

The Taming of the Shrew



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare's father was a glove-maker, and Shakespeare received no more than a grammar school education. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, but left his family behind around 1590 and moved to London, where he became an actor and playwright. He was an immediate success: Shakespeare soon became the most popular playwright of the day as well as a part-owner of the Globe Theater. His theater troupe was adopted by King James as the King's Men in 1603. Shakespeare retired as a rich and prominent man to Stratford-upon-Avon in 1613, and died three years later.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The play is set in an unspecified time in Renaissance Italy, which forms the cultural backdrop for Lucentio as a young scholar and the assortment of wealthy, noble families in separate Italian cities of which Baptista and Vincentio's families are examples.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Taming of the Shrew has basic similarities to other Shakespearean comedies and can be seen as following in the tradition of ancient Roman comedy, especially those of the playwright Plautus, whose plays are filled with clever slaves tricking their masters and star-struck young lovers whose plans for marriage are delayed and obviated but ultimately fulfilled.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Taming of the Shrew*
- **When Written:** Early 1590s
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1623
- **Literary Period:** English Renaissance (also called the early modern era)
- **Genre:** Elizabethan Comedy
- **Setting:** The main action occurs in Padua, Italy and Petruchio's country home. (Though the main action is actually a play-within-a-play, and the frame of the play regarding Christopher Sly occurs at the home of an anonymous English lord.)
- **Climax:** There are multiple climaxes for the various plot-threads of the play. For Petruchio and Katherine, the climax comes when they are journeying to Padua and Petruchio makes her say that the sun is the moon, showing that he has achieved complete mastery over Katherine's wild nature. For

the rest of the characters, it is in act five, scene one, when Lucentio's real father Vincentio confronts the merchant who was disguised as Vincentio at Lucentio's house in Padua. Lucentio is forced to reveal his true identity (and the identity of Tranio) to Baptista. All of the characters' various disguises are put aside, and Baptista and Vincentio approve of the marriage between the real Lucentio and Bianca.

- **Antagonist:** For Lucentio, the antagonists are all those who stand between him and Bianca: Hortensio, Gremio, and Baptista. Petruchio and Katherine may be said to be each other's antagonist, as Petruchio tries to tame her and she struggles against his abusive dominance.

EXTRA CREDIT

Adapting the Shrew. The *Taming of the Shrew* has been prone to adaptations since the 17th century. In the early 1600s, John Fletcher wrote a sequel called *The Tamer Tamed* in which Petruchio is himself tamed by a new wife. In 1948, Cole Porter adapted Shakespeare's play into a musical comedy called *Kiss Me, Kate*. And in more recent years, the 1999 movie *10 Things I Hate About You* moved Shakespeare's romantic comedy from Renaissance Italy to Padua High School, where characters scheme to take the sisters Kat and Bianca to the prom.



PLOT SUMMARY

The play begins with an Induction, which establishes a frame for the main plot. The drunken beggar Christopher Sly gets thrown out of a tavern and falls asleep. A noble lord passing by finds him and decides to play a joke on him. He dresses Sly up in noble clothes and convinces him that he is a wealthy nobleman who has recently been mad and had forgotten his true identity. The lord has his young page dress up as Sly's noble wife, and hires a group of traveling players to put on a play for Sly. The rest of the play is then the production of these players.

The main plot of the play begins in Padua, where the young scholar Lucentio arrives with his servant Tranio. They soon catch sight of Baptista and his two daughters: Bianca and Katherine. Bianca is followed by male suitors, while Katherine appears to be harsh and ill-mannered. Baptista tells Bianca's suitors, that because Bianca is his younger daughter, she will not be married until his older daughter, Katherine, finds a husband. Upon seeing Bianca, Lucentio falls madly in love. Tranio suggests that Lucentio should disguise himself as a teacher to tutor Bianca, so that he can get close to her and spend time with her. Tranio, then, will dress up as Lucentio. Lucentio agrees to the plan.

Another man, named Petruchio, arrives in Padua with his servant Grumio, seeking a wife. His friend (and a suitor of

Bianca) Hortensio alerts Petruccio to Katherine, and Petruccio says that he is interested in her. Hortensio promises to direct Petruccio to Katherine's father, but asks that Petruccio then introduce Hortensio in disguise as a music teacher, so that the disguised Hortensio can enter the house and be with Bianca.

At Baptista's house, Katherine teases and bullies Bianca. Baptista stops their quarreling as Gremio (one of Bianca's suitors), Lucentio (disguised as the teacher Cambio), Petruccio, Hortensio (disguised as the teacher Litio), and Tranio (disguised as Lucentio) all arrive. Petruccio announces his intention to marry Katherine, and the two "teachers" introduce themselves. Baptista sends the teachers inside to Bianca, and negotiates Katherine's dowry with Petruccio. When Katherine comes to see Petruccio, she is rude, doesn't like him, and hits him. Petruccio, though, is confident in his ability to reform her manners. Baptista agrees to marry Katherine to Petruccio, and then turns to deciding who he will get to marry Bianca: Lucentio (Tranio in disguise), Hortensio, or Gremio. After hearing the suitors' describe their riches, Baptista decides that Bianca will marry Lucentio, on the condition that Lucentio's father (Vincentio) will guarantee that Lucentio will indeed inherit his fortune.

Within Baptista's home, Lucentio and Hortensio (disguised as teachers) instruct Bianca. While pretending to teach her, Lucentio reveals his true identity and intentions to her. On Katherine and Petruccio's wedding day, Petruccio is late, much to the dismay of Katherine. When he finally arrives, he is wearing an absurd outfit, which irritates Baptista and Katherine. Meanwhile, Tranio comes up with a plan to help Lucentio get Bianca. He will find a stranger to pretend to be Lucentio's father, in order to guarantee Lucentio's finances. Petruccio and Katherine return from the church where they were just married. Petruccio announces that he and Katherine must leave immediately, skipping the elaborate feast that has been prepared for the wedding. Katherine wants to stay, but Petruccio takes her with him, as they go to his country home.

At Petruccio's home, Petruccio acts like a madman and is rude to all of his servants. He constantly corrects and berates Katherine, and pretends to find something wrong with all the food that his servants bring her so that she gets nothing to eat. This is all part of his plan to tame her by denying her food and preventing her from even sleeping.

In Padua, Hortensio discovers Bianca and Lucentio (still disguised as a teacher) kissing. Frustrated, he gives up on Bianca and decides to marry a wealthy widow. Meanwhile, Lucentio's servant Biondello comes to Lucentio and Tranio and informs them that he has found someone to play Lucentio's father. He introduces Tranio to the man, an old merchant. Tranio lies and tells the merchant that his life is in danger in Padua, so he should pretend to be Lucentio's father in order to protect himself. The merchant agrees to dress up as Lucentio's father, and thanks Tranio for his apparent help.

Back at Petruccio's home, Katherine complains of Petruccio's behavior. She has not been able to sleep or eat at all, and begs Grumio for some food. Grumio tempts her by suggesting various dishes, but decides that none of them are suitable for Katherine. Like Petruccio, he thus starves her under the pretense of caring for her. Petruccio enters with a large portion of meat. He does not let Katherine eat until she thanks him for it, and when she does, he allows her to eat. Petruccio brings in a tailor and a haberdasher with clothes for Katherine to wear to Bianca's wedding banquet. The clothes are made exactly to Petruccio's specifications, but he rejects them as a way of exerting control over Katherine. His goal is to make her agree to any whim or opinion of his.

Tranio brings the merchant (disguised as Lucentio's father) to Baptista. The merchant guarantees Lucentio's inheritance, and Baptista is ready for the marriage with Bianca to happen. Baptista, Tranio (still in the guise of Lucentio), and the merchant go to Lucentio's house in Padua to discuss the financial particulars of the marriage arrangement. Meanwhile, the real Lucentio and Bianca plan to elope to a church to be married.

Petruccio, Katherine, Hortensio, and some of Petruccio's servants make the journey to Padua for Bianca's wedding banquet. On the way, Petruccio calls the sun the moon, and an old man they encounter a young woman. He forces Katherine to agree with his mad statements, showcasing his dominance over her. The old man, a bit confused by being called a young woman, introduces himself as Vincentio, Lucentio's real father. He is on his way to see his son in Padua, and he joins Petruccio's company on the journey there.

When Petruccio and his group arrive in Padua, Vincentio encounters the merchant and Tranio in their disguises. He gets into a furious argument with both of them, who insist that they are Lucentio and his father. Baptista believes Tranio and the merchant, and Vincentio is about to be carried off to jail by a police officer, when Lucentio arrives with Bianca. Lucentio confesses to his deceit, and reveals the true identities of the merchant and Tranio. Baptista and Vincentio are upset by all this, but ultimately approve of the marriage between Bianca and the real Lucentio.

At the banquet celebrating Lucentio and Bianca's wedding, the various male characters tease Petruccio for being married to a shrew. Petruccio responds by proposing a bet. He, Hortensio, and Lucentio will all call their wives, and the husband whose wife comes first will win a sum of money. Hortensio's widow and Bianca do not come when called, but Katherine comes immediately when Petruccio sends for her. The other husbands are amazed at Katherine's newfound obedience. Petruccio sends Katherine to fetch the other wives. When they are all present, Katherine delivers a long speech detailing a wife's duties owed to her husband. Petruccio is pleased with her speech and the two go off to bed, leaving the other characters to marvel at how Katherine has been tamed.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Christopher Sly – Christopher Sly is a drunken beggar, who begins the play by being thrown out of a tavern. A noble lord passing by decides to play a joke on him and dresses him up in noble clothes. Sly awakes in a lavish room, and the lord and his attendants pretend that Sly is a nobleman who has recently been mad and had forgotten his real identity. Sly accepts his new identity and enjoys a play put on by a group of traveling players, which turns out to be the real play of *The Taming of the Shrew*.

A Lord – An unnamed nobleman, the lord finds Christopher Sly drunkenly passed out and decides to play a trick on him, convincing him that he is actually a wealthy nobleman. He arranges for his servants to play along with the elaborate prank and has a group of traveling players (actors) put on for Sly the play that turns out to be *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Baptista Minola – The wealthy father of two daughters, Bianca and Katherine, Baptista establishes a rule that no man may marry Bianca until his older daughter Katherine is married. This is Baptista's way of ensuring that someone will marry the ill-mannered, stubborn Katherine. Throughout the play, Baptista seems more interested in potential son-in-laws' financial matters than their love for Bianca (or Bianca's love for them). He eagerly marries Katherine off to Petruchio against her will and only assents to marrying Bianca to Lucentio because he makes the best offer of a dowry (the money Bianca would be entitled to in the case of Lucentio's death).

Katherine – Katherine is the "shrew" of the play's title. Because she is stubborn, is sometimes ill-mannered, and does not allow herself to be ordered around by men, she is constantly insulted, made fun of, and otherwise denigrated by practically all the other characters in the play. After she marries Petruchio, Petruchio tries to "tame" her, and he forces her into obedience by withholding food from her and not letting her sleep. Toward the end of the play, Katherine seems to change completely and become utterly obedient and subservient to Petruchio. Her long, final speech in which she details a wife's duties to her husband is often particularly troubling to modern readers uncomfortable with her sudden acceptance of sexism. However, Katherine's sincerity in this transformation is debatable, and one could argue (as some productions of the play present it) that Katherine is merely pretending to submit to Petruchio and that her final speech is so over the top that it becomes sarcastic and a parody of wifely obedience.

Bianca – Bianca is Katherine's younger, more desirable sister. While she is better liked by most characters than Katherine, she has a slightly smaller role in the play. When she does speak, she shows herself to be clever, as when she flirts and trades witticisms with Lucentio while he is "teaching" her. At the end

of the play, she refuses to come when called by Lucentio, showing by contrast how obedient Katherine has become.

Petruchio – Petruchio is a gentleman who comes to Padua from Verona seeking a wife. He is loud, stubborn, and boisterous—in some ways a male version of Katherine. He accepts the challenge of taming Katherine and is confident in his ability to exercise male dominance over her. He explains that he approaches taming Katherine as a falconer tames a hawk, by depriving her of sleep and food. Petruchio is violent and rude toward his servants, and heavily misogynistic toward Katherine. Nonetheless, he may at least be admirable in his individuality. As demonstrated when he wears bizarre clothes to his wedding and disregards everyone else's jokes and jibes about marrying Katherine, Petruchio generally does not care what other people think of him or his actions.

Gremio – Gremio is a rather old, wealthy suitor of Bianca, competing for her hand in marriage with Lucentio and Hortensio, as well as others. When Baptista decides to marry Bianca to Lucentio, he adds that she will marry Gremio if Lucentio's financial guarantees don't check out. When Lucentio gets the merchant, disguised as Vincentio, to guarantee his dowry, Gremio is out of luck with Bianca.

Hortensio – Hortensio is another suitor of Bianca. He disguises himself as the music teacher Licio in order to get closer to her. When he sees Bianca kissing her other teacher Cambio (Lucentio in disguise), he gives up on Bianca and marries a wealthy widow, instead. This quick spousal change suggests that he is more interested in money than love in marriage. Hortensio also accompanies Katherine and Petruchio on their journey to Padua, and remarks upon Petruchio's successful taming of Katherine, seeing Petruchio as an exemplary husband worth imitating. At the end of the play, though, he lacks the control Petruchio has over his wife, as illustrated when the widow refuses to come after he calls for her.

Lucentio – Lucentio is a young man who arrives in Padua ready to pursue his studies, along with his servant Tranio. Almost immediately, though, he falls in love with Bianca, and devotes all his energy to wooing her. He disguises himself as Cambio, a teacher of languages, so that he can teach Bianca and spend time with her. When he reveals his true identity and intentions to Bianca and she replies favorably, he elopes with her to a church where they are married. Lucentio is young and somewhat irresponsible—it is Tranio who comes up with the ideas for how he can woo Bianca, and Lucentio suffers no real consequences from his deceit. In the end, he is happily married to Bianca, though her disobedience toward him at the end of the play suggests his dreamed-for marriage may not turn out to be exactly what he thought it would be.

Vincentio – Vincentio is Lucentio's wealthy father. Lucentio needs his father's guarantee of his dowry before he marries Bianca, but he gets a merchant to pretend to be Vincentio instead. When the real Vincentio arrives in Padua to see

Lucentio and encounters the merchant, as well as Tranio in Lucentio's clothes, Lucentio is forced to reveal his deceitful plans and cast off the disguise of Cambio.

Tranio – Tranio is Lucentio's servant and the mastermind behind much of the scheming throughout the play. He encourages Lucentio to disguise himself as a teacher for Bianca and he himself pretends to be Lucentio for much of the play. Tranio uses his clever wit to get Lucentio and himself out of difficult situations, and also to poke fun at the noblemen he serves. He often feigns ignorance and interprets things overly literally, allowing him to annoy and joke with Lucentio and Vincentio.

Merchant – Biondello finds this merchant to dress up as Lucentio's father Vincentio. Tranio tells the merchant, who is from Mantua, that the duke of Padua has ordered for the death of any Mantuans found in Padua, because of a dispute between the two cities. Tranio convinces him to pretend to be Vincentio, supposedly in order to save his life (but really in order to convince Baptista that Lucentio is a suitable husband for Bianca).

Widow – After discovering Bianca's affections for Lucentio (disguised as Cambio), Hortensio stops trying to woo Bianca and instead marries this wealthy (unnamed) widow. At the end of the play, the widow refuses to come when called by Hortensio, showing that he has less control over her than Petruchio has over Katherine.

Tailor – Petruchio hires the tailor to make a custom dress for Katherine to wear to Bianca's wedding banquet. However, he rejects the dress in order to tease Katherine, as part of his ongoing effort to tame her. Petruchio is rude to the tailor, but has Hortensio tell him that he will at least get paid after all his effort.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Hostess – The hostess throws the drunken Christopher Sly out of her tavern in the play's opening scene.

The Lord's Hunstmen – These attendants of the wealthy lord pretend to be Christopher Sly's servants, helping to convince him of his new identity.

Bartholomew the Page – The lord has this young, male servant dress up as Sly's wife. This disguise is very similar to the practice in Shakespeare's day of having young men play female roles in the theater.

Players – This group of traveling actors is hired by the lord to put on a play for Christopher Sly. *The Taming of the Shrew* is then their play, performed within the framing story established by the Induction.

Biondello – Biondello is one of Lucentio's servants. He helps Tranio and Lucentio carry out their plan to woo Bianca for Lucentio and finds a merchant to dress up as Vincentio.

Grumio – Grumio is one of Petruchio's servants, and goes with him to Padua. He is the object of much of Petruchio's abuse.

Curtis, Nathaniel, Phillip, Joseph, Nicholas, and Peter – These servants at Petruchio's house prepare hastily for Petruchio and Katherine's arrival, but Petruchio treats them rudely and harshly, as part of his plan to tame Katherine.

Haberdasher – Much like the tailor, the haberdasher is ordered by Petruchio to make Katherine a hat for Bianca's wedding banquet. Petruchio rejects the hat just like he rejects the tailor's dress, even though it is a perfectly fine hat.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



GENDER AND MISOGYNY

Issues related to gender are hugely important in this play, which centers around Petruchio "taming" Katherine and forcing her into the traditionally submissive role of a wife. The play is filled with characters who fit and don't fit traditional gender roles—particularly the idea of the male as dominant and the female as submissive. The quiet, mild-mannered Bianca, for example, plays the traditional role of a woman well, while Katherine rebels against this stereotype with her boisterousness and refusal to be ordered around by a man. In the last scene of the play, Petruchio, Baptista, Hortensio, and Lucentio tease each other over who is ruled by his wife and is thus less of a man. Perhaps with the exception of Petruchio, these men do not live up to the masculine ideal of a commanding husband in control of his wife, just as Bianca and the widow Hortensio marries turn out not to be the epitomes of female obedience their husbands may have thought they were.

While both men and women in the play don't always behave in accordance with traditional gender roles, it is the women—and particularly Katherine—who are punished for such behavior. Katherine's stubbornness and strong will cause her to be denigrated, insulted, and abused throughout the play. She is less highly valued as a potential wife than her sister and humiliated by various male characters, by none more than her own husband Petruchio. This would seem to make Shakespeare's play rather sexist and misogynistic, especially as it showcases Petruchio's abusing Katherine for comedic value. But, although the play contains much misogyny on-stage, it can also be seen as exposing some of the fallacies of traditional, oppressive gender roles. For one thing, with all of the disguises and deceptive performances in the comedy, it is somewhat

unclear whether Katherine is really tamed by Petruchio, or whether she is simply pretending to be obedient to him. It is even possible that he and she are pretending together, in order to surprise Baptista and the other characters. Different productions of *The Taming of the Shrew* may choose to interpret this ambiguity differently, but with the play's emphasis on performance and swapping roles (more on this below), Shakespeare may be seen as suggesting that gender roles are just that: roles to be played, rather than natural, true identities. This is furthered by the cross-dressing servant in the beginning of the play who convinces Christopher Sly that he is his wife, and perhaps by the fact that in Shakespeare's day, women's parts on the stage were played by young male actors.

In the end, the fact that the play portrays a heavy dose of misogyny is unavoidable, and much of Shakespeare's audience would doubtlessly have laughed at the sexist joking and slapstick abuse in the comedy. Whether Shakespeare would have shared in this reaction, or whether the play endorses this misogyny is somewhat more up for debate, but in any case reading the play offers just as much of an opportunity to critique misogyny and traditional gender roles as it does to reinforce them.



SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Women are just one socially oppressed group in the play; another is the class of servants that are continually beaten, abused, and insulted by the likes of Petruchio, Vincentio, and other noblemen. In fact, the play begins with a scene not about the relation between men and women, but between men of different social classes, as the Lord plays a practical joke on the poor Christopher Sly. Social standing is arguably a more important method of categorization than gender in the play. While women like Bianca and Katherine are disciplined and evaluated with respect to a strict code of gender roles, they enjoy privileges unavailable to their servants. Grumio is able to join Petruchio in teasing Katherine with the prospect of food, but she is able to hit him without consequence.

Despite disadvantages from being at the lower end of the social hierarchy, Tranio, and even arguably Biondello and Grumio, are often more clever than their masters. Grumio often misinterprets things overly literally, but this can also be seen as playing or joking with Petruchio, under the pretense of not understanding him. Tranio, meanwhile, comes up with the plan by which Lucentio successfully woos Bianca and, in devising the various disguises by which he and Lucentio trick Baptista, he is the force behind much of the plot of *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Shakespeare's play displays a rigid social hierarchy between noblemen and lower-class characters like the servants, but it also turns this hierarchy upside-down. The Lord dresses as a servant, Lucentio dresses up as the slightly lower-class Cambio, Tranio dresses up as Lucentio, and the old merchant dresses up

as Vincentio. Moreover, the entire play is performed for the entertainment of Christopher Sly, a drunken beggar who has been tricked into thinking that he is a noble lord. As with gender, categories that society may often deem to be natural are revealed in the play as identities that have to be performed and put on like a costume. Social class is as much a matter of the **clothes** one wears and the way one behaves as it is a matter of one's birth. Thus, even as Shakespeare's comedy shows with comic lightness the brutal treatment of servants, it exposes the arbitrariness of this kind of social hierarchy.



THEATER, PERFORMANCE, AND IDENTITY

The Taming of the Shrew is a play that thinks a great deal about theater itself. This kind of self-reflexivity and theater about theater (often called meta-theater), allows the play to raise questions about performance. To begin, the central plot involving Baptista's daughters and their suitors is a play within a play, performed by a group of traveling actors for Christopher Sly and a small audience who are themselves acting, pretending to be the attendants (and wife) of the supposedly noble Sly. And within this play, numerous characters don costumes and pretend to be people they are not—Lucentio, Tranio, Hortensio, and the merchant, in particular. Even Petruchio can be seen as performing, when he pretends to be mad and find fault with Katherine's food and clothing. Moreover, it is unclear to what degree Katherine is only pretending to be obedient to Petruchio in the later parts of the play, merely playing the role of a dutiful wife. As all of these acts of performance suggest, appearances crucially affect how people are perceived and treated by others. The importance of appearances is emphasized by Petruchio's insistence on wearing bizarre clothes to his wedding and his refusal to let Katherine wear the gown and hat that have been made for her to wear to Bianca's wedding-banquet. Petruchio uses the social importance of **clothing** and appearances in constructing one's identity to his advantage in manipulating Katherine.

All of this emphasis on performance questions to what degree anyone can have a stable or natural identity, or whether such identity is really only formed through continual performance (acting *like* a nobleman or acting *like* a lady, for example). An individual playing a role in society may ultimately not be so different from one of the play's characters dressed up like someone else, or from one of Shakespeare's actors playing a scripted part on the stage. This opens up possibilities in the play to criticize traditional hierarchies of gender and social class, since there may be nothing natural or inherent about the identities that these systems make so much of.

Finally, the swapping of roles and questioning of identity that happens throughout the play suggests that the theater, in particular, is often connected with some kind of reversal of social roles. Indeed, we find in *The Taming of the Shrew*

servants dressing up as noblemen and noblemen acting like servants. This topsy-turvy, upside-down world is characteristic of comedic drama and allows comedies to question social norms. However, like all comedies, *The Taming of the Shrew* has to come to an end, where everything is resolved and social norms are restored. Lucentio confesses to his deceit, while Tranio and the merchant are revealed for who they really are and go back to their original roles. The playful profusion of performance and role reversals might have some subversive potential, but at the end of the play the masks and costumes come off, we return to normal, and the performance must end. Nevertheless, if we go as far as to say that all social identity is a kind of acting, does the performance ever really end?



EDUCATION

Shakespeare's comedy has many scenes of instruction, but tends to poke fun at formal education. Lucentio arrives in Padua as a young scholar ready to pursue his studies, but when Tranio tells him to study what he likes the most, he follows his heart... to the beautiful Bianca. "Cambio" and "Litio" (really Lucentio and Hortensio) are supposed to teach Bianca, but this teaching is merely an excuse to get close to her and try to woo her. While these examples show young people who are more interested in love than education, the character Tranio exemplifies another kind of learning. He is clever, socially savvy, and has learned how to act like a nobleman and trick others in order to help Lucentio and himself get out of difficult situations. While he has not had a formal education in philosophy, Latin, or music, Tranio has clearly gotten a very effective social education by learning from real-life experience.

Another example of a kind of education is Petruchio's "taming" of Katherine. As he teaches her to be a submissive wife, the play reveals some forms of education to be violent and a means of exercising power and control. His act of taming also serves to teach Hortensio by example, as Hortensio remarks several times that Petruchio has shown him the right way to handle one's wife. But is this really a lesson worth learning? If apparent education in the play is often just a pretense for something else, and the only truly successful teacher in the play (Petruchio) is violent and abusive, the play might be seen as harshly critical of formal education. The best education may be learning through life, becoming socially savvy and adept like Tranio, whose practical wit helps both him and Lucentio.



MARRIAGE

The plot of *The Taming of the Shrew* hinges on the marriages of Baptista's two daughters. Over the course of the play, there is a significant tension between different understandings of what marriage is. One understanding of marriage is that it is simply a union of two people in love. This is what Lucentio seems to desire with

Bianca and, as the two develop affection for each other, their relationship seems to exemplify this idealistic version of marriage. But, throughout the play, marriage is often more a matter of economic exchange than reciprocal love. As Baptista negotiates dowries and dowers (what the wife is entitled to if the husband dies), he appears to be almost selling off his daughters, rather than marrying them away. While he approves of the match between Lucentio and Bianca, he will not let the marriage happen until he is guaranteed of Lucentio's financial status. And the speed with which Hortensio abandons his love for Bianca and marries a wealthy widow (who is never even named in the play!) suggests that money is his first priority in finding a wife.

Another way of understanding marriage is provided by the example of Petruchio and Katherine. In this case, marriage is simply a power structure, a way of enforcing female obedience to a male husband. In her long, final speech, Katherine summarizes this idea of marriage, telling Bianca and the widow that "Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, / Thy head, thy sovereign," (v.2.162-163).

Still another version of marriage can be seen when Petruchio greets Vincentio as his father-in-law and when Lucentio greets Petruchio and Katherine at his wedding banquet as his brother and sister. Here, marriage is a way primarily of uniting families, rather than individual spouses. It serves to connect family units and, in this case, link together different wealthy, powerful families.

Ultimately, marriage isn't definitively any one of these versions. Different couples create different unions that function in their own ways. While marriage can be a way for a father like Baptista to "sell off" his daughters or for a man like Petruchio to exercise control over his wife, the very fluidity of what marriage is means that marriage doesn't always have to be either these things. Even if Lucentio and Bianca's marriage doesn't necessarily live up to the ideal union of young lovers (as their squabbling at the end of the play might suggest), Shakespeare's play shows that marriages are not all alike, and can be as much of an economic exchange, loving partnership, or hierarchical power structure as an individual couple makes it.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



CLOTHING

The Taming of the Shrew is filled with scenes involving the importance of clothing. In the Induction, Christopher Sly is dressed by the unnamed lord in wealthy clothes, while the Page dresses up as a woman. In the play proper, numerous characters—Lucentio, Tranio, Hortensio,

and the merchant—dress up in various disguises. And while Petruchio does not wear a disguise, he wears a costume of sorts when he purposely wears bizarre clothes to his own wedding. He also refuses to let Katherine wear the dress and hat that he has had made for her for Bianca's wedding banquet. All this emphasis on clothing points out the significance of appearance and performance in establishing an identity, showing identity to be fluid and changeable.

By merely putting on expensive clothes, Christopher Sly becomes noble in his own mind, while the Page is able to assume a female identity through clothes. Clothing is thus particularly important for signaling gender and class identity. This is evident when Petruchio rejects the hat that has been made for Katherine: when she says, "gentlewomen wear such caps as these," (iv.3.74) Petruchio replies, "When you are gentle, you shall have one too," (iv.3.75). For Petruchio here, clothing is importantly linked to one's identity and character. Clothing in the play thus symbolizes how identity is constructed through appearances and performance, how being someone is often a matter of looking like or acting like that someone. When Katherine is upset by Petruchio's outlandish outfit at their wedding, he may tell everyone, "To me she's married, not unto my clothes," (iii.2-119) but throughout the play Shakespeare shows that it is often the clothes that make the man (or woman).



ANIMALS

The title of the play already contains an animal metaphor, implicitly comparing Katherine to an unruly shrew. Similar imagery pervades the play. Katherine is often called a shrew and Gremio calls her a "wildcat," (i.2.198). Petruchio builds on this pun with "cat" and "Kate" when he tells her he will "bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate / Conformable as other household Kates," (ii.1.292-293). This notion of Katherine as a wild animal that must be tamed continues over the course of the play, as when Petruchio compares his method of taming her to that of a falconer taming a falcon. These insulting comparisons symbolize Katherine's wild temperament, but also the misogyny with which the play's male characters regard her. Simply because she doesn't adhere to a strict definition of a noblewoman, she is denigrated as animal-like.

It is not just Katherine who is compared to animals. The lord in the Induction calls Christopher Sly a "monstrous beast," and "a swine," (Induction 1.35), further exemplifying animal imagery as insulting. Throughout the play, animal imagery is used to degrade various characters who are seen as of a lesser status, often because of gender or social class. But no one is the object of these animal insults more than Katherine, as the imagery of a wild animal and a tamer has particular symbolic significance for the play's sexist portrayal of male-female unions and traditional

gender roles.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *The Taming of the Shrew* published in 2004.

Induction, Scene 1 Quotes

☝ What think you, if he were conveyed to bed,
 Wrapped in sweet clothes, rings put upon his fingers,
 A most delicious banquet by his bed,
 And brave attendants near him when he wakes,
 Would not the beggar then forget himself?

Related Characters: A Lord (speaker), Christopher Sly

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: Ind.1.38-43

Explanation and Analysis

The Taming of the Shrew begins with a strange "Induction," in which a drunken Christopher Sly, a beggar, refuses to pay what he owes, gets kicked out of a bar, and passes out. A Lord enters after finishing a hunt and notices Sly, unsure if he is "dead, or drunk." Finding the drunkard to be breathing, the Lord begins making fun of Sly and devises a prank to humiliate him.

The prank turns out to be more of a social experiment. In the quote, the Lord wonders what would happen if the sleeping Sly were brought to a nice bed, dressed in "sweet clothes" (which symbolize social status), brought delicious food, and given servants to tend on him when he woke up. What would happen, the Lord wonders, if Sly suddenly woke up and found himself in the position of a nobleman? "Would not the beggar then forget himself" and think that he truly was a wealthy nobleman? The Lord orders his men to orchestrate this elaborate plot, directing them like a troupe of actors. He asks them to do as he has described and refer to Sly as "your Honor" and "your Lordship" when he wakes. He also arranges for his page Bartholomew to crossdress (a common occurrence on the Elizabethan Stage, as all parts, male and female, were played by men) and pretend to be Sly's fictitious wife.

Just as the Lord is setting up his plan, a troupe of players (actors) enter. He asks them if they will put on a play for a Lord so that they will perform for Sly during the ruse. Their

performance will be the actual play, *the Taming of the Shrew*. Thus Shakespeare stages scenes filled with theatricality, acting, performance, and changing identities to introduce a play within a play which is also filled with theatricality, performance, and changing identity.

☛ 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.

Related Characters: Christopher Sly (speaker), Bartholomew the Page

Related Themes:  

Page Number: Ind.2.68-73

Explanation and Analysis

The Lord's preparations have been made and Sly has woken up; he is extremely confused. To complete the inversion of the social hierarchy, the Lord is dressed up as a servant, and addresses Sly as a lord. When Sly denies his new identity, the Lord tells the confused Sly to stop acting crazy and to remember his noble birth, cataloging the privileges that the new position offers and mentioning Sly's 'beautiful wife.' Here Sly begins to question his identity and reality, wondering, as the Lord predicted, if he really is a lord.

"Do I dream?" Sly asks, "or have I dreamed till now?" This line describes the profound uncertainty that comes with being unsure if you are dreaming, or have woken up into your real life from a long, convincing dream. Sly concludes he is not asleep, reporting "I see, I hear, I speak, / I smell sweet savors, and I feel soft things." Trusting his sensory experiences, he determines that he is indeed a lord, not Christopher Sly. He forgets himself. The Lord's ruse is successful, and 'lord' Sly, alongside his crossdressed wife, ultimately sits down to watch the rest of the play.

Note that this experience is a favorite of Shakespeare's: characters often enter identity crises, lose themselves, awake from and live strange dreams, or find themselves suddenly somewhere and someone else. Sly's acceptance of his new role can be seen as a statement on the fluidity of identity; social roles, gender, and self are all performance and subject to change.

☛ Thou shalt be master, Tranio, in my stead
Keep house, and port, and servants, as I should.

Related Characters: Lucentio (speaker), Tranio

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 1.1.208-209

Explanation and Analysis

The players have begun the play within the play, and the central plot is underway: Baptista has two daughters, Kate and Bianca, and will not permit the younger Bianca to marry until her older, "shrewish" sister gets married first. A student Lucentio has arrived in the Italian city of Padua, the setting for the play, along with his servant Tranio. Lucentio almost immediately falls in love with Bianca, and is so captivated by her beauty that he needs Tranio to summarize Baptista's conditions. Learning that Bianca will only accept tutors instead of suitors, Lucentio decides to pose as a Latin tutor (later named Cambio, which in Italian means "change").

In the quote, Lucentio responds to prompts from Tranio, who reminds his master that someone ought to pose as Lucentio. The master says to his servant, "Thou shalt be master, Tranio," and instructs him to carry out all of the masterly duties. The two then exchange clothes and start on their courtship plan, with Lucentio changed into Cambio and Tranio changed into Lucentio. Note that in this way the first scene of the play within the play echoes the outer play: masters become servants and servants become masters; social hierarchy is inverted and everything is performance. This scene is also the last scene in which Christopher Sly (or any one from the induction) speaks, and the only scene in which the induction bleeds into the play within the play.

Act 1, Scene 2 Quotes

☛ And I have thrust myself into this maze,
Happily to wive and thrive, as best I may.

Related Characters: Petruchio (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 1.2.56-57

Explanation and Analysis

Petruchio has arrived in Padua and met with his friend Hortensio. Petruchio announces that his father has died, and that he has come to Padua "to wive and thrive." In other

words, he hopes to find a wife from a wealthy family and make money. He reveals that a large dowry is his focus in finding a wife and that he believes it's simply time to get married; he does not express romantic ideals about love or a soulmate.

Hortensio, who is one of Bianca's suitors, realizes if he can get Petruchio to marry Katherine, according to Baptista's rules Bianca will be eligible for marriage. Below, Hortensio tells Petruchio about Katherine in the hopes that he will win Bianca for himself. Petruchio's introduction and desire for a wealthy wife set in motion one of the key plots and marriages in the play.

☝ I can, Petruchio, help thee to a wife
 With wealth enough, and young and beauteous,
 Brought up as best becomes a gentlewoman.
 Her only fault, and that is faults enough,
 Is that she is intolerable curst,
 And shrewd and forward, so beyond all measure
 That, were my state far worse than it is,
 I would not wed her for a mine of gold.

Related Characters: Hortensio (speaker), Petruchio, Katherine

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 1.2.86-93

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Hortensio tells Petruchio that there is a potential wife for him, "With wealth enough, and young and beauteous." She is attractive and will carry a large dowry, and she is of an acceptable social status. But there is a problem with her: "she is intolerable curst"; she is a shrew. Hortensio says that even if he were poor, he would not wed Katherine "for a mine of gold." Kate's shrewishness and unwomanliness make her an unacceptable choice for Hortensio and other male suitors, but all that Petruchio cares about is wealth. What's more, he seems eager to take on the challenge of interacting with, marrying, and ultimately taming Katherine.

Here we see the characterization of Kate as a shrew continue to develop. It's important to recognize what the characteristics of a "shrew" were: speaking out of turn, forwardness, self-confidence, and basically any behavior by a woman that involved her not obeying the men in her life (father or husband). In other words, the idea of a "shrew"

would certainly be seen today as profoundly sexist. Yet in the world of the play, it is taken as a simple matter of course that Katherine must be changed and brought under control.

☝ But will you woo this wildcat?

Related Characters: Gremio (speaker), Katherine, Petruchio

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 2.1.198

Explanation and Analysis

Gremio, another of Bianca's suitors, has entered with Lucentio, who is disguised as Cambio. Gremio plans to use Cambio to convince Bianca to marry him, not knowing that Cambio is really Lucentio and also wants to marry Bianca. Hortensio, Petruchio, and Grumio enter, and inform Gremio of the plan for Petruchio to marry Katherine. Gremio is shocked, and asks Petruchio if he knows about all of Kate's faults, before delivering the line in this quote: "But will you woo this wildcat?" Gremio doesn't at first believe that Kate can possibly be tamed, though Petruchio responds with confidence.

Note also that Katherine is described here as an animal instead of a person, and that wildcat puns on 'wild Kat,' a nickname for Katherine. Naming and renaming will be a crucial tool that Petruchio uses in his "taming school."

Act 2, Scene 1 Quotes

☝ Nay, now I see
 She [Bianca] is your [Baptista's] treasure, she must have a husband,
 I must dance barefoot on her wedding day
 And, for your love to her, lead apes in hell.
 Talk not to me. I will go sit and weep
 Till I can find occasion of revenge.

Related Characters: Katherine (speaker), Baptista Minola, Bianca

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 2.1.34-39

Explanation and Analysis

This strange scene begins with a striking interaction: Katherine has tied up Bianca and is hitting her, demanding that she say which of her suitors she most prefers. When Baptista enters to discover the scene, he unties Bianca and calls Katherine a devilish spirit, yelling at her for abusing her sister. This scene can be interpreted literally, or playfully. Many modern productions choose to make the violence humorous, making it a kind of ironic parody of Katherine's eventual taming and lightening the themes of abuse and starvation that follow.

But the scene can also be read as one of violence, bondage, and a bitter sibling rivalry. Such a reading may be reinforced by Katherine's lines in the quote. Bianca's obedience and conformity infuriate Katherine: she claims to see that her sister is the favorite who must be married, and that she, Katherine, must be damned and kept without a husband. She asks to be left alone, saying she'll sit and cry until she can find an opportunity for revenge. This dark desire for revenge shows the intensity of Katherine's frustration with her family and the misogynistic culture in which she lives.

☛ Then tell me, if I get your daughter's love,
What dowry shall I have with her to wife?

Related Characters: Petruchio (speaker), Baptista Minola, Katherine

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 2.1.126-127

Explanation and Analysis

Katherine, after calling for revenge, has run off stage, and Gremio and Cambio as well as Petruchio and Hortensio (now disguised as Licio, a music tutor, in his own quest to woo Bianca) have entered. Tranio, too, has entered in the guise of Lucentio. The tutors are introduced, and Petruchio has expressed his interest in Katherine.

Here Petruchio cuts directly to the chase: he wants to marry Katherine and wants to know what the dowry is. Satisfied with the amount, he immediately decides he will marry her. When Baptista doubts Petruchio's ability to woo his daughter, the suitor explains that he is as insistent on obedience as Katherine is stubborn. He is "rough" and will "woo not like a babe." In this scene, Petruchio's strength of will is established, and the stage is set for a battle of wills between him and Katherine – the "taming" – to begin.

☛ Say that she [Katherine] rail, why then I'll tell her plain
She sings as sweetly as a nightingale.
Say that she frown, I'll say she looks as clear
As morning roses newly washed with dew.
Say she be mute and will not speak a word,
Then I'll commend her volubility
And say she uttereth piercing eloquence.
If she do bid me pack, I'll give her thanks
As though she bid me stay by her a week.
If she deny to wed, I'll crave the day
When I shall ask the banns, and when be married.

Related Characters: Petruchio (speaker), Katherine

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 2.1.178-188

Explanation and Analysis

Petruchio delivers this soliloquy moments before he will meet Katherine for the first time. In it, he describes his plan for wooing her and taming her. If she gets angry and yells, he'll say that she's singing sweetly; if she frowns, he'll say she looks beautiful; if she's silent, he'll praise her for her eloquence; if she tells him to leave, he'll thank her for the invitation to stay. In short, he'll act as though her actions and words are not her own. He will not allow anything she says to carry the meaning she ascribes to them. Instead, Petruchio will ascribe his own meaning to her words and force his own reality upon Katherine, regardless of her experience.

This technique will be the crux of his taming. During their first interaction, the two exchange witticisms and puns in a humorous back and forth, and Katherine ends up hitting Petruchio. Again, we are faced with the question of how to interpret the dark notes of the play. Does Katherine relish in meeting a challenge to her wit and finally having someone who can go back and forth with her? Is her slap playful? Or is this a violent courtship in which the dominant male asserts his will forcefully upon his unwilling bride?

☛ Thus in plain terms: your father hath consented
That you shall be my wife, your dowry 'greed on,
And will you, nill you, I will marry you.

Related Characters: Petruchio (speaker), Katherine, Baptista Minola

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 2.1.284-286

Explanation and Analysis

Katherine and Petruchio have been going back and forth after first meeting. According to plan, he has denied everything she said or did and asserted the opposite, beginning with her very name. The entire scene, and the courtship in general, is extremely performative. He first calls her Kate, and when she tries to correct him, saying she is called Katherine, he calls her a liar and tells her that she is only known by Kate. Thus begins the series of witty jabs, and slaps, and innuendos.

Here Petruchio breaks off the dialogue to deliver his intentions "in plain terms." Baptista has agreed on the marriage, the dowry has been settled, and regardless of Katherine's desires, Petruchio is going to marry her. This marks a break from his usual tactic of taming, where he forces his "reality" over hers. Here Petruchio's lesson is outright: what you desire is meaningless. Her willingness or unwillingness is irrelevant, since she is the daughter and wife, and he is the husband and the man.

☞ For I am he born to tame you, Kate,
And bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate
Conformable as other household Kates.

Related Characters: Petruchio (speaker), Katherine

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 2.1.291-293

Explanation and Analysis

Just a few lines earlier, Petruchio told Katherine's that her desires are meaningless (and she will marry Petruchio whether she wants to or now), here Petruchio says that he is the man who was born to tame Kate, and bring her from a "wild Kate to a Kate / Comfortable as other household Kates."

Earlier, Gremio asked Petruchio if he could woo the "wildcat," treating Katherine as a kind of animal. Here, Petruchio again "animalizes" Katherine, figuring her as a beast that needs to be tamed. By suggesting that he is the only one to tame her, he elevates his status among the other men of the play and reinforces his role as Katherine's

singular master.

Note that the social hierarchy depicted in the play is extremely rigid and narrow: lords rule over servants and men rule over their wives, but there is no Duke or extra-powerful political figure to overrule unfair treatment. In this way Petruchio's power over Kate is made even more absolute.

Act 3, Scene 2 Quotes

☞ No shame but mine. I must, forsooth, be forced
To give my hand, opposed against my heart,
Unto a mad-brain rudesby, full of spleen,
Who wooed in haste and means to wed at leisure.

Related Characters: Katherine (speaker), Petruchio

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 3.2.8-11

Explanation and Analysis

It is the wedding day, and everyone has gathered, but Petruchio is late. When Baptista complains that the lateness brings him shame, Katherine laments that the shame is only hers, since she is forced to marry against her will and give her heart to a madman. She believes that Petruchio is insane, not even knowing the full extent to which he will extend his cruelty after the wedding. She claims that he "wooed in haste" – insisted immediately on getting married – but now wants to be married "at leisure", which is to say whenever he wants to show up to the ceremony.

Katherine here reiterates that she is being married against her wishes, that she thinks it's wrong, and that there is nothing she can do about it. Such is the lesser status of women during the play. Her emotions and her words are dismissed as the rantings of a shrew, a name which she is even called by her father as she exits crying, abandoned at the altar on her wedding day. It is worth noting that Petruchio's "lessons" that Katherine's speech and wants are meaningless are constantly upheld and reinforced by the entire society presented in the play. Katherine is an outspoken woman; everyone else in the play, from her sister, to the men pursuing her sister, to her father, to her fiancé want to make her obedient.

☞ To me she's married, not unto my clothes.

Related Characters: Petruchio (speaker), Katherine

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 3.2.119

Explanation and Analysis

Petruchio has finally arrived at the wedding, but he is wearing the clothes of a poor man. Baptista is disgruntled, and an argument begins surrounding Petruchio's attire. Tranio (disguised himself as his master Lucentio) suggests that Petruchio change, and Baptista says that he will not let Katherine marry when Petruchio is dressed this way.

Petruchio, however, insists she will marry him just as he is, stating that Katherine is marrying him, not his clothes. While clothes symbolize social status and gender, Petruchio is here asserting that they are changeable and ultimately unimportant. What matters, according to Petruchio, is Petruchio's own wit, will, and power, which he boldly asserts in this scene.

Within the structure of the larger play, from Sly who gets dressed up as a lord and begins to think he is a lord, to the suitors who dress up as tutors to try to trick their way into getting close to Bianca, Petruchio's comment here is almost revolutionary. Every other character acts as if their clothes do define them. Petruchio insists otherwise. And by imposing his will over Baptista and the other male characters of the play, Petruchio establishes himself as a sort of alpha male, with unquestionable authority over his self and his wife. This gesture assures that none can intervene with his taming of Katherine.

It is worth noting that Petruchio is *not* asserting that everyone is an individual worthy of respect. He is asserting that *he* is – he has no interest in Katherine's individuality for example, and showing up to his own wedding dressed as a beggar is part of his plan for taming any of her individuality out of her.

☝ I see a woman may be made a fool
If she had not a spirit to resist.

Related Characters: Katherine (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 3.2.226-227

Explanation and Analysis

The marriage has happened according to Petruchio's wishes, and he has immediately begun his taming by continuing to disrespect tradition and Katherine's wishes. As soon as the wedding is over, Petruchio says that he and Katherine will be going home. Baptista pleads with them to stay, and Kate even appeals to Petruchio, asking him to stay if he loves her, but Petruchio still refuses.

Here Katherine attempts to refuse, asserting her "spirit" by trying to "resist" the will of her husband, lest she be made a fool. But she is powerless; the whole wedding and post-wedding performance is under Petruchio's control. To these lines, Petruchio responds (below) that Katherine is essentially his property. She leaves with him, again against her wishes, and misses her post-wedding feast.

☝ I will be master of what is mine own.
She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house,
My household stuff, my field, my barn,
My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything.

Related Characters: Petruchio (speaker), Katherine

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 3.2.235-238

Explanation and Analysis

Responding to those that would try to limit his control over Katherine, since they want her to stay for the feast that follows her wedding, Petruchio says that he owns Katherine, and is master over her. In a stunning, horrifying list and very direct language, he characterizes her as his property: "my goods, my chattels." She is also his "house" and all of his "household stuff." She is his "field," his "barn," and, in a series of animal comparisons, his "horse," "ox," and "ass."

Describing his wife as property, fields, and beasts of burden is cruel, but the final item in his list demonstrates the full extent of his control. He concludes, she is "my anything." Whatever Petruchio desires her to be, she will be. He is saying that his words and his will shape her reality, her identity, and her very being, until she is nothing more than a fluid "anything" – whatever he desires – that he completely owns.

●● Thus have I politicly begun my reign,
 And 'tis my hope to end successfully.
 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.

Related Characters: Petruchio (speaker), Katherine

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 4.1.188-194

Explanation and Analysis

Katherine and Petruchio have made it home to Petruchio's house after a difficult journey. Petruchio continuously berates his servants to irritate Katherine and to act insane; he has taken her to her bedroom, and here in a soliloquy outlines in greater detail the next stages of his "taming." Using more animal imagery, he calls her a "falcon" which needs to be trained, saying that he will not allow her to eat or sleep until she is well trained. He will keep her "haggard, / To make her come and know her keeper's call."

Again, as readers, we may question whether Petruchio's plan is meant to be taken literally. Treating a woman like a hunting animal in training (recall the Lord from the Induction just returned from a hunt) is cruel, but what is the true extent of the cruelty. Does Petruchio really starve Katherine and keep her sleep deprived. Is this taming comedy or torture, or both?

Petruchio's basic plan going forward is to find something wrong with all her food and her bedding, so that in the name of caring for her and her best interests, he will keep her from comfort and food. In this way he intends to "kill a wife with kindness."

●● Tranio: Faith, he is gone unto the taming school.
 Bianca: The taming school? What, is there such a place?
 Tranio: Ay, mistress, and Petruchio is the master,
 That teacheth tricks eleven and twenty long
 To tame a shrew and charm her chattering tongue.

Related Characters: Bianca, Tranio (speaker), Petruchio, Katherine

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 4.2.56-60

Explanation and Analysis

This scene takes place back in Padua, where Lucentio (as Cambio) has been courting Bianca. Hortensio has seen the two kissing, and been convinced by Tranio (disguised as Lucentio) to cease his attempts to woo Bianca. Tranio then goes up to Bianca and Lucentio to tell them the news that Hortensio has given up.

Here they discuss Hortensio's intention to learn from Petruchio at "the taming school." Bianca questions what such a place could be, and Tranio responds that it indeed exists, and "Petruchio is the master" who teaches how to "tame a shrew and charm her chattering tongue." In this quote, taming is treated as a kind of education, and thus Petruchio is framed as a master, a husband, and also an educator who teaches women how to be good wives, and men how to be good trainers of women. And the men of the play all seem to believe that such training is necessary, that all women must be "trained" to be good obedient wives to their husbands.

●● Well, come, my Kate, we will unto your father's.
 Even in these honest mean habiliments.
 Our purses shall be proud, our garments poor,
 For 'tis the mind that makes the body rich,
 And as the sun breaks through the darkest clouds,
 So honor peereth in the meanest habit.

Related Characters: Petruchio (speaker), Katherine

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 4.3.175-180

Explanation and Analysis

Petruchio has informed Katherine that they will be attending the celebration of Bianca's wedding back at Padua. He has brought in a tailor with a hat and gown, but with each design he pretends that there is something wrong, denying Katherine what she desires. In the quote, Petruchio says that they will go to the wedding in their everyday clothes. They will dress like they are poor, but "tis the mind that makes the body rich," and like the sun breaking through clouds, honor will shine through even the meanest clothing.

Here Petruchio asserts his dominance yet again, while

showing that status is mainly performance and exterior. However, he notes that certain features, like honor (or power), are constant; true character matters more than surface-level qualities.

●● It shall be what o'clock I say it is.

Related Characters: Petruchio (speaker), Katherine

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 4.3.202

Explanation and Analysis

The household is preparing to leave for Bianca's wedding, after Petruchio insists that he and Katherine attend in their basic clothing. During preparations, he says incorrectly that it is seven o'clock. Katherine corrects him: "I dare assure you, sir, 'tis almost two." Petruchio's response is one of absolute power and control: "It shall be what o'clock I say it is."

Here he goes beyond controlling Katherine's life to dictating what her sensory experience of the world should be. Petruchio demands that the forces of nature and time itself for Katherine must all be viewed through the lens of Petruchio's will, subject to change on his whim. By continuing to assert that Katherine knows nothing without him and that her desires are meaningless, he hopes to break her and make her completely subservient. At the end of the scene, Hortensio remarks in a prophetic aside, "Why, so, this gallant will command the sun!" foreshadowing Petruchio's continued use of this technique.

Act 4, Scene 5 Quotes

●● Now, by my mother's son, and that's myself,
It shall be moon, or star, or what I list,
Or e'er I journey to your father's house.

Related Characters: Petruchio (speaker), Katherine, Baptista Minola

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 4.5.7-9

Explanation and Analysis

Petruchio, Katherine, and their train are traveling to

Baptista's house for Bianca's wedding. Continuing with the "lesson" he gave with "It shall be what o'clock I say it is," Petruchio has said that the moon is shining, even though it is daytime. When Katherine protests that it is the sun, Petruchio offers this quote in response.

Note that he begins by swearing by his "mother's son," that is, by himself, and says that "It shall be the moon, or star, or what I list." Whatever Petruchio says shall be. He swears by himself since to Katherine, he is the absolute figure of authority. No Duke, no King, no God will supersede his authority. His will dictates her very experience of the world.

●● Forward, I pray, since we have come so far,
And be it moon, or sun, or what you please.
And if you please to call it a rush candle,
Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me.

Related Characters: Katherine (speaker), Petruchio

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 4.5.14-17

Explanation and Analysis

In response to Petruchio swearing on his own self, Katherine seems to finally give in. When he says they'll turn back if she disagrees, he says that since they have come so far, she will call it "moon, or sun, or what you please," even "a rush candle." She vows that whatever Petruchio says the sun is, it will be for her. Katherine appears to be broken, and for the rest of the play she goes on with his jokes and his crazy assertions that things are not what they seem. As Hortensio says, the field is won; the "shrew" has been tamed.

●● Let's each one send unto his wife,
And he whose wife is most obedient
To come at first when he doth send for her
Shall win the wager which we will propose.

Related Characters: Petruchio (speaker), Petruchio, Hortensio, Widow, Katherine, Bianca

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5.2.68-71

Explanation and Analysis

This is in the final scene of the play; the marriages are done, the plot has been mostly resolved. All that remains is this bet, and the test of "whose wife is most obedient." Petruchio suggests that each man send for his wife, and that the man whose wife comes first when sent for wins the bet. This demeaning experiment is meant to demonstrate Petruchio's mastery, and remind the other males in the play that Petruchio is the head of the taming school. More broadly, the bet, with its emphasis on wifely obedience, implies that *all* women are "shrews" who must be trained, that any woman who does not show total obedience to her husband is a shrew.

The wager also sets up Katherine's controversial final speech

●● Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
Thy head, thy sovereign, one that cares for thee.

Related Characters: Katherine (speaker), Petruchio

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5.2.162-163

Explanation and Analysis

Petruchio wins the bet, as Katherine comes first and most obediently. At his request, she explains to everyone, addressing her friends, all the characters, and often the audience in a lengthy monologue about obedience. Here she explains that a husband is "thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, / Thy head, thy sovereign, one that cares for thee." Recall that Petruchio suggested that Katherine was his anything. Here she seems to suggest that he is her *everything*. Across various frames of reference, including life itself, the husband is the master.

Each production and reading of *The Taming of the Shrew* must find a way to interpret this challenging speech. For modern audiences where this kind of misogyny and sexism are taken to be antiquated and wrong (and frankly horrifying), the final speech is usually delivered ironically, with a hint or even more that Katherine hasn't been tamed either entirely or at all. But the speech can also be evidence that Katherine has been completely broken, her former character and outspokenness completely eliminated by Petruchio's taming.

●● I am ashamed that women are so simple
To offer war where they should kneel for peace,
Or seek for rule, supremacy, and sway
When they are bound to serve, love, and obey.

Related Characters: Katherine (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5.2.177-180

Explanation and Analysis

This is another excerpt from Katherine's long, controversial final speech. Here she says she's ashamed that women are so simple, and that they fight their husbands when instead they should be obedient. This line could be ironic, since she describes the type of woman she has been the entire play, or dark, showing that her old personality has been erased. She continues to say that women should *seek* the "rule, supremacy, and sway / When they are bound to serve, love, and obey." This little rhyme suggests that she has finally conformed to Petruchio's rule and to the ideal of silent, obedient women.

Again, we must question whether this speech should be taken directly or ironically. Its length and extreme excess might suggest that it is sarcastic, and typically in modern productions the speech is delivered as a wink to the audience, implying that Katherine's true beliefs and personality have survived. But given the severity of Petruchio's tutelage and the extent to which he asserts his will over his wife's even to the point of deconstructing and rebuilding her very reality, it is also easy to read this final speech as a haunting display of a woman broken down by torture and ultimately oppressed by the misogynistic culture she lives in.

●● Now, go thy ways, thou hast tamed a curst shrew.

Related Characters: Hortensio (speaker), Petruchio, Katherine

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5.2.205

Explanation and Analysis

The wager is over, the speech is done; everyone is awed at Katherine's transformation, and the field seems to be won. After Petruchio leaves with his wife, Hortensio says that his friend has "tamed a curst shrew." While our interpretation is

debatable, it is clear that the characters within the play believed the final speech to be in earnest. Katherine has become Kate, an obedient woman without any concrete beliefs or identity other than those of her husband.

Note also that Christopher Sly and the outer play are here forgotten. The play within the play ends, and with it the entire play ends. Whether forgotten by the playwright or simply considered superfluous at this point, audiences and readers are left to consider Katherine's harrowing final

speech. And, in fact, there are many very different interpretations of the play. Some critics argue that it is, simply, horribly misogynistic. Others argue that the "cruelty" of the play is in fact a kind of play, a back and forth both characters, having met their match, enjoy. Still others argue that the misogyny represented in the play is supposed to make an audience reflect on the misogyny in their society; that the play is forcing an audience to see and be horrified by society's expectations for women.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

INDUCTION, SCENE 1

The play opens with a beggar named Christopher Sly getting thrown out of a bar by a hostess. Sly refuses to pay for some glasses he broke, and the hostess leaves to get a constable. Sly drunkenly falls asleep.

The comedy begins with a poor beggar, already suggesting that social class and hierarchy will be important issues in this play.



A wealthy Lord enters, having just finished a hunting trip, along with several huntsmen. He notices the sleeping Sly and decides to play a prank on him. He wonders if the beggar would "forget himself" (Induction 1.43) if the Lord had him carried away to a bed, dressed him in expensive **clothes**, and gave him an entourage of attendants. He tells the hunters to do this and to address Sly as "your Honor" and "your Lordship." He tells them to pretend that Sly has been mad recently, and has forgotten that he was "a mighty lord," (Induction 1.68). They carry Sly off-stage.

This is the first example of a nobleman abusing or poking fun at a lower-class character. In addition, the lord's prank illustrates the fluidity of identity. By merely putting on different clothes and being treated differently by those around him, Christopher Sly will think that he is an entirely different person.



A band of traveling players (that is, actors) arrive. The Lord asks them to perform for a lord (Sly). He then orders a servant to tell his page Bartholomew to dress like a woman and pretend to be Sly's wife. The Lord exits, excited for the practical joke and hoping that no one will spoil it by giving away the joke with laughter.

*Bartholomew dressing up as a woman illustrates that performance and appearances are especially important in displaying gender identity and gender roles. The lord's planning of an elaborate prank with costumes and fictional characters (such as Sly's supposed wife) mirrors the process of putting on a play like *The Taming of the Shrew*.*



INDUCTION, SCENE 2

Christopher Sly awakes and is confused when servants address him as a lord, offering him fancy food and drink. The Lord is dressed as a lowly attendant and says that it is a pity Sly has gone mad. Sly is confused, and insists that he is Christopher Sly.

Christopher Sly is confused by his apparently new identity, but especially by his changed social class. Not only is Sly made into a nobleman, but the Lord is also dressed as a servant, demonstrating how theatrical games often invert social hierarchies.



The Lord tells Sly, "O noble lord, bethink thee of thy birth," (Induction 2.30) and catalogues all the luxuries that Sly has at his disposal: servants, caged nightingales, luxurious furniture, horses, hawks, and hounds for hunting. The Lord again tells him, "Thou art a lord, and nothing but a lord," (Induction 2.61) mentioning his beautiful wife.

The Lord continues to carry out his prank, and begins to convince Sly of his noble identity.



Sly begins to question his own identity and finally agrees that he is indeed a wealthy lord. He asks to see his wife. The servants tell him that he has been mad for fifteen years. The Lord's page enters, dressed as a woman. Sly is convinced that the page is his wife and asks her to come to bed. The page declines, saying, "For your physicians have expressly charged, / In peril to incur your former malady, / That I should absent me from your bed," (Induction 2.122-124).

A messenger enters, announcing that the group of players the Lord earlier hired is ready to perform. The messenger says that Sly's doctor thinks it will be good for him to see a play. Sly asks the page to sit next to him and watch the play.

Sly is totally convinced by the page's costume, again showing how important performance is in establishing gender roles. The page's costume also comically mirrors the practice of Shakespeare's own actors: in Shakespeare's time, female parts were played by young male actors in female costumes.



The group of traveling players put on a play within a play. This makes the characters' "real" identities even more ambiguous. For example, we could regard "Cambio", later in the play, as really Lucentio, or as really a traveling player acting as Lucentio, or as Shakespeare's actor portraying a player acting as Lucentio.



ACT 1, SCENE 1

Lucentio enters with his servant Tranio. He has just arrived in Padua, eager to study philosophy. Tranio says that he, too, is excited for Lucentio's studies, but he encourages Lucentio to mix his studies with pleasure. He tells Lucentio, "study what you most affect [like]," (i.1.40).

Baptista enters with his two daughters, Katherine and Bianca. Two men, Gremio and Hortensio, enter as well, seeking to woo Bianca. Baptista reminds them that he has decided not to give Bianca away in marriage until Katherine, the ill-mannered older daughter, finds a husband. Gremio says Katherine is "too rough," (i.1.55) for him. Katherine responds harshly to Gremio and Hortensio, and Tranio notes how difficult and badly behaved Katherine seems.

Lucentio, meanwhile, has become obsessed with Bianca's beauty. Baptista tells Bianca to leave and go inside, and she is polite and deferential, in contrast to Katherine's rudeness. Gremio and Hortensio protest Baptista's condition for the marriage of Bianca, but he says that his mind is made up.

Baptista says that he will keep only schoolmasters in his house, to instruct Bianca in music and poetry. He asks Gremio and Hortensio if they know of any teachers, then exits, telling Katherine to stay. Katherine is offended at being told what to do, and leaves.

Lucentio arrives in Padua to further his education. Tranio encourages him not to focus exclusively on his studies, unaware of just how far Lucentio will take this advice.



The entrance of Baptista, his daughters, and Bianca's suitors establishes the importance of marriage in the play. Baptista's rule about Kate having to marry before Bianca shows him almost bargaining to marry off his daughters. Katherine is quickly characterized as ill-tempered and not traditionally feminine. But, to some degree, her rudeness is only a response to the harsh treatment she receives from characters like Gremio.



Bianca displays the deferential good manners that the male characters expect of subservient women. Gremio and Hortensio compete with each other to marry Bianca, while Lucentio falls madly in love with her.



Katherine resists being told what to do by men, rebelling against traditional gender roles.



Gremio insults Katherine, then says that he would gladly find a teacher for Bianca. Hortensio agrees, but also tells Gremio that they should cooperate in finding Katherine a husband, since they both desire it. Gremio jokes that a devil would be a fitting husband for Katherine. Gremio and Hortensio agree to seek a husband for Katherine, so that they may fairly compete for Bianca's hand in marriage. They exit, leaving Tranio and Lucentio alone on-stage.

Lucentio says that he has suddenly fallen in love with Bianca and is desperate to win her heart. Tranio asks if Lucentio also heard about the arrangement with Katherine, and saw Bianca's rude, boisterous sister, but Lucentio speaks only of Bianca's beauty. Tranio fills Lucentio in on Baptista's condition for Bianca's marriage. Lucentio says he has an idea, and Tranio says that he does, too. Lucentio asks to hear Tranio's idea first. Tranio suggests that Lucentio disguise himself as a teacher and go to teach Bianca in her house. Lucentio acts as if he had the same idea.

Tranio coyly asks who will play the part of Lucentio, if Lucentio is the teacher. Lucentio tells Tranio to pretend to be him. The pair exchange clothes, so that Tranio looks like a nobleman. Lucentio's servant Biondello enters and is confused to see Lucentio and Tranio in each other's **clothes**. Lucentio tells him they have switched identities, because Lucentio has killed a man in Padua and fears retribution. Tranio is thus disguising himself as Lucentio, to protect the real Lucentio. Lucentio and his servants exit.

Meanwhile, Christopher Sly is watching the play (just like Shakespeare's audience). One of his servants nudges him and tells him he is nodding off to sleep. Sly pretends that he is enjoying the play and asks, "Comes there any more of it?" (i.1.261)

ACT 1, SCENE 2

Petruchio arrives in Padua with his servant Grumio, to see his friend Hortensio. Petruchio tells Grumio, "knock me here" (i.2.8) at Hortensio's gate, meaning knock on the door to announce his arrival. Grumio misunderstands (or pretends to), asking why Petruchio wants him to knock him (that is, hit him). Hortensio enters as Petruchio is angrily hitting his disobedient servant.

Gremio again heaps abuse on Katherine, reacting to her refusal to be ordered about by men. He and Hortensio cooperate in trying to fulfill Baptista's conditions for Bianca to be married. In some ways, they seem more interested in the competition with each other for Bianca than in Bianca herself.



Though he lacks a noble education, Tranio appears more clever and observant than Lucentio. Not only does Lucentio not register Baptista's condition for Bianca's marriage, but Tranio is the one who actually comes up with a plan for him to get Bianca.



Tranio cleverly acts as if he doesn't know who will pretend to be Lucentio, letting Lucentio think that he comes up with that part of the plan. Their identity switch offers another example of performance establishing someone's identity, aided by their exchange of clothing. It is also a playful turning upside-down of the social hierarchy.



As the scene ends, Christopher's reaction reminds us of the fact that we are watching a play within a play. His falling asleep during the play pokes fun at his lower-class background (and is perhaps a slight toward Shakespeare's own audience, which didn't always appreciate his productions).



Grumio can be seen as either incompetent, failing to understand Petruchio's idiom, or as jokingly clever, pretending not to understand so as to irritate his master.



Hortensio tells Petruchio to end his quarrel with Grumio and asks what has brought Petruchio to Padua. Petruchio says that his father has passed away and he now seeks a wife. Hortensio asks if he would be interested in a wife that is very wealthy, but a shrew. Petruchio says that all he cares about is finding a wealthy wife, and is eager to meet Katherine. He adds that Baptista knew his father and wants to go see Katherine immediately. Grumio is confident that Petruchio can reform Katherine's bad manners.

Petruchio seeks a wife because he feels it's time for him to be married, not out of any kind of love or romantic desire. He is interested in Katherine because of her father's wealth, further showing non-romantic understanding of marriage.



Hortensio tells Petruchio that he must accompany him to Baptista's house, since he is in love with Baptista's younger daughter Bianca, whom Baptista refuses to marry off "Till Katherine the curst have got a husband," (i.2.129). He asks Petruchio to present him (in disguise) as a music teacher, so that he can enter the house and be near Bianca.

Katherine continues to be insulted by virtually all the male characters of the play. Hortensio's planned disguise is another example of all the acts of performance and false identities that pervade the play.



Gremio enters with Lucentio, who is disguised as a schoolmaster named Cambio. Gremio tells Lucentio to teach Bianca only "books of love," (i.2.147). Lucentio promises to plead for Bianca to marry Gremio while he teaches her.

Gremio hopes that Cambio's teaching will make Bianca desire romantic love. Little does he know that Lucentio will try to use his teaching to make her fall in love with him, not Gremio.



Hortensio greets Gremio, who tells him that he is on the way to Baptista's house, to bring Cambio to teach Bianca. Hortensio responds that he has found someone to teach Bianca music. He then introduces Gremio to Petruchio, who he says "Will undertake to woo curst Katherine," (i.2.185) for her dowry. Gremio asks if Petruchio is aware of Katherine's faults and wonders if he can "woo this **wildcat**," (i.2.198). Petruchio is confident that he can.

Petruchio is again interested in Katherine mostly for her dowry. Gremio's misogynistic comparison of Katherine to a wildcat that must be tamed insults her as animal-like and less than human. The idea of "taming" captures the men's ideal of ownership and control over their wives, and of women in general.



Tranio enters, disguised as Lucentio, with his servant Biondello. Tranio asks the group how to get to Baptista's house. Hortensio asks if he is a suitor of one of Baptista's daughters. Gremio and Hortensio each protest that Bianca is already theirs. Tranio says that his father knows Baptista, and he is not worried that Bianca has other suitors.

Tranio's confident claim that his father knows Baptista reveals an understanding of marriage as primarily about linking together families (and the financial fortunes of those families).



Petruchio informs Tranio that Bianca cannot marry until her older sister, whom he wants as his wife, is married. Tranio agrees with Hortensio that Petruchio's pursuit of Katherine is in all their best interest. Tranio encourages all the others to eat and drink with them as friends, since they share the common goal of having Katherine marry Petruchio.

As Bianca's suitors cooperate as friends in their common goal of getting Katherine married, their pursuit of Bianca seems almost as important for establishing their bonds of friendship as for the actual desired marriage to Bianca.



ACT 2, SCENE 1

In Baptista's house, Katherine is teasing Bianca. She has Bianca's hands tied and asks her which of her suitors she likes the best. Bianca says she is not in love with any of them. Katherine says perhaps Bianca desires a wealthy husband, in which case Gremio would do just fine. Katherine hits Bianca.

In one of the few scenes where Katherine and Bianca interact, Katherine takes out her anger against traditional female roles and an economic understanding of marriage on Bianca, who—as an obedient woman and valuable bride—exemplifies both.



Baptista enters and is upset to see Katherine abusing Bianca. He unties Bianca's hands and sends her off to sew. He chastises Katherine, saying Bianca has done her no wrong and has said nothing against her. Katherine replies, "Her silence flouts me, and I'll be revenged!" (ii.1.32) She accuses Baptista of favoring Bianca over her and leaves angrily.

Katherine is offended by Bianca because she is an example of the kind of obedient, good-mannered woman Katherine refuses to be.



Gremio enters with Lucentio (disguised as Cambio). Petruchio enters with Hortensio (disguised as a tutor named Lito). Tranio (disguised as Lucentio) enters with Biondello. Petruchio introduces himself and tells Baptista he is interested in Katherine. He introduces "Lito" (really Hortensio) as a teacher of math and music, who can instruct Bianca. Baptista thanks him for finding the teacher, but is skeptical that Petruchio really wants Katherine.

It is almost hard to keep everyone's identity and disguise straight, showing how the play's proliferation of disguises and performing raises questions about one's "real" identity.



Gremio interrupts to introduce "Cambio" (really Lucentio) as a teacher of Greek, Latin, and other languages. Baptista thanks him for the teacher, and then asks who Tranio is. Tranio introduces himself as Lucentio, and says that he is a suitor for Bianca. He presents Baptista with some Greek and Latin books as a gift. Baptista is pleased and says that he knows Lucentio's father. He has a servant lead the two "teachers" inside to Bianca.

Baptista thinks that Bianca is receiving an education in languages and music, safe at home, but she will really receive a practical education in romantic courtship.



Petruchio discusses the dowry for Katherine and assures Baptista that he is strong enough to make Katherine yield to him. He claims, "I am rough and woo not like a babe," (ii.1.144).

Petruchio is again interested in marrying Katherine for her money, but is not willing to take her as she is. He sees it as necessary to make her "yield" to him if he is to marry her.



Hortensio enters (still disguised as the music-teacher Lito), pale and with an injury on his head. He reveals that he tried to teach Katherine how to play the lute, but she got frustrated and broke the lute over his head. Petruchio is amused and says he loves her even more than before. Baptista tells "Lito" (Hortensio) to try teaching Bianca instead. He goes inside to send Katherine out to meet Petruchio.

Hortensio's comedic injury shows that Katherine is not interested in learning traditionally proper female activities like music, and is not afraid of using physical violence. Petruchio seems to like Katherine for this, whether because he enjoys a challenge in wooing/taming her or because he actually wants a marriage of two like-minded (that is, stubborn) people.



Alone on-stage, waiting for Katherine, Petruchio plans how he will woo her. Regardless of what she says, he plans to compliment her and act as if she is being polite and kind. Katherine arrives and Petruchio praises her as beautiful and fair. Katherine tells him to leave, and the pair engage in a long exchange of witty word-play, each using punning to twist the other's words.

Katherine strikes Petruchio and he threatens to "cuff" her if she does so again. The two continue to spar with words and wit. Petruchio says that he has heard that Katherine is "rough, and coy, and sullen," (ii.1.257) but that she is actually pleasant and sweet. Katherine is frustrated by his absurd praise. Petruchio tells her that Baptista has agreed to make him Katherine's husband. He tells her, "I am he am born to tame you, Kate, / And bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate/ Conformable as other household Kates," (ii.1.291-293).

Baptista enters with Gremio and Tranio (disguised as Lucentio). Katherine complains to her father that he has wed her to a lunatic. Petruchio says that Katherine is modest, patient, and chaste, and announces that they have agreed to marry on the upcoming Sunday. Katherine quips that she'll have him hanged on Sunday. Petruchio says that he and Katherine have agreed that she will pretend to still be ill-mannered and upset in public, but that in private she and he are getting along nicely. Baptista approves of the wedding. Petruchio and Katherine leave, but through different doors.

Baptista now sets his mind to figuring out who Bianca's husband will be. Gremio claims that he loved Bianca first, but Tranio says he loves her more. Baptista breaks up their dispute by saying that whoever offers the better financial situation for Bianca will get her. Gremio lists all of his property and riches. Tranio (speaking as Lucentio) catalogues all the wealth of Lucentio's father (which is even more than what Gremio can offer), to whom he is the sole heir.

Baptista says that he will give Bianca to Lucentio on the Sunday after Katherine and Petruchio's wedding, provided that Lucentio's father guarantees Lucentio's inheritance. Otherwise, Bianca will be married to Gremio. Baptista leaves. Gremio is confident that Lucentio's father will not turn over all his property to Lucentio, and he leaves. Left alone, Tranio plots to find someone he can disguise as Lucentio's father.

Petruchio approaches marriage as an opportunity to exert control over a wife. However, the extended feud of wordplay between Katherine and him shows that they might actually be a good match, as they are both equally strong-willed and quick-witted.



Petruchio describing Katherine as pleasant and sweet (exactly the kind of personality she refuses to have) irritates her even more than the usual insults of characters like Gremio. His use of the imagery of taming (punning on the similarity of "Kate" and "cat") again shows his misogynistic desire for complete control over his wife.



Petruchio's claim that he and Katherine are pretending to hate each other seems to be an obvious lie—but with all the pretending going on in the play, how certain can we be? In any case, Baptista is easily persuaded, as he simply wishes to marry Katherine off to someone, regardless of how she feels about the union. Katherine leaves through a different door than Petruchio as a minor act of defiance against his control.



Baptista decides who will be Bianca's husband based solely on the suitors' financial situations. Since Lucentio's wealth is dependent on inheriting his father's property, the ideas of marriage as a union of families and as an economic exchange are shown to be closely related.



Again, Baptista's approval of the marriage between Lucentio and Bianca is contingent upon a financial guarantee from Lucentio's father. Baptista does not stop to think what Bianca might think about this union. Meanwhile, Tranio continues his clever plotting, driving the plot of the play forward.



ACT 3, SCENE 1

Within Baptista's household, Lucentio (disguised as Cambio) and Hortensio (disguised as Licio) instruct Bianca. The two squabble for Bianca's attention, Hortensio wanting to teach her music while Lucentio wants to teach her philosophy. Bianca tells Hortensio to tune his lyre while she listens to Lucentio's lecture.

While pretending to teach Bianca Latin, Lucentio reveals his true identity to Bianca and tells her that he is in love with her. Hortensio says his instrument is ready, but Bianca pretends it sounds out of tune so that she can finish talking to Lucentio. She whispers to Lucentio that she doesn't know him and thus doesn't trust him. She tells him not to be presumptuous with his love, but also not to despair.

Bianca declares that she is ready for her music lesson now, and Hortensio sends Lucentio away. Under the pretense of teaching Bianca musical scales, he encourages Bianca, "take [Hortensio] for thy lord," (iii.1.78). A servant interrupts and tells Bianca that she must help Katherine prepare for her wedding. Bianca, the servant, and Lucentio leave. Hortensio notes that Cambio (really Lucentio) is in love with Bianca and thinks to himself that if Bianca gives in to the affections of a lowly tutor (he doesn't realize that Cambio is really Lucentio), perhaps she is not for him.

ACT 3, SCENE 2

It is Katherine and Petruchio's wedding day, and Baptista, Gremio, Katherine, Bianca, Tranio (disguised as Lucentio), and Lucentio (disguised as Cambio) are all present for the ceremony. Petruchio, however, is late. Katherine complains that she is being married off against her will, that Petruchio is mad, and that he probably doesn't even intend to really marry her. She exits, crying.

Biondello enters and announces that Petruchio is coming, but he is dressed in bizarre and old **clothes** (including two mismatched boots) and is riding an old, feeble horse. His servant Grumio, accompanying him, is equally ridiculously dressed.

Lucentio and Hortensio's teaching is really just an excuse to spend time with Bianca and attempt to convince her to marry them—to "teach" her to love them.



Lucentio reveals his true identity to Bianca, but remains disguised for most of the play's other characters. But even though Bianca now knows who Lucentio is, she still does not truly know him (as she herself remarks) and is suspicious of how genuine the real Lucentio actually is.



Bianca cleverly uses the music lesson to bring her meeting with Lucentio to an end. There is perhaps more to her than a simple, obedient, pretty woman. Hortensio is upset by the prospect of Bianca loving someone of a lower social standing—never considering the fact that he himself is pretending to be of a lower social standing and perhaps someone else is as well—revealing how important social status and wealth are to his conception of marriage. He only wants a wife who wants a rich nobleman.



Katherine and Petruchio's wedding is more than just a union of two people. It is an elaborate, social event and performance. Here we also gain some insight into Katherine's character: while she often eschews what other people think, she is still hurt by being humiliated in front of so many people.



The strange outfits of Petruchio and Grumio are almost like costumes. As he will continue to do, Petruchio performs the role of a madman in order to irritate and ultimately tame Katherine.



Petruchio and Grumio finally arrive. Petruchio acts as if nothing is strange about his attire, and asks where Katherine is. Baptista is offended by Petruchio's lateness and ridiculous clothing. He and Tranio tell Petruchio to change his clothes before seeing Katherine. Petruchio refuses and goes to find Katherine. Baptista pursues him.

Left alone, Tranio and Lucentio discuss their plan to get Bianca for Lucentio. Tranio tells him that he will find a man who will pretend to be Lucentio's father, Vincentio. This man will promise great riches to Lucentio, so that Baptista will approve of his daughter marrying him. Tranio assures Lucentio that he will beat out all of Bianca's other suitors.

Gremio enters, having just come from the church where Katherine and Petruchio were wed. He calls Petruchio "a devil, a devil, a very fiend," (iii.2.157). Tranio counters that Katherine is a devil, herself, but according to Gremio, she's "a lamb, a dove, a fool to him," (iii.2.159). Petruchio acted rudely at the wedding and swore loudly in front of the priest who was marrying the couple. He drank raucously, made a mess, and kissed Katherine "with such a clamorous smack / That at the parting all the church did echo," (iii.2.180-181).

Petruchio enters, along with Katherine. Bianca, Baptista, Hortensio, and Grumio. Petruchio announces that he will leave now, skipping the traditional wedding feast that has been arranged. Tranio and Gremio ask him to stay, but Petruchio insists that he must leave, offering no explanation for why he cannot stay. Katherine asks him, "Now, if you love me, stay," (iii.2.209) but Petruchio refuses.

Katherine says she will not go with Petruchio, but rather will enjoy the feast without him. Petruchio insists that she come with him, calling her his property and saying, "I will be master of what is mine own," (iii.2.235). He acts as if he is protecting Katherine from her family and takes her away, leaving with Grumio.

Everyone is astonished at Petruchio's behavior. Bianca says that Katherine is mad and has found a fittingly mad mate. Baptista tells everyone that they can still enjoy the feast, and that Lucentio (actually Tranio) and Bianca can take the places of Petruchio and Katherine.

Petruchio's strange clothing exposes the importance of appearances in signaling social status and establishing identity. Everyone else wants him to wear clothes suitable for a noble wedding, but Petruchio—who sees his wildness as an asset—does not seem to care.



The fake Vincentio offers another example of a deceptive false identity. Once again, Baptista's main concern in finding a husband for Bianca is money.



Gremio describes Petruchio's elaborate performance at the wedding (though it is unclear how genuine some of his bad behavior might be). The same strong-willed qualities that make Katherine a shrew make Petruchio "a devil", and perhaps make him a good match for Katherine. Though note how Petruchio is partially admired for his behavior, while Kate decidedly is not. There is a double standard at play here.



Petruchio begins to exercise his authority and control over Katherine, now that they are married. Katherine asks him to stay at the feast out of love for her, but Petruchio shows that, for him, marriage is more about power than love.



Petruchio sees Katherine as his property. For him, marrying a woman means essentially owning her and having complete control over her.



It is still unclear how much of Petruchio's bizarre behavior is an intentional performance, an act put on to tame Katherine, or whether he is actually this difficult. From Bianca's point of view, Katherine and Petruchio make a good match, since they are both so stubborn and mad.



ACT 4, SCENE 1

At Petruchio's country home, Grumio complains about how cold it is and prepares to start a fire. He tells another servant, Curtis, to help start a fire, since Petruchio and Katherine will be arriving soon. He asks if everything is ready for their arrival, the house cleaned, the supper ready, and all the servants properly dressed. Curtis tells him everything is ready, and asks him for news.

Grumio tells Curtis that, on her way to the house, Katherine fell off her horse into the mud. Instead of helping Katherine up, Petruchio beat Grumio, whom he blamed for the horse falling. Katherine finally had to pull Petruchio off Grumio, while the horses all ran away. Grumio calls an assortment of servants to come line up and be prepared to welcome Katherine and Petruchio.

Petruchio and Katherine arrive. Petruchio is angry that the servants did not meet him outside and immediately begins to insult them. He sends the servants off to bring him his dinner and continues to act rudely toward them. When he hits a servant, Katherine tells him not to be so harsh toward them. Petruchio tells her not to worry and takes her to the bedroom. Curtis reports that Petruchio is constantly correcting, scolding, and berating Kate.

Petruchio re-enters and announces, "Thus have I politicly begun my reign," (iv.1.188). He says that he will train Katherine as falconers tame **falcons**: he will not let her eat or sleep until she obeys him. He will pretend to find something wrong with her food and with the bed, whenever she tries to eat or sleep. This is his plan to reform Katherine's behavior and thus "tame a shrew," (iv.1.210).

All of Petruchio's servants hastily prepare for his arrival, as Petruchio (and other noblemen) are liable to insult, abuse, and hit the servants upon whom they rely if those servants do not meet their expectations.



Petruchio continues to irritate Katherine, by irrationally punishing his servant Grumio when her horse falls in the mud, instead of helping her up. This would seem to be more of Petruchio's deliberate act, but given his propensity for treating servants harshly at other times, it is unclear to what degree Petruchio is simply performing.



Petruchio treats Katherine and his servants equally harshly, showing how both women and those of lower social classes are in similarly oppressed positions in the play.



Petruchio uses animal imagery both to degrade Katherine and to suggest the complete mastery over her he desires in marriage. He also compares his relationship to Katherine to a king ruling over a subject, implying that the subservient role of women is similar to that of people lower on the social hierarchy. Meanwhile, to tame Katherine he is literally denying her food and sleep, which seems like a kind of torture.



ACT 4, SCENE 2

Back in Padua, Hortensio (disguised as Latio) leads the person he thinks is Lucentio (in reality Tranio) to spy on Bianca and the real Lucentio (disguised as Cambio). They see Bianca and "Cambio" flirt and kiss, and Tranio, pretending to be Lucentio, acts as if he is greatly upset by this. Hortensio reveals his true identity to Tranio and vows that he is done trying to woo Bianca. After seeing her with her teacher Cambio, he has decided that she is unworthy of his affections. Tranio promises also not to marry Bianca. Hortensio says that he will marry a rich widow instead and leaves.

While Hortensio thinks he has discovered a secret, he is still ignorant of the actual identities of Lucentio and Tranio. The instruction "Cambio" gives is again merely a pretense for Lucentio and Bianca to spend some romantic time together, for him to "teach" her to love him. Thinking that Bianca is attracted to non-noble men makes Hortensio see her as unworthy. He's looking for class and money in a wife—thus, the widow. At the same time, this shows that Hortensio's "love" for Bianca wasn't really love at all.



Tranio goes forward to Bianca and Lucentio and tells them the news about Hortensio. He also tells them that Petruchio is a master at taming **shrews**. Biondello arrives and tells Tranio that he has found a merchant who may be able to act as Lucentio's father, Vincentio. Lucentio and Bianca exit, as the merchant enters.

Tranio asks the merchant where he is from and the merchant responds that he is from Mantua. Tranio makes up a story that Mantua and Padua are in the middle of a political dispute and "'Tis death for anyone in Mantua / To come to Padua," (iv.2.86-87). Still pretending to be Lucentio, Tranio tells the merchant that he will do him a favor. Since the merchant resembles Lucentio's father Vincentio, he will allow the merchant to assume Vincentio's identity and stay with him. That way, no one will know that the merchant is from Mantua and he will be safe.

The merchant agrees and thanks Tranio for helping him. As Tranio leaves to find suitable **clothes** for the merchant, he mentions that he will need Lucentio's "father" to make assurances about his inheritance, in preparation for a wedding.

ACT 4, SCENE 3

At Petruchio's home, Katherine complains to Grumio about Petruchio's behavior, telling him she is starved and has not been able to sleep. She begs him to bring her any food. Grumio tempts her by asking if she'd like different kinds of dishes, but he ends up saying that none of them would suit her, and so does not bring any food. Katherine hits him and sends him away angrily.

Petruchio and Hortensio enter. Petruchio has brought a large portion of meat with him, and demands that Katherine thank him for bringing her food. Katherine thanks him, and Petruchio allows her to begin to eat. Petruchio says that he and Katherine will celebrate Bianca's upcoming marriage at her father's house, and he brings in a tailor and a haberdasher with **clothes** for Katherine. The haberdasher presents a **hat**, but Petruchio rejects it. Katherine says that it is fine, and that it is the sort of hat gentlewomen wear. Petruchio replies that she can wear one like it when she is gentle.

Hortensio sees Petruchio as a kind of teacher, who shows him how to "tame shrews." The merchant will become yet another character who disguises his real identity during the course of the play.



Tranio again displays his cleverness, tricking the merchant into wanting to dress up as Vincentio. Once again Tranio is, in a sense, the architect of the play's plot, despite the fact that he is a mere servant.



All that the merchant needs in order to assume a new identity and become a nobleman is a suitable set of clothes. Yet again, identity is established through performance, and that performance relies heavily on appearances.



Grumio exercises a little bit of power over Katherine, teasing her like Petruchio. However, Katherine quickly reminds him of his place when she hits him. She may be a woman, but she is a noblewoman, and he is just a servant.



Petruchio's method of "taming" is humiliating and treats Katherine like a pet animal. She appears to begin to relent, thanking Petruchio for the food he has brought. The clothes that Petruchio has made for Katherine (but then rejects) again show the importance of clothes in a social context. The hat, in particular, signals that its wearer is a noble gentlewoman, as Petruchio jokes that Katherine can wear it when she is gentle.



Katherine protests, telling Petruchio, "I am no child, no babe," (iv.3.79) but he sends the haberdasher off and asks the tailor to show them Katherine's **gown**. As with the hat, he acts as if the gown is hideous and unacceptable. The tailor says that he made it just as he was ordered to, and Katherine says that she likes the gown. Petruchio acts as if the tailor is insulting Katherine by offering her the gown, and tells him to leave. The tailor reads out the written instructions he was given for the gown, but Petruchio and Grumio still deny that the gown is as they ordered. Petruchio sends the tailor away, but has Hortensio go and tell the tailor that he will be paid tomorrow.

Petruchio tells Katherine that they will go to her father's in their humble, everyday **clothes**, minimizing the importance of outward appearances. As they prepare to leave, he says that it is seven o'clock and she corrects him: it is two o'clock. Petruchio tells her, "It shall be what o'clock I say it is," (iv.3.202) and Hortensio marvels at how he orders her around.

Petruchio continues to act irrationally. He wants Katherine to obey his every word, no matter how wrong or illogical what he says is. At this point, she is still resistant to his control. The gown is such a point of contention precisely because of the social importance of clothing and appearances that has been so emphasized throughout the play.



In contrast to the importance of clothing and appearances throughout the play, Petruchio insists that such surface-level qualities do not matter as much as someone's true identity and character. He is also beginning to gain some control over Katherine, insisting that she agree with him when he is wrong about the time of day. Note how Hortensio does not care about how Katherine is being treated. He just admires Petruchio's ability to control his wife.



ACT 4, SCENE 4

In Padua, Tranio (still disguised as Lucentio) brings the merchant, who is dressed up as Vincentio, to Baptista's house. Biondello arrives, as well, and Tranio reminds him to act as if the merchant is Vincentio. Baptista enters with Lucentio (disguised as Cambio) and Tranio introduces the merchant to him as Vincentio. The merchant tells Baptista that he approves of the marriage between Lucentio and Bianca.

Baptista is convinced that the merchant is Vincentio. Baptista, the merchant, and Tranio decide to go to Lucentio's lodging to discuss the financial particulars of the marriage in private. Before they depart, Tranio tells Baptista to send "Cambio" to inform Bianca that the marriage has been approved. "Cambio" (that is, Lucentio) goes to find Bianca. Baptista, Tranio, and the merchant leave to discuss their financial matters.

Lucentio returns and Biondello informs him of their plans. Baptista has asked for Cambio to bring Bianca to a banquet, agreeing to marry her to the person he thinks is Lucentio (actually Tranio). Before going to the banquet, Lucentio will elope with Bianca to a church and get married in secret.

Nearly every character on the stage is in a disguise, highlighting the very performance of Shakespeare's play itself. After all, Baptista is merely an actor in a costume, too. Furthermore, we are still supposed to imagine that all of this is being staged for the entertainment of a beggar dressed up as a noble lord (Christopher Sly).



Here, the marriage between Bianca and Lucentio seems to be less a romantic matter between those two and more a financial or economic matter between the various men arranging it. Of course, the real Lucentio and Bianca aren't even in this scene (except for "Cambio" being used as a messenger).



In asking for "Cambio" to bring Bianca to the banquet, Baptista unwittingly sends Lucentio to Bianca. Lucentio and Bianca's elopement may be the only way for them to have a marriage that is (potentially) more about love between two people than economic exchange between two families—at least, until Baptista and Vincentio find out.



ACT 4, SCENE 5

Petruchio, Katherine, Hortensio, and some of Petruchio's servants are making the journey from Petruchio's house to Padua. Though it is the middle of the day, Petruchio comments on how brightly the moon shines. Katherine corrects him and Petruchio refuses to continue their journey until she says that he is right.

Katherine relents and agrees that it is the moon shining, not the sun. Petruchio immediately changes his mind and says that it is the sun and Katherine is wrong. Katherine agrees with him that the sun is shining. Hortensio comments that Petruchio has tamed Katherine and that "the field is won," (iv.5.26).

Pleased that Katherine is obedient, Petruchio prepares to continue the journey, but just as they are setting out again, they encounter an old man. Petruchio addresses the man as a young woman, praising her beauty. He tells Katherine to embrace the young woman, and Katherine complies. She calls him a "young budding virgin, fair and fresh and sweet," (iv.5.41) but then Petruchio calls her mad and says that he is clearly an old man. Katherine apologizes.

The old man introduces himself as Vincentio and says that he is traveling to Padua to see his son Lucentio. Petruchio happily greets him as his father-in-law, since Lucentio is marrying Katherine's sister. Vincentio is confused by this and thinks that Petruchio is playing a joke on him. They all continue their journey to Padua together, with Hortensio commenting on how remarkably Petruchio tamed Katherine.

Petruchio demands Katherine's complete obedience, even when he is clearly wrong. This is, for him, the ideal structure of a marriage.



Katherine seems to be affected by Petruchio's abusive course of "taming." But has she truly changed so dramatically, or is she merely pretending?



Petruchio now tests how far Katherine's obedience will go. As it turns out, she is willing to (pretend to?) obey him even if it means acting like a complete fool.



In Petruchio's view, the marriages between Katherine and him and between Bianca and Lucentio have united all of their three families. Hortensio continues to see Petruchio's dominance over Katherine as an instructive model for other men to learn from.



ACT 5, SCENE 1

Outside of Lucentio's home in Padua, Lucentio runs off with Bianca and Biondello to the church where he will marry Bianca. Meanwhile, Gremio waits outside Lucentio's door, remarking on how long Cambio is taking to bring Bianca. After Lucentio leaves with Biondello and Bianca, Petruchio arrives with Katherine, Vincentio, and Grumio. Vincentio knocks on the door and asks for Lucentio. The merchant (who is impersonating Vincentio) tells him Lucentio is busy. Petruchio says that Vincentio is Lucentio's father, here to see his son. The merchant denies that Vincentio is Lucentio's father and says that he is, instead.

Now all the disguises and false identities of the play are coming to a head, as the appearance of Vincentio threatens to reveal the deception of Tranio and Lucentio. At the same time, the merchant is so emboldened by his own disguise that he refuses to give in to the reality that he is not Vincentio even when the real Vincentio appears.



Biondello returns from the church, where Lucentio and Bianca have been married. Vincentio recognizes Biondello, but Biondello pretends not to know Vincentio. Vincentio angrily beats Biondello, causing Biondello and the merchant to cry out that a madman is attacking them. Biondello leaves. Baptista and Tranio (still impersonating Lucentio) enter. Vincentio is furious at his servant Tranio when Tranio pretends not to know him. Tranio says that Vincentio is a madman. Baptista is confused and asks Vincentio who he thinks Tranio is. Vincentio identifies him as Tranio, but Tranio continues to say that he is Lucentio. Vincentio thinks that Tranio has murdered Lucentio and stolen his **clothes**. A police officer arrives and Baptista tells him to carry Vincentio off to jail.

Biondello, Lucentio, and Bianca enter. Thinking that their deception has been uncovered and fearing punishment, Biondello, Tranio, and the merchant run away. Lucentio reveals his true identity to Baptista and Vincentio, and explains how he and Tranio changed places. He says that he was motivated by love, and that he and Bianca are now married. Vincentio and Baptista are upset and leave to take out their frustrations on the servants who have deceived them. Lucentio and Bianca exit.

Petruchio and Katherine, meanwhile, have been watching all this commotion. Katherine suggests they go see how the matter will be resolved. Petruchio says that she must kiss him first. At first, she refuses to kiss him in the middle of the street, so Petruchio threatens to take her back home. Katherine relents and kisses him.

ACT 5, SCENE 2

It is finally time for Lucentio and Bianca's wedding banquet. Baptista, Vincentio, Gremio, the merchant who had pretended to be Vincentio, Lucentio, Bianca, Petruchio, and Katherine are all present. The servants Tranio, Grumio, and Biondello are there as well, as are Hortensio and the widow he has married. Lucentio welcomes everyone to the banquet, calls Petruchio and Katherine his brother and sister, and says that all the earlier chaos and confusion is now happily resolved.

As the guests at the banquet trade jokes and jibes, the widow teases Petruchio for being married to a **shrew**, offending Katherine. The women leave, and Tranio also teases Petruchio, saying he is ruled by his wife. Baptista tells Petruchio that he has "the veriest shrew of all," (v.2.66).

Normally, Vincentio would be able to beat his servant Biondello and discipline Tranio, but all of the mixed-up identities and theatrical disguises of the play have turned these kinds of social standards upside down, such that Vincentio is now at risk of going to jail because no one believes that he is who he actually is. Baptista, much like the reader or audience of Shakespeare's play perhaps, is confused by all the opposing claims of who is who.



Lucentio reveals his deception, as the numerous disguises of the play unravel. Baptista and Vincentio forgive Lucentio and Bianca, but go to discipline their servants, showing how the rigid social hierarchy, at times subverted by the comedy, has now been re-established.



Katherine shows a final flicker of resistance, but ultimately gives in to Petruchio, kissing him in the street.



While Lucentio and Bianca eloped to marry out of love, their wedding banquet firmly establishes their marriage as a social event bringing together different families.



The characters who have not seen Katherine's apparent transformation, continue to heap their usual abuse on her, insulting her for her resistance to male authority.



In response to all this teasing, Petruchio proposes a bet. He, Lucentio, and Hortensio will call their wives, and the husband whose wife comes first will win a wager of money. Lucentio sends Biondello to fetch Bianca, but he returns with the news that she says she is busy and won't come. Hortensio then sends Biondello to get the widow, but she refuses to come, as well.

Petruchio's bet shows how important he thinks a wife's obedience is in marriage. The other husbands are surprised to find that they are not as powerful in their marriages as they thought they were, and that their wives may have a bit of Katherine's nerve, as well.



Petruchio tells Grumio to find Katherine and tell her that Petruchio commands her to come to him. Grumio goes to get her and, to the surprise of everyone but Petruchio, she comes immediately. Petruchio orders her to go and bring the other wives to them, and she obeys.

Katherine, in contrast to Bianca and the widow, is entirely devoted to Petruchio. But it is still possible that she is simply performing the role of a subservient wife, perhaps even in cahoots with Petruchio to win the bet.



The men are amazed at Katherine's obedience. Baptista says that Petruchio has won the bet, and jokes that he'll give him even more money as a second dowry, since Katherine is now a completely different daughter. Katherine returns with Bianca and the widow. Lucentio chides Bianca for not coming, telling her that her disobedience cost him money. Bianca replies that it was his fault for betting the money.

Regardless of how real Katherine's transformation is, the other characters believe that it is genuine. Lucentio tries to show some authority in chastising Bianca, but she shows that she has a will of her own, and is not merely a passive wife.



Petruchio asks Kate to tell the other wives what duty they owe to their husbands. The widow protests, but Petruchio insists on it. Katherine begins a long speech, detailing the importance of a wife's submission to her husband. She tells the wives, "Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, / Thy head, thy sovereign," (v.2.162-163). She says that a wife owes her husband "love, fair looks, and true obedience," (v.2.169) and that women are bound to "serve, love, and obey," (v.2.180). Petruchio is pleased with her speech and asks her to kiss him, which she does. As they leave together to go to bed, Hortensio and Lucentio marvel at Petruchio's ability to tame Katherine.

Katherine's long speech is perhaps the most controversial part of the play. How can the strong-willed Katherine expound at such absurd length the duties of a docile, submissive wife? Has she really been so tamed, or is she pulling one over on the other characters? Depending on the choices a particular production of the play makes, Katherine's speech can be seen as ironically over the top or startlingly sincere. Whether she means it or not, her speech outlines the essential qualities of a good wife according to traditional, oppressive gender roles.





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