses herself to defend her sister in public. When Adriana is accused of nagging her husband into madness, Luciana excuses the woman and attacks the man, “She never reprehended his but mildly,/ When he demeaned himself rough, rude, and wildly.” Then, instead of recommending meekness, Luciana says, “Why bear you these rebukes and answer not?” (5.1.87-89).

Katherina’s speech, too, is a performance, a piece of rhetoric shaped to a purpose. As Peter Levi notes, it “is as eloquent as any speech of the kind in Terence or Menander, but only as convincing as they are” (The Life and Times of William Shakespeare, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1988, 81). Kate, who has long been chastised by her father for the way she treats her sister, now gets the chance to play the role of dutiful wife, beating and berating Bianca in the process. What better ending could Kate wish than to be loved and praised by a husband who sees through her shrewishness to her spirit while, at the same time, she outacts Bianca in her sister’s chosen role? And what other ending should we expect in a play so loaded with deceptive performances than one last wink between Kate and Petruchio that says they know the truth beneath the outward show?
Laughter and Beyond

*The Taming of the Shrew* belongs with Shakespeare’s early comedies, apparently composed in some haste in 1593 or early 1594 and acted soon thereafter. Without much doubt, Shakespeare merely reworked an old play that was his immediate source, but the ultimate sources of the plot and situations are various. It was conceived as a popular comedy, meant to be performed before a general audience, rather than for the court, and has been persistently popular since Shakespeare’s day. It is a boisterous and amusing farce on a theme that has entertained both men and women since the beginning of time: the conflict between the sexes and the comic situations that this eternal warfare begets. Shakespeare was not writing a treatise on sociology; he was writing what he hoped would be a stage success, and he made the situations as comic as possible.

Thus *The Taming of the Shrew* is historically popular with directors and theatre-goers, though it has been rather neglected by teachers and scholars, and relatively little criticism has been written about it. The play contains many rewarding roles for actors and is frequently presented on the modern stage.

The play was much influenced by the Roman comedy of Plautus and Terence which Shakespeare would have read in school, and it is thus in many ways simpler and more straightforward than his later comedies. It is, for instance, a play of a single world. It has no fairies, no magic, and none of the miracles which characterize later works. Its action all occurs on the single plane of “reality,” and its business is the business of all comedy: the simultaneously serious and unserious business of getting young people paired up and married so that the dance of life can go on.

Unfortunately, these goals are often presented with burlesque effects. In nineteenth century productions it was traditional for Petruchio to carry a whip, and in certain twentieth century productions he has administered a spanking to Katherina. None of these pieces of action is necessary; Shakespeare intended that Petruchio tame Katherina completely without physical violence or brutality. The play employs a variety of theatrical devices which would be wide enough to suit the tastes of any audience: mistaken identities, disguises, puns and twisted meanings, and physical action. Everything Petruchio does to tame her, he does with excessive claims of his great love, and in the end Katherina is really in love with her lord and master—all of which can be conveyed without whips, beatings, or spankings.

The play’s theme, the disciplining of a headstrong wife, is an old one. It appeared several times in the literature of the period. By Shakespeare’s time, in fact, the farcical battle of the sexes had a long history in both fiction and drama. Many folk tales, some of which were crystallized by Chaucer, make use of the age-old combat between husbands and wives, with sometimes the husband victor and sometimes the wife.

Audiences and readers—except those who must see a profound lesson in all literature—have enjoyed *The Taming of the Shrew* for what it is, an entertaining farce on a topic of eternal interest. Shakespeare knew precisely what he was doing when he prepared the comedy for the stage. He expected his audience to accept the conventions of this kind of comedy and to disregard absurdities of plot and even of characterization. He was not writing a realistic comedy of manners, but was breathing new life into a set of stock situations that audiences had found laughable since the beginning of comic drama.

In spite of its youthfulness and its single plane of reality, Shakespeare manages to move this comedy well beyond the themes of its early prototypes. In its concern with disguises and transformation of character, *The Taming of the Shrew* winds up beyond its laughter, making a statement about the place and function of romance, love, and marriage in the larger contexts of social, moral, and cosmic order.
Were Shakespeare’s Heroines “Liberated”?

Women characters who transcend the narrow boundaries of their social positions and exert control over their own destinies and those of the people around them are not rare in the plays of Shakespeare. In his thirty-seven dramatic works, Shakespeare probably created a richer and more varied gallery of female characters than any other playwright, and many of these women are just as strong, or even stronger, than the men surrounding them; but to assert that Shakespeare himself, or his heroines, were truly liberated in a modern sense of that word is pushing the point too hard.

*The Taming of a Shrew* gives a good example of this quasi-liberation in Katherina, the shrewish young woman who disrupts her father’s house and terrorizes most of the men around her until she comes up against Petruchio, the first man willing to challenge her at her own game. In many ways Kate is her own woman. Yet, even a woman as headstrong and determined as she must allow herself in Elizabethan society to be “given” in marriage to a man she has not chosen for herself—and her more docile sister Bianca consents to waiting, perhaps forever, until Katherina is wed before she can have a husband of her own.

In Shakespeare’s time a young woman, whether she was English, French, or Italian, had very little to say about whom she would marry. Most marriages were arranged, at least among the upper classes, and in the great houses a marriageable daughter was a valuable commodity. Among the great land-owning and land-trading families, as among the royalty of Europe, a marriage was the equivalent of an alliance. Thus, unreasonable as the arrangement may seem, Katherina likely has no choice but to try to make the best of her contracted marriage to Petruchio—and her decision to exert her will creates the conflict of the play.

A young woman had to be very courageous, or very foolish, to disobey her parents’ wishes. These situations of obedience or defiance occur again and again in Shakespeare: Katherina, Juliet, Desdemona, Perdita in *The Winter’s Tale*—all these women fight or flee to protect their domestic integrity. Either they disguise themselves in order to confront men as equals and show them the error of their ways; or without resorting to disguise they courageously exert their wills in spite of the conventions of their time and place, as does Katherina. The result is usually the same: the men learn a moral lesson, the problem at hand is resolved, and order and happiness are restored.

Yet, even within this male-oriented frame of reference, Petruchio and Kate are surprisingly like Benedick and Beatrice of *Much Ado about Nothing*. Petruchio, for all his rant, is increasingly drawn to Kate by her spirit. As wit-combatants they are worthy of each other’s enmity—or love. No one else in the play, be it Katherina’s father or her suitor, offers Kate the same kind of respect that Petruchio does. Kate’s jaded view of such marriage brokering is entirely defensible. Not surprisingly she first views Petruchio, whose professed intentions are far from reassuring, as another mere adventurer in love. Possibly she is prepared to accept the prevailing Elizabethan view of marriage, with its dominant role for the husband, but only if she can choose a man deserving of her respect.

Yet, even with all this, do these female characters who rebel against their situation, and there are many more of them in Shakespeare’s works, mean that Shakespeare was a “liberated” man? Probably not, if the term “liberated” implies that he thought men and women should be true equals. Like most Elizabethans, Shakespeare accepted a view of the “proper” order of things. In that order, women were subordinate to men; Kate says something very similar in Act V: “Each duty as the subject owes her prince, / Even such a woman oweth her husband.”
In the idealized picture of society which is usually found onstage at the conclusion of Shakespeare's comedies, men and women are in their respective place, collaborating to create harmony between them. As long as the men behave as they should, fulfilling their duties and acting with honor and intelligence, Shakespeare seems to say that women should be supportive and loyal. When a man needs a lesson, a wise and courageous woman will teach him one.
The Affirmation of Affection

By Elaine P. Pilkington

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Petruchio presents the supposedly shrewish Kate with a series of trials that so thoroughly confuse and frustrate her that she willingly re-examines and reconsiders who she is and what she expects from herself and those around her. Petruchio’s tirades against his servants, his depriving Kate of food, sleep, and even the right to choose her own clothing, may seem to parallel the physical taming of shrewish wives in old folk tales, but passive submission is not Petruchio’s goal. When Kate passes Petruchio’s final test by emphatically pretending to believe that the old and wrinkled Vincentio is actually a budding virgin, her whole-hearted enthusiasm tells us that she cannot possibly be in earnest. Instead she has joined with Petruchio and learned to play his game with a thoroughness that delights him without sacrificing her dignity as a human being.

Consequently, Kate’s initial refusal to kiss Petruchio later in the play is not a rebuff, nor is his request a further test of her obedience. Petruchio’s request is in sharp contrast to his kisses earlier in the play, one to seal the bargain of betrothal and the other, artificially exaggerated, to show just how little the wedding ceremony betokened a nuptial. Petruchio asks for a kiss just after he and Kate have watched the plight of Vincentio who discovers upon his arrival in Padua that he is being impersonated by a stranger, that his own servants refuse to recognize his authority over them, and that the citizens of Padua think he is mad. Vincentio’s anger and confusion is framed by Petruchio’s “Prithee, Kate, let’s stand aside and see the end of this controversy” (5.1.61-62) and Kate’s “Husband, let’s follow to see the end of this ado” (5.1.142). Here Kate and Petruchio join together as audience for other people’s manipulations of reality, abandoning their other dramatic spectacle in favor of a shared laugh at the poses of others, and in the very next line Petruchio requests the kiss, “First, kiss me, Kate, and we will” (5.1.143).

Kate does not reject Petruchio by initially refusing to kiss him; she simply affirms her newfound commitment to social propriety. But Petruchio has already shown himself a man of independent character who refuses to be bound by mere conventions that conceal rather than express inner truths. His request for a kiss is a lesson, not a test. Petruchio shows Kate that breaking the rules can be even more important than following them, and her kiss signals her delight in the knowledge. They have become one, forming a true marriage. And the kiss they share is the consummation of their new unity.

The wedding feast in Act 5 is a continuation of the couple’s unity that demonstrates the differences between their marriage and the marriages of Bianca and Lucentio and of the widow and Hortensio. The seeming harmony in the courtship game of Bianca and Lucentio ends with their wedding. Lucentio has moved from romantically idealized visions of Bianca to concern for the money that he believes she has lost him when she did not respond to his bidding. Hortensio and his widow are on no better terms. These two couples may join in the festivities of chatting and eating, but what should be for them a rite of integration ends in discord. The wedding feast more truly belongs to Kate and Petruchio, for Petruchio puts his trust in Kate, depending upon her not to destroy his public image of husband, and, in return, he gives her a chance to get back at her sister and the widow by telling “what duty they do owe their lords and husbands” (5.2.131).

Kate and Petruchio are the couple who have been united as one, replacing Bianca and
Lucentio just as the two of them performed the roles of bride and groom at Kate and Petruchio’s marriage feast. It may be late in coming, but it is, indeed, a celebration of requited love. Kate and Petruchio have established their own hierarchy of values—peace and love and quiet life—their own personal rituals for expressing those values, their own standards of propriety and impropriety. The rightness of their relationship, the affirmation of their affection, sets them apart from the other marriages of mismatched expectations. The two have formed a new, exclusive society, one that is better, more energetic than that which surrounds them, for each is now an “initiating yet cooperating center” for the other (Joseph Campbell, *Myths to Live By*, New York: Viking Press, 1972, 47)
This season represents the Utah Shakespeare Festival’s tenth production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, dating back to season one (1962) when it was featured. When analyzing why *The Taming of the Shrew* is so enduringly popular, the battle of the sexes, comedy, and farce all come to mind.

In the world of Shakespeare there is much discussion in determining the structure of “Shrew.” There are critics who believe that “Shrew” is a farce. Then there are those who consider it to be a “realistic comedy,” where a moral is preached, and there is societal benefit imparted. Those residing in camp farce include Auden, Marshall, and Van Doren. Garber, Hazlitt, and Shaw, with the exception of the last scene, seem to favor the realistic comedy approach. Harold Bloom sits directly on the fence, “The ‘Shrew’ is as much a romantic comedy as it is a farce,” (Shakespeare, the Invention of the Human, p. 29).

In a farce, the audience is more concerned with plot and amusement found within stock players, where character development is a wasteland. W. H. Auden elaborates, “Farce is impromptu in nature,” and “The characters represented must be universal—the clown, the shrew, etc. . . . think of Groucho, Chaplin, Grock,” (Lectures on Shakespeare, p. 63). Any significant theme development is normally fatal to a farce.

The moral or intellectual debate surrounds and presupposes the reality of the characters. “The plots are also worth our careful attention, in part because they reflect—and anticipate—Shakespeare’s continuing interest in certain kinds of interpersonal relationships” (Shakespeare After All, Garber, p. 58). The kind of character development portrayed in *The Taming of the Shrew*, where character affinity resides, pigeonholes this more as realistic comedy.

There is also debate as to whether the three parts, the Induction, the Bianca story, and the taming plot, form a unified play. All three are championed by various critics to support their arguments whether a comedy or a farce.

*The Taming of the Shrew* is a play-within-a-play, and opens with the Induction. It is a pair of scenes where a mischievous, practical joking lord convinces the drunken tinker, Christopher Sly, that he is a great lord who suffers from an ailment imagining himself a penniless tinker. Sly actually succumbs to this delusion of greatness and begins to speak in verse rather than prose. A play, *The Taming of a Shrew*, is performed for his edification. As Garber details, “The Induction . . . introduces and mirrors all the major issues that will preoccupy the actors in the main drama” (Garber, p. 59). Its commentary, narrative, and costuming introduce the audience to themes and motifs such as disguise, transformation, role playing, and marriage. It also enlists the audience to become complicit in this battle of the sexes.

The action verbs “take him up,” “carry him,” “hang it about him,” and “balm his foul head,” captivate the audience; we’re curious as to what will happen. Sly’s intellectual limitations become humorously evident when he reports his family line going back to “Richard Conqueror,” an amalgamation of William the Conqueror and Richard the Lionhearted. The absurdity of his transformation tickles us, and as Hazlitt delightfully put it, “We have a great predilection for him,” (Characters in Shakespeare, p. 345). Sly presides at the play not merely to observe a comedy, but to comment on it as well, “‘Tis a very excellent piece of work, madam lady. Would ‘twere done!” (1.1.251–252).

Unfortunately, the Induction is sometimes cut. This eliminates the play-within-a-play makeup, and thus greatly affects the argument of farce or comedy. As a play-within-a-play, directors seem to employ more license for creativity.

With both the Bianca plot and the Petruchio-Katherine plot, the play deals with outrageously diverse ways of wooing and holding a wife. It also portrays varying types of husbands and wives. We could easily conclude the play a farce given the ludicrous nature of the characters.
At first glance Bianca is predictably seen as the supposed heroine sought by the proverbial hero of romantic plays. She is compliant and beautiful when contrasted at first to her then less attractive and obstinate sister. Shakespeare can’t leave it there, so he meticulously manipulates the narrative. Bianca becomes part of the back story for Kate’s shrewishness. He creates a psychological realism by using Bianca in a “realistic” way. Kate not only resents Bianca’s propensity for her “pretty” tricks and her father’s overt partiality, but also for her very mildness. It infuriates Kate. Then we see Bianca in action. Surrounded by her many suitors, she puppeteers them flawlessly. Lucentio’s impulsive obsession with Bianca, after only hearing four lines, is blatantly based on her attractiveness and “dutiful” manners, doubtlessly illuminating his credulous character. Exerting some self-will, Bianca insists on the decision making process regarding her lessons. In so doing, she gives Lucentio encouragement that flies in the face of her pretended modesty. Lucentio’s trophy is a wife who is not only defiant but adroitly invective, “The more fool you for laying money on my duty” (5.2.129).

The “fires” truly begin with Katherine. All the adjectives, comments and descriptions are designed to engender audience sympathy normally reserved for a stereotypical mother-in-law. Gremio, a potential Bianca suitor, inimically declares to Kate’s father, Baptista, “To cart her rather. She’s too rough for me” (1.1.55), is tantamount to calling Kate a prostitute to her face. Hortensio classifies her “devil,” and Tranio as “stark and mad, or wonderful froward” (1.1.69). Our sympathies shift for a moment with Kate’s first words to her father, “I pray you sir, is it your will/To make a stale of me amongst these mates?” (1.1.57). Audience concerns also elevate with the “taming” tactics employed by Petruchio, the salutary results not withstanding. Ah, there’s the rub, “We sympathize with Katherine—and as soon as we do, farce becomes impossible,” (The Taming of the Shrew Oxford World Classics, H. Oliver, p. 51).

Initially the jury is out as to what make of Petruchio, that fiery, wealthy, swashbuckling, witty, gold digger who says, “I come to wive it wealthily in Padua” (1.2.73). Hortensio with access to Bianca solely on his mind, fully discloses that he has a prospect in mind, but she is “curst,” “shrewd,” and “froward.” And it is likely that he has completely understated these traits. Petruchio replies, “Hortensio, peace: thou know’st not gold’s effect” (1.2.92). Intriguingly, his raging fire designates him the right man for the task of shrew tamer and potential mate for Kate.

Kate and Beatrice, in Much Ado about Nothing, are the exceptions to Shakespeare’s penchant for marrying off his comedy heroines to husbands beneath themselves. “Petruchio is worth fifty Orlandos” (Shaw on Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw, p. 89). They are equals in wealth, intelligence, beauty, and wit and their language is everywhere spirited and lingua franca. The celebrated appeal of The Taming of the Shrew is witnessing Petruchio and Kate surrendering to the verity of their affections. It’s a bulls-eye, to the connection of the sexes at its liveliest point. “The mutual roughness of Kate and Petruchio makes a primal appeal, and yet the humor of their relationship is highly sophisticated” (Bloom, p. 29).

“It’s as if Shakespeare set out to write a farce . . . but had hardly begun before he asked himself what might make a woman shrewish anyway?” Then, “The play changed key . . . it has modulated back from something like realistic comedy to the . . . kind of entertainment that was foretold by the Induction” (Oliver, p. 51–57), logically a farce.

Whether a farce or a realistic comedy, the debate will continue; it remains open ended like the Induction itself. Petruchio and Kate are deeply in love and have reservedly been since first sight, and with that flammable love “tamed” and “tamer” become nebulous. “Kate and Petruchio . . . clearly are going to be the happiest married couple in Shakespeare” (Bloom, p. 28). Petruchio, searching for money, journeyed from Verona to Padua and discovered love as well. Katherina seeking nothing, resoundingly found love. Bellissimo—no?
Synopsis for Student Audiences

Baptista, a rich gentleman of Padua, has two daughters. The elder, Katherina, or Kate the curst, has a fiery temper and a sharp tongue, while Bianca, the younger, is gentle and sweet, and has many suitors, including Hortensio and Gremio. However, Baptista has decided no one may marry Bianca until after Katherina is wedded.

Two visitors to Padua arrive with their servants. The first, Lucentio, instantly falls in love with Bianca, and disguises himself as a teacher so he can see her more often, adding still another suitor to the mix. The second visitor, Petruchio, has come to Padua in search of a rich wife. Hortensio, one of Bianca’s suitors tells Petruchio of Kate’s wealth and beauty, but also her awful temper. Petruchio resolves to woo, marry, and tame the wild Kate.

When the two meet, sparks begin to fly. Kate discovers she has at last met a man who can stand up to her in wit and passion. When she is sharp and cruel, Petruchio is clever and determined. Despite her protests, he declares that he will have no wife but her. Baptista arrives, and Petruchio announces that he and Katherina are to be married Sunday.

When Sunday comes, Petruchio arrives late for the wedding, dressed like a clown, and behaving like a ruffian. After the wedding Petruchio refuses to stay for the wedding dinner and whisks Kate away from her family and friends.

When the newlyweds arrive home, Petruchio is even stranger. He yells at the servants and forbids them to give his new wife anything to eat or to let her rest, claiming that nothing, food or bed, is good enough for Kate. In other words, he behaves just like Katherina used to.

Being very tired and very hungry, Kate’s temper begins to falter. She finds herself sticking up for the servants and giving compliments, instead of finding fault with everything and everyone. In the morning Petruchio orders food and new clothing for his bride; but, since she isn’t quick enough to say thank you, he takes it away again.

He then decides to take her back for a visit to Baptista, but when he finds Kate still being disagreeable he calls off the trip.

Kate begins to understand how to play nice with her husband and at last they set out on their journey. On the way Petruchio tests her by claiming the sun is the moon. Kate, weary of all the arguing, says it will be sun or moon or whatever he wants.

On the road they meet an old man who Petruchio calls a “fair maiden,” Kate agrees with him even in this, and they at last seal their love with a kiss.

Petruchio and Kate arrive at Baptista’s just in time to celebrate Lucentio’s marriage to Bianca and Hortensio’s marriage to the Widow. Alone together, the three new grooms make a wager on whose wife is the most agreeable. Both Bianca and the Widow refuse to come when beckoned by their husbands. But when Petruchio commands Kate to come, she complies immediately, and she ends the play by gives a final speech about the duty of women to their husbands and the blessings of a happy marriage.
Shakespeare’s Language

Since *The Taming of the Shrew* was written, many words in English have changed their meaning, and some are no longer used. Consider how today’s popular slang will seem dated in just a few years. For instance, who now uses the word “groovy”? Shakespeare used the rich vocabulary of his day within his plays and also made up words when it suited him. When reading Shakespeare try not to get hung up on understanding every word, rather read the line in context of the scene. Try translating the lines below into your own words using today’s vernacular.

Selected Vocabulary

**Stoic:** A follower of the ancient philosophy that stated a man should be free from emotion.

“Let us no Stoics”
—Tranio (1.1.31)

**Stocks:** a block of wood, i.e., without feeling.

“No Stoics nor no stocks”
—Tranio (1.1.31)

**Mew:** to shut up or lock away

“Has he closely mew’d her up”
—Tranio (1.1.184)

**Dam:** the female parent of an animal

“Go to the devil’s dam”
—Gremio (1.1.105)

**Pith:** the essential part, the core

“What’s the pith of all”
—Tranio (1.1.166)

**Readiest:** arranged

“Which is the readiest way”
—Tranio (1.2.219)

**Gawds:** ornaments

“But for these other gawds”
—Bianca (2.1.3)

**Hilding:** a base and menial wretch

“Thou hilding of devilish spirit.”
—Baptista (2.1.26)

**Peremptory:** absolute, not open to debate

“I am as peremptory as she”
—Petruchio (2.1.131)

**Rail:** scold harshly

“Say that she rail”
—Petruchio (2.1.170)

**Jade:** a vicious broken down horse

“No jade such as you”
—Katharina (2.1.201)

**Pedant:** A boring, self-important schoolteacher

“Wrangling pedant”
—Hortensio (3.1.4)
**Breeching:** in breech, erring, needing punishment
  “No breeching scholar”
  —Bianca (3.1.18)

**Habit:** Costume, apparel
  “Doff this habit”
  —Baptista (3.2.100)

**Domineer:** to have one’s way, indulge
  “Revel, feast and domineer”
  —Petruchio (3.2.224)

**Buckler:** shield or defend
  “I’ll buckler thee”
  —Petruchio (3.2.239)

**Bemoiled:** covered in mud, bedraggled
  “She was bemoiled”
  —Grumio (4.1.75)

**Dresser:** table meat is prepared on
  “Brought it from the dresser”
  —Petruchio (4.1.163)

**Choler:** anger of spirit, bad humor
  “It engenders choler”
  —Petruchio (4.1.172)

**Continency:** self-control
  “A sermon of continency”
  —Curtis (4.2.183)

**Neat’s foot:** cow foot
  “What say you to a neat’s foot?”
  —Grumio (4.3.17)

**Cockle:** a sea muscle-shell
  “Tis a cockle, a knack a toy, a trick”
  —Petruchio (4.3.66)

**Censer:** an incense burner with a perforated lid used for Catholic mass
  “Like to a censer in a barber’s shop”
  —Petruchio (4.3.91)

**Habiliments:** clothes
  “These honest mean habiliments”
  —Petruchio (4.3.170)

**Jarring:** discordant, out of tune
  “Our jarring notes agree”
  —Lucentio (5.2.1)

**Giddy:** dizzy
  “He that is giddy thinks the world turns round”
  —Widow (5.2.19)

**Holidame:** referring to the Virgin Mary
  “Now, by my holidame, here comes Katharina”
  —Baptista (5.2.98)

**Meads:** meadows
  “As frosts do bite the meads”
  —Katharina (5.2.139)

(All references are from *The Riverside Shakespeare* [Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997].)
References from Shakespeare’s Time and Place

Shakespeare lived in a time far distant and removed from our modern culture. When he wrote, he wasn’t thinking about the students who would be reading his plays 400 years later. Thus, included in his writing are references to stories, cultural beliefs, or activities that were popular in his time, but that are very strange to us. Below are some examples from *The Taming of the Shrew* that need some explanation:

“I must dance barefoot on her wedding day and . . . lead apes into hell.”
—Katherina (2.133-34)

Katharina accuses her father of favoring her sister Bianca while he dooms her to these two proverbial fates. First, it was a custom throughout Europe for older sisters to dance barefoot upon the occasion of a younger sister’s wedding in order to ward off the curse of becoming an old maid. Second, leading apes into hell was said to be the fate of women who die as old maids, an afterlife punishment for their failure to go forth and multiply.

“So may you lose your arms. If you strike me you are no gentleman. And if no gentleman, why then no arms.”
—Katherina (2.1.221-223)

Katharina says this in response to Petruchio’s threat that he will hit her if she attempts to hit him again. She is referring to both his physical arms as well as a gentleman’s coat of arms—a symbol of nobility.

“That teacheth tricks eleven and twenty long.”
—Tranio (4.2.56-57)

The reference is to a phrase used in a popular card game of the time, trentuno. The basic meaning is that one needs to use the right hand, or trick, to overcome the opponent.
Allusion in Shakespeare

Allusions are a specific kind of reference: to well-known characters, events, or themes that come from classical works of literature, such as Greek and Roman mythology or the Bible. Here are some allusions from the text of *The Taming of the Shrew*.

“Hear Minerva speak.”
—Lucentio (1.1.84)

Minerva is the Roman equivalent to Athena of Greek mythology. She is the goddess of wisdom.

“Leave that labor to great Hercules.”
—Gremio (1.2.255)

Hercules, or Heracles, is a hero of incredible strength from Greek mythology. He was assigned twelve impossible labors by the goddess Hera.

“Hic ibat Simois, hic est Sigeia tellus.”
—Lucentio (2.1.28-29)

These lines come from the Greek poet Ovid’s book *Heroides*. They speak of the location of the river Simios and the palace of the Trojan king Priam. This basic Latin text would have been used in many schools, and could be considered the equivalent of “See spot run” in a modern English lesson.
Other Literary Devices Used in *The Taming of the Shrew*

**Alliteration**

Alliteration is the repetition of a starting sound in two or more words.

“Katherine the Curst.”
—Hortensio (1.2.128)

**Pun**

A pun is a play on words used to suggest the different meanings of alike or similar words.

“I did but tell her she mistook her frets.” (He means the frets on a guitar.)

“Frets, call you these? . . . I’ll fume.” (She means “to annoy,” as in “to fret and fume.”)
—Hortensio (2.1.149-152)

**Extended Metaphor**

Also called a conceit, an extended metaphor is a comparison between two unlike things that continues throughout a series of sentences. For example, in the following speech, Petruchio compares his treatment of Kate to the practice of falconry, or training wild falcons for hunting. The wild and stubborn birds, who were the strongest and most valued, would be kept from food and rest until they were willing to follow the commands of their keeper.

My falcon now is **sharp** and passing empty;
And till she **stoop** she must not be **full-gorged**,
For then she never looks upon her lure.
Another way I have to **man** my **haggard**,
To make her come and know her keeper’s call,
That is, to **watch** her, as we watch these **kites**
That **bate and beat** and will not be obedient.
—Petruchio (4.1.190-196)

A number of these words, such as those in the following list, may be unfamiliar to modern audiences.

**Sharp**: hungry, alert, aware of its captor.
**Stoop**: to follow the lure put out by the trainer, to swoop when called.
**Full-gorged**: fully fed, no longer hungry.
**To man**: to train, tame, overcome
**Haggard**: female hawk
**To watch**: to keep awake
**Kites**: a bird of prey, such as a falcon, that soars on updrafts of air
**Bate and beat**: flutter and flap about
Evolving English

Language is constantly evolving and has changed dramatically in the 400 years since Shakespeare was writing. For instance, in Petruchio’s wooing speech with Katherina, several words need a little explanation to make the speech even more meaningful:

You lie, in faith; for you are call’d plain Kate,
And bonny Kate and sometimes Kate the curst;
But Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom
Kate of Kate Hall, my super-dainty Kate,
For dainties are all Kates, and therefore, Kate,
Take this of me, Kate of my consolation;
Hearing thy mildness praised in every town,
Thy virtues spoke of, and thy beauty sounded,
Yet not so deeply as to thee belongs,
Myself am moved to woo thee for my wife.
—Petruchio (2.1.185-193)

Christendom: This word refers not to any religion or belief, but to all the kingdoms of the Christian world, which were considered by Shakespeare’s contemporaries to be the only civilized places in the world.

Kate Hall: It was common practice in Shakespeare’s England for a noble family’s home to be called after the family name, i.e. Smith Hall. Petruchio is implying that Kate is so well spoken of that her home is known as Kate Hall, rather than by her family or father’s name.

Dainties: Here Petruchio is playing with the words dainty and cake. Dainty refers not only to the delicacy and grace of a woman, but can also mean a delicacy, as in a dessert or cake. He then uses an audio pun by comparing the sound of the words Kate and cake.
Objective:
Once you and your students have read and discussed *The Taming of the Shrew*, take the students back into the text to further analyze individual characters. This activity can be used to demonstrate knowledge of the characters or it can serve as preparation for a character analysis essay.

Materials:
Copies of the play; blank, unlined paper

Class Time Needed:
This activity will take one to two class periods, depending on the ability level of the class.

Method:
Give the students a piece of unlined paper and have them fold it into quarters to create four squares. Ask students to choose their favorite or least favorite character and write that character’s name in the center of the paper. At the top of each of the four squares, have each student write a different personality trait for his or her chosen character. For example, Petru (prefix)hio could be described as impulsive, and egotistical. Encourage the students to be exact in their wording. Under each trait listed, students should note three to five scenes in which the trait is demonstrated. Discourage the students from listing the same scene more than once.

Next, students must locate a quotation from the play to support each trait. A quotation may be something the chosen character says or something others say about him or her; it can be long or short. Explain how to cite a quotation: Act 1, Scene 1, Line 154 should be listed as 1.1.154. If students moan, “I can't find it,” remind them to go back to the scenes they have already written down and look for quotations there.

Once these steps are completed, have the students flip their papers over to the back. Ask students to describe the appearance of their characters in the first square. Encourage them to cite quotations from the play that support their descriptions. For example, if a student states that Bianca is beautiful, he might cite 1.1: Lucentio: “Sacred and sweet was all I saw in her.”

In the second square, have students write the name of the person closest to their characters, explaining the relationship and anything it indicates about the character’s personality.

Have students fill the third square with any other facts about their character that the students can glean from the play.

Finally, in the last square, students should write one sentence to sum up what makes the character unique.

Hold small group or class discussions to reveal the students’ findings. If you choose to hold small-group discussions, group the students by character. If you prefer a class discussion, write several characters’ names on the board and have student volunteers toss out the traits they listed for those characters along with their best supporting quotations. Discuss the validity of choices in character traits and supporting quotations.

Assign a character analysis essay, requiring students to use the supporting materials they discovered through the brainstorming process in their essay.
Evaluation:

Were the students engaged in the brainstorming activity and in the discussion process? How full of information were their squares? For a more formal, graded evaluation, collect the brainstorming and check for cohesiveness between the quotes chosen and character traits. When you assess the essays, evaluate the entire process, assigning a grade for both the brainstorming and the final product.

Source:

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Classroom Activities

Elementary School
1. Draw a picture of Kate and Petruchio when they first meet. Draw a picture of them at the end of the play. Make sure the pictures show how their feelings about one another have changed.

2. The Utah Shakespeare Festival’s 2010 education touring production of *The Taming of the Shrew* was set in the Wild West. Its 2008 main stage production was set in 1948 Italy. Discuss other places and times you could set the play. As a class draw pictures of what the set for the opening scene would look like in a medieval castle, in a big modern city, or in ancient China.

3. As a class create, or find in the text, one line from the beginning, one from the middle, and one from the end of the play that sums up each of the main character’s attitudes during that section of the play (three lines for Kate, Petruchio, Baptista, Bianca, Lucentio, and Hortensio). Have students in the class speak the lines aloud in order to express the various attitudes.

Middle School
1. The play is full of colorful insults. Make a list of those you can find within the text. Examples include minion, foolish knave, rascal, horeson villain, twangling jack, and beetle-headed, flap-ear’d knave. Have students create their own insults using animal, pop-culture, and even technological imagery. Have them share the best examples they come up with.

2. Examine the fight scene between Bianca and Kate. Do you get the feeling this isn’t the first time this has happened? Look for clues about the roots of their arguments. Brainstorm ideas on how they could overcome their differences and become friends. Explore the power of matching words and action by having students read the scene aloud with different feelings (sweetness, anger, humor, etc.) behind the words.

3. Make a list of Kate’s character traits. What does she do that make people call her a shrew? Make a list of famous and infamous women. Do these women share Kate’s traits? Discuss how/if Kate has changed at the end of the play. Did she really change, or did the way people see her change?

High School
1. Rewrite the wooing scene in a more modern language. Does it still work? Try it while using an extended metaphor. Start with Petruchio saying, “Give me some sugar, baby.”

2. Review Petruchio’s speech in 3.2.229-233. Research the progress of women’s rights over the last century then research the state of women’s rights in Shakespeare’s England (1590). Was Petruchio’s pronouncement of his ownership of Kate correct at that time? How does this statement stand up today?

3. Look at Petruchio’s speech in 2.1.131-136. What does he mean about fires? Make a list of words describing first Kate and then Petruchio. Are these characters more alike than different or vice-versa? How do their personalities work together? Have students make a list of their own personality traits, both strengths and weaknesses. What should they look for and what should they avoid in their potential mates?
Discussion Questions

Textual
1. Discuss the fight scene between the sisters Kate and Bianca. Do you think this is the first time they have had a fight? What did their father's words tell you about how he feels about each of his daughters?
2. Discuss the “Sun and moon” scene? Why did Petruchio call the sun the moon? Why did Kate agree?
3. Petruchio tells Kate's father that he is as “premptory” (stubborn) as Kate is and so they will have to fall in love. Think of examples of how they behave that show that they have similar personalities.

Relative
1. Have you ever had a fight with your brother or sister? Do you ever feel like your parents “always” take his or her side instead of yours? What can you do to try and better express how you feel when you are angry?
2. How would you react if you were treated the way Kate is treated by Petruchio? Would you do what he wanted or keep fighting?
3. Do you think Kate and Petruchio’s marriage will be a good one?

Compare/Contrast
1. Who is the best wife? In the end of the play Bianca, the widow, and Kate were each asked to come to their husbands. Who did as they were asked? How did the other wives respond when they were called?
2. There are two servants in the play, Tranio and Grumio, one is asked to lie about who he is by pretending to be his master; the other has to serve his master honestly though it is hard work. Is one a better servant than the other?
3. Was Kate really a shrew? What did others say about her? What did she say herself?