



The Taming of the Shrew

William Shakespeare



The Taming of the Shrew

(parallel edition, translated and edited by Jolanda Flescia), Feltrinelli

- Written 1590-92, performed in 1594, published in 1623
- Plot from the comedy *Suppositi* by **Ariosto** (1509), translated into English in 1566 by George Gaiscoigne.
- **Prologue or Induction** (as called by A. Pope the first time)
- An induction in a play is an explanatory scene, summary or other text that stands outside or apart from the main play with the intent to comment on it, moralize about it or in the case of **dumb show** (mime)—to summarize the plot or underscore what is afoot (going to happen or has been planned). Typically, an induction precedes the main text of a play. Inductions are a common feature of plays written and performed in the Renaissance period.
- **Play within the Play**



Prologue in 2 scenes

- The setting is in Warwickshire
- A mischievous /'mɪs.tʃɪ.vəs/ (malizioso, dispettoso) nobleman tricks a drunken tinker named Christopher Sly into believing he is actually a nobleman himself. The nobleman then has the play performed for Sly's diversion.
- Sly has supposed to have slept for 15 years. When he wakes up, everybody plays a part as in a play.
- Double effect: Play within the play within the play
- References to Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*:
- "Pauca pallabris" instead of "Pocas Palabras"
- "Hieronimo beware, go by, go by" (from Kyd, 3.12.31) (Via via!) turns into "Go by, Saint Jeronimy"



List of Roles: Characters

- Baptista Minola, of Padua. A merchant. (Where is his wife???)
- His two daughters: Katherina and Bianca
- Bianca (the younger) can't marry until Katherina (the older) marries.
- Bianca's two suitors: Gremio (elderly man) and Hortensio
- Lucentio: another suitor, a gentleman of Pisa, in Padua to attend university
- Petruccio of Verona, Katherina's suitor
- Servants:
 - Lucentio's servants: Tamio and Bondello
 - Petruccio's servants: Grumio (and many others his house: Curtis, Nathaniel, Philip Nicholas, Peter, the tailor)
- Many minor characters: DOUBLING



The setting: Italy

- Setting of the play: Padua
- Petruccio is from Verona
- A merchant from Mantua plays the part of Lucentio's father
- References to Venice
- Lucentio is from Pisa



The title: The **Taming** of the Shrew

La bisbetica **domata**

- Katherina Minola: headstrong, strong-willed, obdurate shrew.
/'ɒb.dʒə.rət/ostinata
- Petruccio tames" her with various psychological and physical torments, such as keeping her from eating and drinking, until she becomes a desirable, compliant, and obedient bride.
- Bianca: the ideal wife (and daughter)
- A misogynistic play?
- **Shrew** = originally an animal, a type of rat (toporagno), which can be harmful to humans -> Beshrew! (a curse: beshrew your enemies)
- The term **shrew** was sexualized for women, as opposed to **sheep** (good, sweet, silent, mild).
- TAMING: Focus on the process of "addomesticamento" of a wild animal. Active gerund vs passive past participle
- Domestication



The ideal woman and wife

- Silent, reserved, shy (not witty), obedient to the father and future husband

Destiny for a woman: marriage or the convent (however, many convents were closed after the Reformation)

- A woman who talks/speaks out = a witch a shrew = a witch
- Witch hunt had a violent climax at the end 1500 and beginning of 1600.
- The shrewish Katherina does not conform. By talking, replying, having personal opinions, refusing to get married, she undermines the social patriarchal order. She must be domesticated.



Marriage



- Arranged marriages, decided by the families (fathers)
- Petruccio and Katherine, Gremio and the widow.
- Where are the mothers in Shakespeare's plays?
- Arranged marriage versus love marriage (Bianca and Lucentio)
- Rebellion of women in Shakespeare's plays



A lot of Disguise (here not crossdressing)

- ▶ Lucentio disguises as a private tutor, Cambio, to woo Bianca.
- ▶ Hortensio disguises as Licio, the music and mathematic teacher from Mantua, to woo Bianca too.
- ▶ Lucentio's servant Tranio becomes Lucentio in his place
- ▶ A Merchant from Mantua is made to perform Vincenzo, Lucentio's father
- ▶ **Crossdressing** the act of wearing clothes usually worn by a different gender:



Disguise

- Shakespeare's use of disguise could foster **humour** or **a sense of impending doom, comical or dramatic device**.
- You could instantly change your position, if you were brave enough to take the risk. You could also change people's perception of you.
- Protection from judgment, freedom to be something else
- A plot device, a powerful narrative technique.
- Dramatic irony: the audience knows who is behind the mask (for comical effect or to arouse pity)
- Masked balls allowed people to behave differently to how they may do in everyday life.



Dressing in a Different Way in Elizabethan Times

- In Elizabethan times, clothes indicated a persons' identity and class. Queen Elizabeth had supported a law pronounced by her predecessor named **'The English Sumptuary Laws'** where a person must dress according to their class but also should limit extravagance.
- People must protect the levels of society, but they must also dress so as not to flaunt their riches—they must not dress too sumptuously.
- As a result, **clothes were regarded as a manifestation of a persons' position** in life and therefore, dressing in a different way had a lot more power and significance and danger than it has today

The Character of Katherina

- From the beginning of the play (even before she appears) she is introduced by the **external (derogatory) comments of the others**.
- Gremio: «She's too rough for me» (I,1,55)
- Gremio: «Why will you mew* her (Bianca) up, Signor Baptista for this fiend of hell (Katherina) and make her (Bianca) bear the penance of her tongue (Katherina's)?» (I.i.87-89)
- Gremio says that being married to her is like «to be whipped at the high cross** every morning (I,i,131-132) and «though her father be very rich, any man is so very a fool to be married to hell?» (I.i.122-124)
- Hortensio: «No mates for you unless you were of gentler, milder mould (I,i,59-60)
- She is hurt and asks her father for help: «I pray you, Sir, is it your will to make a stale of me among these mates?» (I, i, 57-58).
- * tenere in gabbia ** croce del mercato



Katherina vs Her Father Baptista

- Baptista humiliates Katherina
- He publicly announces that he will not marry Bianca until Katherina is married too (I, i, 50-51) [p. 52-53].
- He asks both Hortensio and Gremio if one of them wants to marry Katherina although they are Bianca's suitors.
- He stands on Bianca's side at all times (II, i, 23-30) [p. 92].
- Is Katherina's behaviour a reaction to her father's humiliation and his favouritism towards Bianca?
- Katherina's suffering (II, i, 31-35) [p. 92-3] prompts her revenge



Katherina vs Bianca

- She is **the opposite** of Katherina (sweet, silent, obedient). For this reason she has many suitors. She **is not interested in them, however**. Anybody is the same, as long as they make her get out of her father's home.
- Bianca **condescending** and **superficial**. **Katherina** is more **serious about love**.
- Scene in which Katherina tries and torments Bianca in order to know whom she really loves (II, i, 5-21) [p. 90-91]
- Bianca is the symbol of the **socially accepted woman**. Katherine's behaviour seems to be a reaction to Bianca, her father's favouritism for Bianca and the continuous comparison she has to undergo.
- Bianca is innocent according to the father but does nothing to defend her sister. Selfish, indifferent?
- **Appearance vs reality**. Who is really good? Bianca or Katherine?
- The final transformation (Bianca becoming disobedient and Katherine a good wife) underscores this.



Final Scene (V, ii, 79) [p. 218-19]

- ▶ Lucentio: «Bid your mistress come to me» (79) → Chiedi
- ▶ Hortensio: «Go and entreat my wife» (90) → Supplica
- ▶ Petruccio «I command her to come to me» (99) → Ordina

- ▶ Bianca: «Fie what a foolish duty is this ... The more fool you for laying on my duty ? (V, ii, 131/135) [p. 222]
- ▶ Widow «Lord, let me never have a cause to sigh/Till I be brought to such a silly pass» (V, ii, 129-30) [p. 222].



Petruccio and Katherine

- ▶ Petruccio, unlike the other men, is not afraid of her and appreciates her wit and energy «I'll attend her here./ And woo her with some spirit, when she comes» (II,i,169-170) [pp. 102-3]
- ▶ Rhetorical battle between them, a duel, a game: all her rude actions are turned into socially accepted ones (II,i,171-180) [pp. 102-3].
- ▶ At their first encounter he lists her virtues, her qualities: she is «pleasant, courteous, gamesome, sweet as spring-time flowers, sweeter than the kernels».
- ▶ At first she is sceptical and resists. She is not used to receiving attention, to receiving compliments. Nobody, not even her father, has ever done it. Then she seems to like it.
- ▶ Petruccio can cope with her female pride and self-assurance, does not see a shrew but an attractive young woman, worthwhile courting.
- ▶ Petruccio transforms her anger into productive energy




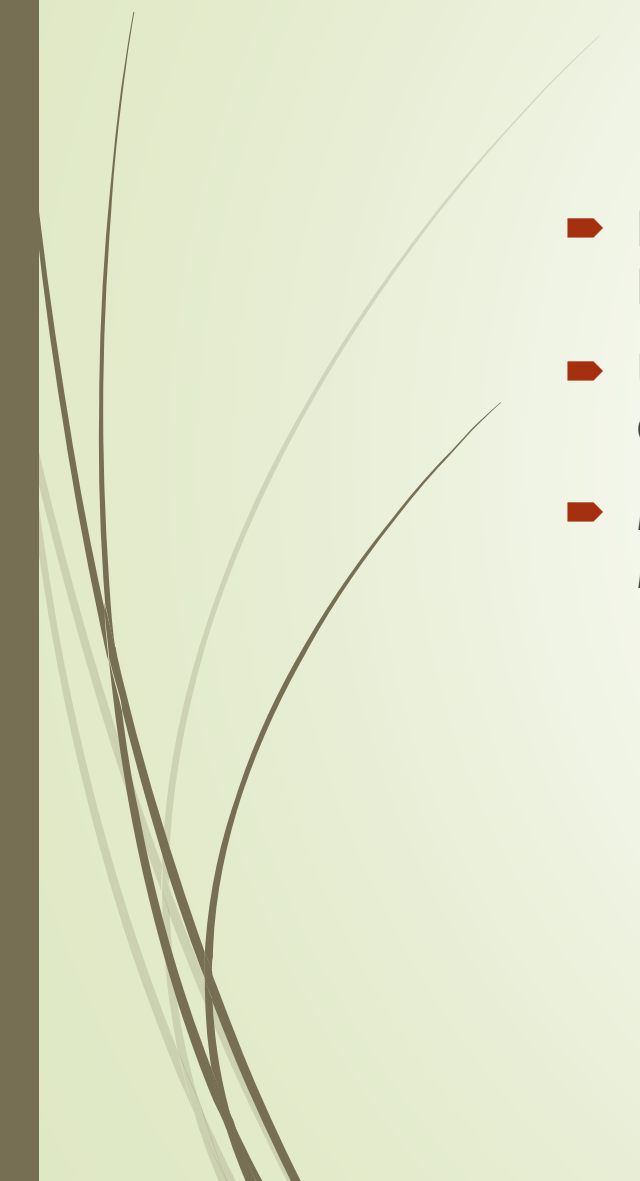
Petruccio and Katherina

- Then he changes technique to «tame» her.
- He becomes an unpredictable tyrant: arrives late at the wedding ceremony, badly dressed, take her away from the nuptial banquet, etc.
- Cruelty or a willing attempt to take her away from the noxious environment of her family? (Langis)
- He wears her out, stresses her psychologically and physically. He does what she usually did with the others with her stubborn behaviour.
- In the end, it is not important if the moon is the moon or the sun (IV, v, 1-26).
- The taming seems rather than a domestication an emancipation from her life of frustration and bitterness.
- Petruccio and Katherina become accomplices in a private game, an **intimacy** that free them from prejudices.
- They both subvert conventions.



Is Katherina and Petruccio's Relationship a Fictional Play Itself?

- ▶ Petruccio plays the part of the tyrant, seems to conform to external conventions, but in the end is asking Katherine to be part of that play too.
- ▶ They become **accomplices** in a game, that however frees her. **Complicity**.
- ▶ Petruccio indirectly exposes the paradoxes of marriage
- ▶ Is Katherine playing a part? «Forward, I pray, since we have come so far» (IV, v, 12) [p. 194]
- ▶ Is Shakespeare ironic or serious?

- 
- 
- E. Krippendorff, *Le Commedie di Shakespeare. Il regno della libertà*, Fazi Editore, 2014
 - U.P. Langis, *Passion, Prudence and Virtue in Shakespearean Drama*, Continuum International Publishing Group London 2011
 - Melchiori, *William Shakespeare e le commedie romantiche*, Vol 11 Mondadori 2005.