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"For she is changed, as she had never been": Kate's Reversal in *The Taming of the Shrew*

By Charles A. Hallett

Most people agree in their appraisal of **The Taming of the Shrew.** It contains much scintillating dialogue and a few memorable characters, yet it is not a good play. Now this is something of a paradox. For many, the test of the worth of a play rests with the quality of the characterization, and surely Kate and Petruchio, though no Beatrice and Benedick, are a winsome, boisterous, and amusing couple. Robert Heilman pictures them as "lively and charming creatures," "full of vitality and imagination" (xxiii-xxviii). Still, Kate and Petruchio haven't saved the play from its critics, several of whom seem loath to disparage a play with such an engaging couple at its center but do, however reluctantly, write it off as a failure. Where does the failure lie? Not in its language. No one denies the biting, rollicking quality of Shakespeare's language in **The Taming of the Shrew**. But even those who love its language don't deem the play a success.

So where does the play fail? I propose that it fails in the very aspect that transforms character drawing and dialogue into drama. **The Taming of the Shrew** is deficient in its dramatic form. We all know that in **The Taming of the Shrew** Shakespeare sets out to mock the conventional romantic plot of the comedies of his time by contrasting the commonplace lovers with two such as "had never been," the feisty Katherina and the indomitable Petruchio, who battle their way through his innovative plot of anti-romance. How better to censure the sweet sentimentality of Bianca and Lucentio than by giving Bianca a sister who prowls about the premises snarling like a lion, then foisting upon that sister a lover who is ready and willing to jump into the role of a lion tamer? The situation is ideally suited to the techniques of farce that come out of Rome and Italy and are much in vogue in London at the time Shakespeare is writing. A play called **The Taming of the Shrew** was guaranteed to be a crowd-pleaser. Scores of fictional tamings provided precedents that might have been used for the billing: "Here Begynneth a Merry Jest of a Shrewde and Curste Wyfe, Wrapped in Morel's Skin, for Her Good Behavyour."

But the young Shakespeare was equally attracted to the potential for character development in a story about a husband's desire to alter—or **reverse**—the will of his wife. He is as challenged as Petruchio at the prospect of effecting a reversal in Kate's determined resistance to change. Battles of will become the essence of his drama. Unfortunately, while the concept of a conflict of wills requires tight construction and a certain inevitability in the plotting, the techniques of farce are spontaneous and episodic in essence. In farce, anything is possible and everything can be laughed at, primarily because the figures on stage are never developed to the point of becoming full-blown characters with whom we may become emotionally involved. The mad merriment of Petruchio which Shakespeare employs to effect the reversal in **The Taming of the Shrew** almost of necessity works against the concept that he wishes to embody in it—the transformation and exaltation of Kate. The result is a serious disjunction between content and form. In this early play, Shakespeare's **means** seem incompatible with his **end**. He has set himself an impossible task.

Tracey Ullman as Katherina in New York Shakespeare Festival's 1990 **The Taming of the Shrew**. Photo by Martha Swope.

In **The Taming of the Shrew**, then, the farcical form is in the process of becoming comedy. Kate and Petruchio are in a sense akin to the slaves of Michelangelo who are pushing their way out of a piece of stone. These two lovers are imbedded in the marble of a **commedia dell'arte** scenario. There is more life in them than the farce requires, for the nascent qualities of the playwright who will create Beatrice and Benedick lie latent in the poet. He already has in mind the image that he wants to carve out. Indeed, that image is freed when actors and actresses seize upon the merry subtext and bring it to fruition upon the stage. **The Taming of the Shrew** is indeed a play that is not complete until the "madcap rudesby" (with his inherently generous spirit and his reliance on conventional Right Reason) and his potentially merry wife (who ultimately grasps the point he wants her to get) are brought to life in production.

So much for bald assertions! Can they be supported?

The Taming Plot: What is at stake? (and is it achieved?)

Let's go directly to the core of the play's action, the contest between Petruchio and Kate. The dramatic question of this plot as a whole is implied in the play's title, which informs us that the heroine, Katherina Minola, is to be transformed from the self-centered and cantankerous shrew we first meet into a courteous and obliging lady. The exact nature of the alteration can be even more precisely stated—Shakespeare casts the reversal in terms that move Kate from **disobedience** to **obedience**. The point of the change embodied in Shakespeare's action seems to be that marital happiness is only possible when Right Reason exists in the relationship between husband and wife. Kate is made to say as much after her conversion:

> Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
> Thy head, thy sovereign: one that cares for thee,
> And for thy maintenance; commits his body
> To painful labour both by sea and land,
> To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,
> Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe,
> And craves no other tribute at thy hands
> But love, fair looks, and true obedience—
> Too little payment for so great a debt.
> Such duty as the subject owes the prince,
> Even such, a woman oweth to her husband. (5.2.146-56)

But the dramatic question Shakespeare evokes in the audience is not merely, **Can Kate be tamed?** As Shakespeare constructs it, the plot focuses as much upon the tamer as upon the tamed. The question that this play means to answer, therefore, is more specific. **Can Petruchio tame the cantankerous Kate?** Other characters in the play make it quite obvious that taming Kate is a task that no one else has been able to accomplish.

This is perhaps the first time in Shakespeare's canon that we see Shakespeare attempt to create such a reversal. There is nothing like it in the earlier **The Comedy of Errors**, unless one counts the change that occurs in the fortunes of the old merchant Egeon, who is condemned to death by

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the awkward laws of Ephesus for being a citizen of Syracuse but is pardoned at the end of the play and lives. The reversal in **The Comedy of Errors** is merely a reversal of situation, a somewhat gratuitous change of fortune, designed to clear up mistaken identities, to unify long-separated members of the subject family, and thus to bring the play to a happy conclusion. All it takes to resolve the error and turn his situation around is for the playwright to bring all of the characters to the same place at the same time. More is at stake in the true Shakespearean reversal, the kind of reversal we first see in the transformation of Kate in **The Taming of the Shrew.** Basically, we are referring to a reversal in which the attitudes or emotions of a certain character are moved across an arc of a full one hundred and eighty degrees. In the classic example, Othello is moved from loving Desdemona to despising her. In another instance, King Lear is moved from irascible pride to selfless humility. In a lesser vein, we see such a reversal in Lady Anne when Richard of Gloucester proposes to her: Anne moves from despising Richard (she actually spits in his face) to admiring and even loving him (she agrees to accept his ring). For the most pertinent example, however, we need only think of Beatrice in **Much Ado About Nothing**, who is denigrating Benedick when we meet her but who will ultimately embrace and marry him. Essential to the definition of the Shakespearean one hundred and eighty-degree reversal is that it takes place in a structured manner. The character to be changed is introduced at a point that is at the exact opposite extreme of the point he is to arrive at. So it will be with Kate, who begins as Kate the Curst and becomes Katherina the Kind.

If in **The Taming of the Shrew** we can see Shakespeare's first experiment at shaping his plot around the curve of a reversal—**Can Petruchio change Kate from the willful, irredeemably destructive harridan that no one will court, let alone marry, into an obedient wife who preaches the virtues of submission?**—we can also find embodied in this play the response that Shakespeare expects from the audience that witnesses Petruchio's achievement of the given task. Shakespeare has amassed in the taming plot a gallery of characters who, in expressing their own admiration for the change in Kate, give the audience its cue to applaud—Kate's father Baptista is one, Hortensio another. The response that Shakespeare's dialogue suggests in the scenes where Petruchio parades this new Kate before the audience in act five is one of wonder and amazement at the miraculous transformation. Shakespeare had a ready empathy with the triumphant feeling that engulfs Petruchio, and why not? Shakespeare worked just as hard and as long on the perfecting of Kate as did his canny bridegroom.

Judging from the responses one comes across not only in commentaries on the play but in productions of it, audiences have reservations about the exact nature of Petruchio's miracle. The consensus is that Kate's final speech comes more from the playwright than from the character. In fact, our era's chief complaint about this play strikes at the very center of Shakespeare's work, the taming itself. The irony is that the triumphant conversion toward which all of the action of **The Taming of the Shrew** has been driving is today deemed totally and indisputably unbelievable!

The editor of the Oxford edition of **The Taming of the Shrew**, H. J. Oliver, assessed the situation. Concluding his evaluation, he remarked that the play has "two great problems," first, "the 'unfinished' Induction" and, second, "the lack of appeal of Kate's final tameness to audiences whose sympathies, even when they are not exactly feminist, are unlikely to be with the taming of a wife." It is no easy work, says Oliver, "to make Kate's final submission acceptable" on the stage. Generations of actresses have found it difficult to render Kate's climactic soliloquy with the required degree of sincerity, and a review of the play's production history reveals that the ending has very often been altered in production. Oliver reports that "as early as 1908, in Melbourne, and 1914, in New York, Margaret Anglin is said to have spoken Kate's sermon on obedience 'as if it were mere mockery—implying that it is hypocritical, a jest, secretly understood between Petruchio and his wife'—and one has the impression that this is the 'solution' most favoured today." He notes that, in the 1929 movie, "Kate's sermon was delivered [by Mary Pickford] 'with a wink to the other women.'" And he reminds us that "[Charles] Marowitz turns the taming of Kate (by a savage, perverted Petruchio) into an illustration of 'the modern technique of brainwashing . . . almost to the letter.' The effect is quite terrifying" (70-74).

The irreconcilability of these two facts—on the one hand, the playwright's deliberate seizing upon a well-known theme in which a character is moved from a state of barbarism that other characters in the play equate with the disequilibrium of hell to a state that embodies "peace . . .and love, and quiet life" and all "that's sweet and happy," and, on the other hand, the general disinclination to accept the play's conclusion as it stands—provides intriguing incentives for a closer inspection of Shakespeare's technical ability to construct a credible reversal at this early stage of his career.

My argument is that the reversal Shakespeare aims at is never adequately prepared for, that the belief in Katherina's conversion does not take hold of us because Shakespeare has not yet learned to create plot segments that convince us that the propelling character Petruchio is having any effect whatsoever on the responding character, Katherina. Nowhere do we see Katherina moving toward the ultimate comprehension that she is going to preach in her concluding monologue. Shakespeare informs us, through Tranio, that Petruchio is the master of the "taming-school," that "teacheth tricks eleven-and-twenty long, / To tame a shrew and charm her chattering tongue" (4.2.55-58). The assumption beneath much of the banter in the play is that Petruchio wants to make a happy woman of Kate. But in trying to render Petruchio's achievement, Shakespeare displays the very limitation that Gwendolyn Fairfax attributes to Jack Worthing: Mr. Worthing wants to say something specific, but he doesn't **say** it. The knowledge that Kate puts forward in act five is presented to us without Petruchio's ever really having taught it to her.

There is a certain "Catch 22" element to the shrew story that Shakespeare falls prey to. On the one hand, Kate's transformation is the goal that will effect the closure of the play. On the other hand, once Kate changes, the play **must** end, and, therefore, Shakespeare seems to have reasoned, the plot requires Kate to continue a shrew at least to the closing of act four. He has to keep the play going. Moreover, it would be a shame to sacrifice her shrewish qualities too early, for, after all, is Kate's shrewishness not what people have come to see?

There are, of course, plot segments in **The Taming of the Shrew** of the kind that will in later Shakespearean comedy be containers for sequential alterations in a character's development. Shakespeare has shaped his plot as a three-part progression. Petruchio must woo Katherina. He must wed her. And then he must tame her. Editors have detected these segments and labeled them act two, act three, and act four. Since Shakespeare relies much on cumulative plotting in this play, presumably he means us to experience some cumulative effect as Petruchio moves Kate closer and closer to the goal he has set for her. But Shakespeare never delineates these segments as segments of action, nor does Kate make interim advances in them that demonstrate that she is acquiring self-knowledge. If Petruchio's "cures" have any demonstrable effect on Kate before the actual reversal, it is rendered only in terms of fatigue. Though Shakespeare realizes that the taming action he wants to develop can be parsed into three distinct stages through which Kate must be moved, he never shapes the episodes within these segments so that the crucial dramaturgical issues in this war of the wills between the lovers are squarely confronted.

The intriguing truth is that Shakespeare relegates interim changes in Kate's attitude to hints in the dialogue. Kate's insights are never bodied forth as intermediate stages in a building action but remain as subtext for the actress to discover and develop. She **may** be learning something, but she is still available to be trotted out as the shrew. Petruchio's motives and Kate's responses become—how to express it?—free-floating. They are preeminently present in the dialogue, but they are there as Shakespeare's stage directions are there, as hints to the performers that they may make use of as they will. These motives (for example, Kate's occasional efforts **to entreat**) remain as subtext, in the sense that they are not raised above the subliminal level by being tied to distinct goals of one or the other characters that would pit their wills against one another, in a controlling-and-resisting attempt to dominate.

In short, it is hardly surprising that Kate's reversal, as Shakespeare has shaped it, evokes a sense of disbelief in performers and audiences alike. Shakespeare made a serious misjudgment by not letting the theatre audience see Kate's change of heart before it is shown to her own family (the onstage audience) during the triumphant finale of the fifth act. This failure to specify the exact degree and nature of certain intermediate changes that are taking place in Kate as a result of Petruchio's "lessons" renders the final conversion too sudden and, therefore, psychologically unconvincing.

Still, Shakespeare leaves no doubt about what is at stake in this conflict of wills that he sets in opposition to his romantic subplot. He gives control of the plot to Petruchio and sets him the task of overcoming Kate's—let's raise a glass to her courage!—almost awesome resistance. I want now to examine in more detail the particular instances where the farcical activities of the characters work at cross purposes to their characterization.

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Act One: Setting Up

Even this early in his career, Shakespeare is aware that an essential part of the reversal form is the firm establishment at the very beginning of the position of the character who is to be altered. Though it seems quite natural that the action opens at the home of Baptista Minola, where the eldest daughter Kate has been making life miserable for everyone who enters the house and that Petruchio appears only at the end of act one, after every other character has been introduced, Shakespeare's ordering of the action is essential to his idea. The audience must be introduced to Kate as she is before any attempt to alter her can be made dramatically effective.

Quite appropriately, Shakespeare gives us a clear view of the reputation Kate has earned for herself in the society of Padua right at the start. He presents her on a full stage; virtually all of the characters of the play—with the notable exception of Petruchio—are on stage for Kate's introduction. And Shakespeare lets us see her from three different perspectives.

First, we see Katherina in direct contrast to her younger sister Bianca, who, in the first act of the play, is all that a woman should be. Katherine is shown as the opposite in every way to what her sister is. Bianca is humble, obedient, loves music and poetry—is extravagantly compared to Minerva—and has a special quality of serenity. Kate is belligerent, sharply sarcastic, rebellious, and (beneath all this display of will) discontented. Shakespeare particularly contrasts Bianca's obedience to Kate's disobedience. While Bianca accepts the unfair imprisonment foisted upon her by her father's resolution to confine her to the house, Kate takes offense even at the liberty she is given when Baptista allows her to stay in the public square while he escorts Bianca inside. If it is her father's wish that she remain in the piazza, she will flout it and desire to go into the house. Every occasion becomes for her a means to demand the opposite of what is required of her. Shakespeare establishes Kate as totally and irrationally contrary, that contrariness showing itself in the form of disobedience. One sister accepts her situation and is content within it, while the other seems locked in a permanent state of dissatisfaction with everything and everybody. Nor does Kate's unnatural behavior make her happy.

Second, we see Katherina through the eyes of the public, that is, Bianca's suitors, the old man Gremio, and Gremio's younger rival, Hortensio. In the segment that introduces the family of Baptista, Katherina is offered to the two suitors who have been frequenting the house. Both reject her. Gremio says instantly that "She's too rough for me." Hortensio goes further. Addressing Kate directly, he affirms that no one would want the role that Baptista is offering, that of Kate's suitor, "unless you were of a gentler, milder mould" (1.1.59-60). Characters seize naturally upon imagery of hell to characterize the behavior of the shrew. Gremio, especially, says Kate is fit company only for "the devil's dam," that a devil is the only fit husband for her, and to be married to Kate is as much as to "be married to hell." Both suitors pray that the good Lord will deliver them "from all such devils." "Hellish," "mad," "froward," she embodies all that is unnatural. While these comments disclose the general reputation that Kate has earned in the society of Padua, they also establish that for all of the suitors in this play the proper goal of marriage is happiness, and marriage to Kate, as she is, would produce anything but bliss.

Third, of course, is the view we get of Kate from her own speeches. In the very first lines she utters, Kate declares publicly that marriage is not for her: "Iwis it is not halfway to her heart" (1.1. 62). As Oliver glosses the line, "marriage is something she is not even half attracted to" (109). Shakespeare, in the same speech, has Kate explain her version of proper wifely behavior:

But if it were, doubt not her care should be
To comb your noddle with a three-legged stool,
And paint your face, and use you like a fool. (1.1.63-65)

These are lines Kate hurls willy-nilly as nimbly as she might hurl the stool or a rock at anyone who strolled within her reach. Kate's own perspective on her situation is that she has no particular desire to change, and we understand that what matters most to Katherina is to have her own way, no matter how contrary or how extreme or how unnatural she has to be to get it. A happy marriage is obviously not in her future. This, then, is the Katherina that Petruchio will encounter.

The stage is now prepared for Petruchio's entrance. Having established the immovable object, Shakespeare turns his attention to depicting the irresistible force that will contend with it. What techniques does Shakespeare use to instill character into the hero of this farce? Very few: Petruchio's character takes its shape principally from the demands of the plot. That is to say, Shakespeare has used Petruchio as the character whose desires propel the action (Kate's role, of course, being to resist), and he has given Petruchio a single-mindedness that will insure that the plot goes directly to its goal, the surrender of Kate.

Observe that in characterizing Petruchio, Shakespeare gives him no extraneous motives: the only desires attributed to the prospective bridegroom are those that pertain directly to the titular action. Shakespeare brings Petruchio to Padua with two desires, to marry (a motive that is necessary to the plot) and to marry wealth (a stock comic theme guaranteed to provoke mirth) and gives him two more-significant motives after he sees Kate, to marry Kate and to be happily married. Typical of farce, the motives are simple, theatrically conventional, and exaggerated. Observe, also, that Petruchio's motives are all blatantly stated. There has been no attempt at subtlety here: "I have thrust myself into this maze / Happily to wive and thrive as best I may" (1.2.54-55). As Petruchio himself says, few words suffice to explain what he is after:

As wealth is burden of my wooing dance . . . (1.2.67)
I come to wive it wealthily in Padua;
If wealthily, then happily in Padua. (1.2.74-75)

Much is explained if one accepts this bareness as an aspect of Shakespeare's early style. These primitive motives manifest a playwright with his attention focused on narrating his story. What Petruchio says allows the plot to advance and, at the same time, the lines entertain; the wit is far more important than the revelation of a particular psyche. Shakespeare has not troubled to make the motivations of the characters reflect their inner beings.

This disjunction between the two functions of motivation can, unfortunately, tempt an actor to incorporate the comic one-liners about "wiving it wealthily in Padua" as integral features of Petruchio's character. To use this raw and primarily comic simplicity as an excuse to portray Petruchio on stage as a fortune hunter, as Richard Burton did in the Burton-Zeffirelli film, is to jump centuries ahead into Realism. The problem is not that Petruchio is a crass fortune hunter but that Shakespeare feels no need as yet to embellish the bare details of narrative with words and actions that soften the seeming grossness. The playwright's main concern is to bring Petruchio to the home in which this wealthy, as-yet-unmarried maid lies waiting. The prospective actor should remember that Petruchio intends not only to wive and thrive but to wive and thrive **happily**. The ending of the play tells us that, however pleased Petruchio may be to get Kate's dowry (a dowry that is not mentioned again after its comic potentials have been exploited), he expends far more energy on assuring that the marriage will be a happy one. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde's Miss Prism, "that is what comedy means."

I have noted that Shakespeare gives Petruchio a single-mindedness that insures that the plot goes directly to its goal. In this sense, Petruchio's persistent and primary goal, which underlies all of his action in the play, "to wive and thrive happily," coincides aptly with the storyline of the reversal plot, **Can Petruchio tame the irascible Kate?** Shakespeare obviously knows, however, that if the reversal structure he is experimenting with is to work dramatically, he must establish that Petruchio will be a worthy match for this Katherina. And so he does. Before the first act ends, we hear Petruchio proclaim what will be a major characteristic of his personality—his swaggering fearlessness. The churlishness of Kate, which frightens all of his peers in the play, presents no threat to Petruchio—"tush, tush, fear boys with bugs?" He rather relishes the challenge of taming Kate, though it be a labor greater "than Alcides' twelve." How apt the hyperbole! And finally, lest there be any who miss the point that Petruchio is a worthy opponent for the irascible Kate, Shakespeare has Petruchio's servant Grumio confirm that Kate will find Petruchio formidable (1.2.107-14).

Shakespeare, then, has given over the first act, at least as far as the taming plot is concerned, to the introduction of the two combatants in this contest for dominance—he has established Katherina as "Katherina the Curst," renowned throughout Padua as "an irksome brawling scold," and has presented Petruchio as a man who is (Bernard Shaw catches the tone admirably) "worth fifty Orlandos. . .The preliminary scenes in which Petruchio shows character by pricking up his ears at the news that there is a fortune to be got by any man who will take an ugly and ill-tempered woman off her father's hands, and hurrying off to strike the bargain before somebody else picks it up, are not romantic, but they give an honest and masterly picture of a real man, whose like we have all met." As act one concludes, Petruchio is setting off to combat, financed and supported by the proclaimed suitors of Bianca. The question now becomes, **Can Petruchio succeed in attaining his goal?** So far, so good.

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Act Two: Can Petruchio win Katherina?

What does Shakespeare have to accomplish to get to his goal? We know what he is aiming at—Petruchio must get Kate to the point where she will abandon her chaotic willfulness—and Shakespeare has chosen to render this as a point of absolute submission to the more powerful will that "knows better" what is good for her. In 4.3, we (along with Kate) are shown what Shakespeare sets Petruchio to achieve:

> **Petruchio.** It shall be seven ere I go to horse.
> Look what I speak, or do, or think to do,
> You are still crossing it. Sirs, let't alone,
> I will not go today; and ere I do,
> It shall be what o'clock I say it is. (4.3.188-92)

Kate's froward will must be broken in the same way that one breaks the will of a wild falcon or a skittish horse. Petruchio is no Lucentio, no pining lover who needs the wily servant because he is so infatuated that the only thing he can do is carry his hat in his hand to the beloved. Petruchio is characterized by his will, not his feelings. "I am rough, and woo not like a babe."

The process of transforming narrative into action is the process of restructuring the story as a series of questions. The propelling character is given a task that he desires to achieve, and a question arises, **Will he succeed or will he fail?** Macbeth, for example, worries, "If we should fail?" Shakespeare does not entertain the question, "If we should fail?" in **Taming.** The problem for him is how to dramatize Petruchio's success.

The first task Shakespeare gives to Petruchio is to woo Kate. But the circumstances of the plot have given Baptista a significant role in Petruchio's fate: Baptista has made it a condition of his bargain with Petruchio that the marriage covenants will not be drawn until "the special thing is well obtained, / that is, her love; for that is all in all." So the question raised by Petruchio's negotiations with Baptista at the beginning of act two is, **Can Petruchio win Kate's love?** This is what is at stake when Baptista sends his daughter on stage to encounter Petruchio.

The first stage of Petruchio's task of taming, then, is to gain Kate's approval. Though Kate has just smashed a lute over Hortensio's head, Shakespeare leaves no doubt about the fact that Petruchio can best her. What the playwright cannot do is let his Hercules overcome in act two. To do so would create a problem. However much Petruchio may maintain that Kate "is a lusty wench" and though he may "love her ten times more than e'er I did," if Petruchio manages to subdue her in the wooing scene, the story has no further to go. The playwright has set himself an irresolvable problem. Kate can only resist; she cannot surrender. The way out, as Shakespeare conceives it, is for Petruchio to deceive Baptista into believing that Kate has accepted him.

Obviously, Shakespeare has designed the meeting of Petruchio and Kate (2.1.167-333) as the key event of act two. Observe how Shakespeare handles it. This betrothal scene is all that one might wish it. Shakespeare eschews the persuading mode for the more appropriate and more highly charged mode of a quarrel, nay, an all-out battle. The dialogue is spirited. Shakespeare first sets the couple to a sparring match, goes beyond that to give Petruchio a wooing speech that makes Kate wonder where such goodly sounds have come from, and then builds to Petruchio's final plea, "Never make denial: I must and will have Katherine for my wife" (2.1.278-79). In all of this, the characters come truly alive.

But the problem of reconciling Kate's rejection of Petruchio with Baptista's condition that she agree to the betrothal is never satisfactorily resolved. "If we should fail?" Petruchio **has,** after all, failed in his attempt to win Kate's love, at least overtly. Though she is obviously attracted by his boldness, she has no intention of accepting his proposal. Kate is not going to marry. Least of all is she going to marry Petruchio, and she tells her father so directly. She will not be married off to a lunatic.

How does the fledgling playwright get around his heroine's denial? The betrothal must be effected if the play is to proceed, yet he can't have the shrew succumb so soon, not when her refusal is fundamental to her characterization as a shrew. Shakespeare has left himself no way out but to sidestep the issue of Petruchio's failure by making Petruchio deceive Baptista. "It's her shyness," claims Petruchio. "She and I have secretly agreed to seem enemies in public." What else is needed? Is this not a farce? He writes the conclusion of the wooing scene as though the dramatic question hovering in the minds of the audience had been not **Can Petruchio win Kate's love?** but, rather, **Can Petruchio deceive Baptista into believing that his daughter has agreed to the marriage?**

The change that allows the play to go forward is not some intermediate adjustment—however slight—in the character of the woman Petruchio is trying to tame, but merely a change in the situation. Petruchio resorts to the trickery of the clever knave and negates Kate's objections by duping her father. No matter that Kate has just replied to Petruchio's proclamation that they will be married on Sunday with "I'll see thee hanged on Sunday first." Baptista, much to the convenience of the audacious playwright, proclaims it "a match" (2.1.299, 321).

The daring chutzpah of Petruchio's device contains within it sufficient surprise to amaze and satisfy the audience, first the onstage audience and, in consequence, the play's viewers, while the establishment of an uncontested wedding date brings the action to a new height. The contest that raged with such energy in the climactic segment of act two has, after all, achieved two things. It has rendered Katherina more perverse than ever in her determination never to wed this "madcap ruffian and swearing Jack," and it has, at the same time, effected a betrothal. Shakespeare's instinct for the dramatic is sure here, but the means by which he drives toward his climax remains centered in the play of wit. Petruchio's victory over Kate is clearly not a matter of any reversal in her character but only of ingenuity in his. Kate is not altered; she is just outwitted.

This amusing but glib solution, appropriate to the farcical tone of the play, has no staying power—it leaves a vital flaw in the play's structure that will bring hard critical bricks down upon Shakespeare's head. Katherina "is characterized more by silence than by speech at several important points in the play. These moments of silence baffle critics, actors, and directors. . . How do we know what Katharine thinks, feels, and wants? How does Katharine act in these scenes in which she says nothing?" asks Frances E. Dolan (24). There is one last segment to act two. Kate's silence is not broken, however. Shakespeare devotes the final segment of act two to moving along the subplot. Kate does not reappear.

There is a falsification in the structuring of the wooing scene that Shakespeare gets away with only because the tone is farcical and a theatre audience—pleasantly entertained—will be carried over the bump without being much jarred by it. Though we know that Kate's father could not possibly have believed Petruchio's lie, we also know that Baptista desperately wants to get Kate married off, and so we ignore the glaring inconsistencies. But Shakespeare's dramaturgical dishonesty here only creates a more serious problem for him. He has evoked in his audience a new set of dramatic questions. **Will Katherina show up for the wedding?** And if she does, **How will Petruchio get Katherina to say "I do" in the church?** There are other questions in our minds as a result of the deceit Petruchio has practiced on Baptista and the trick he has played on Kate. **What revenge will this consummate shrew wreak on the bridegroom if she does turn up for that wedding? Will Kate prove a worthy match for Petruchio?** Having raised our expectations, Shakespeare is obliged to satisfy them.

Let us turn from Shakespeare's presentation of the wooing scene to his imaging of the wedding.

Act Three: Can Petruchio wed Katherina?

Who would deny, with these tantalizing questions hovering in the air, that Shakespeare has obliged himself to stage the wedding of Katherina and Petruchio? The audience needs to see how Kate is brought to acquiesce to the union. **How will she behave at the church?** As act two ends, it is not at all clear that Kate will submit to the will of the obviously ineffectual Baptista. Even though Baptista has given Kate contractually to Petruchio, theatrical conventions bind Kate no more than they bind her sister Bianca or any other ingenue in a comic love plot to obey that Pantalone figure. All indications are that Kate will refuse to go to the church. We have heard her inform Petruchio that "I'll see thee hanged on Sunday first." Shakespeare is virtually obligated to show us whether Kate will pronounce that quintessential "I do." That Shakespeare dedicates the climactic position of the five-act structure—act three—to the marriage day indicates that he too understands the dramatic importance of such a scene.

The playwright is still confronted with the problem of having to balance the plot's one demand, that Kate and Petruchio get married so Petruchio can commence the titular action of taming that is to him so enticing a challenge, and that same plot's other demand, that Katherina not turn gentle wife before Petruchio has expended more effort to tame her—these madcap revels still have another hour or so on the stage before they can be ended.

There is a sense in which Franco Zeffirelli in his filming of **The Taming of the Shrew** demonstrates how Shakespeare might have worked in the obligatory wedding without compromising Kate's contrary nature

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too far too soon. In Zeffirelli's film, the pending dramatic question **How does Petruchio induce Kate to say "I do"?** is answered. Zeffirelli goes with the lovers to the church, where we see Richard Burton as Petruchio behaving like an oaf. In this rendering, Kate bides her time until the priest asks her whether she takes this man to be her lawful wedded husband. Elizabeth Taylor's Kate is put off by Petruchio's outrageous behavior and chooses the moment when she is expected to say "I do" to challenge the whole proceeding. Before she can erupt, however, Petruchio seizes her and stops her mouth with that "clamourous smack" of a kiss that is mentioned in the text, whereupon the priest hastily pronounces them man and wife. This happy coup wins another round for Petruchio.

Shakespeare himself, as we know, takes a different approach. **How does the young dramatist get Kate to the church? Will Petruchio be able to make good his boasts and tease the jittery mare into a halter?** Again, Shakespeare doesn't solve the problem; he avoids it. What one sees immediately when one observes Shakespeare's presentation of Kate's wedding is, first, that there is no wedding (3.2 breaks down into two halves, one episode takes place **before** the wedding and one **after** it); second, that Shakespeare works more with narrative than action, more with dialogue than drama; and, third, that the playwright takes an inordinate interest in those inevitable elements of farce—tricks and capers. In shaping 3.2, Shakespeare has transformed the narrative not into a structured action where Kate is responding to the previous deceits of Petruchio but into a show that Petruchio is producing, a show in which Petruchio is producer, director, and star performer, Kate and her family the amazed audience. The performance begins on Sunday with a grand entrance by the star player in the forthcoming wedding scene. In the third act of the play, Shakespeare is no longer giving us a Petruchio motivated by the desire "to wive it wealthily in Padua." That joke has served its purpose and been dropped. The Petruchio of act three, now as consummate a trickster as Tranio, has slipped into a new role, which he will play to the hilt, while the narrative will be shaped as a succession of his performances.

In the pre-wedding segment, 3.2.1-126, Shakespeare plays a trick on us as well as on the Minola family. Having led us to expect that the bride (still an accomplished shrew and well versed in asserting her own will) will refuse to show up for the wedding, Shakespeare flouts our expectations. To our astonishment, the obligatory wedding scene opens with Kate in full bridal attire, with her family and all of the wedding guests assembled and ready to proceed to the church. Wonder of wonders, the bridegroom is missing. Shakespeare has ignored the pending dramatic questions he has evoked and creates a new and distracting one—**Where is Petruchio?**

The characters and the motives they are given are not meshing with the plot that Shakespeare has been unfolding. Shakespeare has recklessly assumed a shrew who will not only peacefully acquiesce to be married against her will but will stay around to wait for the missing bridegroom. More than that, he has allowed Petruchio to get ahead of himself. In his eagerness to get to the activity of taming, Petruchio initiates classes in his school for wives before he is safely married to the bride. Shakespeare takes full advantage of the prerogatives of farce to engineer act three as one continual and flamboyant spectacle. Shakespeare's "idea" in plotting the wedding scene, apparently, is to show that Petruchio is already embarking on the first step of his campaign to tame the shrew by putting Katherine on the defensive. Before Katherine can begin to storm about and gain control, Petruchio subjects her to public embarrassment. She is the object of attention that she always demands to be, but in a new way:

> Now must the world point at poor Katherine
> And say, 'Lo, there is mad Petruchio's wife,
> If it would please him come and marry her'. (3.2.18-20)

The farce poses different questions than the comedy had posed: **Will Petruchio come? And how will Shakespeare get him on stage?**

Such questions are easily answered. They clearly signal that Shakespeare is planning to amaze the audience—the onstage audience and the seated audience—with a grand entrance for Petruchio, so grand, in fact, that the messenger given the task of preparing the way for the bridegroom's arrival gets to deliver one of the prize speeches in the play. To the servant's narrative, Shakespeare devotes his best energies. We are not, after all, going to see a wedding; we are going to listen to a narrated description, and a description not so much of a character but of a costume.

G. R. Hibbard in **The Making of Shakespeare's Dramatic Poetry** shows how Shakespeare in **The Taming of the Shrew** "makes dramatic capital" out of such narratives in such a fashion that the audience sees what is actually taking place offstage "in its mind's eye and accepts it as part of the action." Hibbard rightly praises Biondello's "wonderful prose aria" describing Petruchio's horse that makes that beast "as large as life and twice as decrepit." Hibbard emphasizes as well that "new things are being done with the blank verse line" in the reporting passages of **The Taming of the Shrew** (98-99). Let us not denigrate Shakespeare's prose arias. Hibbard's fine observations merely underscore the point that I am making—that in writing **The Taming of the Shrew**, Shakespeare is directing his creative energies elsewhere than toward yoking together those disparate elements of narrative and action into a unified, expertly crafted dramatic build. His brilliant effects are splashes of genius that remain independent of one another and never merge into an integrated whole. Dramatically speaking, Biondello's report, vivid as it is, keeps Petruchio himself offstage for an inordinately long time, gives Kate nothing to do or say, and compels our attention not to what Kate may be thinking of the bridegroom's absence but to the costume that Petruchio will be wearing when he finally steps before us. Biondello's report and Petruchio's appearance combine to create a single effect—a spectacle designed to amaze:

> And wherefore gaze this goodly company
> As if they saw some wondrous monument,
> Some comet, or unusual prodigy? (3.2.93-95)

Who, hearing the report that Shakespeare has given Biondello to deliver, would wish that it had been consigned to the cutting-room floor? And who, hearing Biondello, could fail to notice that, by the end of Biondello's comic narrative, the young Shakespeare has transformed Petruchio into that grand impresario that will be the presiding force during the remainder of the play?

Well, let us accept the fact that Shakespeare had the bride appear for the wedding and not the groom and that Shakespeare chose to bring the groom to his wedding looking like a "mad-brained rudesby." At least Shakespeare has made good on the dramatic questions he left pending. Now we know that Petruchio is indeed approaching, and we know how Shakespeare will get him on stage. Shakespeare has taken great pains to apprise us—through the reporting of the servants—that Petruchio has come to his wedding in the most outlandish outfit imaginable. **But where is Kate?** And **What will she think of the apparel that Petruchio has gathered "'gainst the wedding day"?**

Katherine, in fact, has nothing to say. She's not brought onstage to be part of the "goodly company" that will witness the coming of this prodigy. Dolan, in another context, comments upon the irony of Kate's aborted response. Petruchio, she says, has a "monopoly of self-expression in the play. He has soliloquies in which he explains his motives and intentions; Katharine does not. . . .[He] thus controls the resources of the stage as well as Katharine's access to food and clothing." Dolan assumes that "Katharine's baffling silences are the dramatic enactment of the process by which she, like all married women, becomes a 'feme covert,' that is, one who is absorbed into, or subsumed by, her husband" (26). Dolan seems to imply that Katherina's "baffling silences" serve some purpose in the play, when, in fact, her silences have nothing to do with the shortcomings of Renaissance culture but rather are symptomatic of certain flaws in early Shakespearean dramaturgy. The author's dramaturgical choices and general inexperience with the stage sufficiently account for the failures in adequately motivating Kate's behavior. By the time Shakespeare creates Beatrice, he will have learned how to write dialogue for a feisty lady; there will be no "baffling silences" in Beatrice's role.

If Katherina is bafflingly silent on the subject of her betrothed's apparel, her parent is not. Irony of ironies, Shakespeare has given over to Baptista and Tranio the objections that should have been put in Kate's mouth. It is worth noting the difference in conception between Petruchio's entrance scene and the short exit scene by which Shakespeare gets Petruchio off the stage, particularly because of the eyebrow-raising fact that the grand entrance Shakespeare prepared for Petruchio brings him on stage only with the motive of leaving it ("But where is Kate? I stay too long from her"). In this episode, Shakespeare is rendering action—in the present tense. Shakespeare has instinctively engaged Petruchio and those on stage in a clash of wills, albeit a brief one. Petruchio's motive is to seek Kate (who had long ago left the stage, in tears); Baptista's objective is to persuade Petruchio to change clothes, to "doff this habit, . . . / An eyesore to our solemn festival" (99-100). When Petruchio refuses to "put on clothes of mine," which Tranio offers, Baptista makes one more stab at altering Petruchio's will: "**visit** her in that attire if you must, but do not **marry** her thus." Petruchio is not to be altered. Shakespeare is already working with dramatic motivation here. The propelling characters Baptista and Tranio both manifest a desire to persuade. Both make attempts to curb Petruchio's

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eccentricity. Their desire to have the prospective bridegroom "change these poor accoutrements" allows Petruchio to resist—"Ha' done with words; / To me she's married, not unto my clothes" (115-16). Thus, the lunatic behavior of Petruchio is further highlighted, to delicious comic effect, and, in addition, the pompous exit to go "bid good morrow to my bride" reinforces everyone's awareness of Petruchio's strength. The family follows him offstage with hopes of yet achieving their purpose, to "persuade him, be it possible, / To put on better ere he go to church." But Petruchio will not comply, even offstage, and Shakespeare does not continue the persuasion. He shifts the scene to the subplot.

Shakespeare's handling of Petruchio's arrival in 3.2 indicates, does it not, that Shakespeare did not quite know what to do with Petruchio once he had gotten him onstage. The spectacular buildup was merely for an entrance, which rapidly turns into an exit. One can only imagine what Shakespeare might have done with the scene had he entrusted the persuading action to Kate. To Kate. There is still a chance that she may exercise her notorious tongue on the subject of her lover's manner of celebrating their wedding day. Petruchio's exit from the stage with the intention to "bid good morrow to my bride, / And seal the title with a lovely kiss," brings the audience back to the question, **How will Kate receive this lover, coming to her so late and "in his mad attire"?** And we still wonder, **Will she marry him?**

In Shakespeare's own version of the wedding, neither Kate nor Petruchio comes onstage. We never see the wedding. We only hear about it. We have to take Gremio's word for it that at the church Petruchio behaved like "a devil, a devil, a very fiend" and Tranio's that Kate was "a devil, a devil, the devil's dam," and Gremio's again that Kate was "a lamb, a dove, a fool to him" (3.2.154-56). If the "mad-brained bridegroom" engendered a "mad marriage," if Petruchio was prepared to rival Kate in creating chaos, if, in spite of all of that, Petruchio managed to keep curst Kate at the altar and marry her—for that, too, we have to take Gremio's word. We aren't invited to the wedding that was promised as the climax of Petruchio's arrival.

Pending dramatic questions have again been abandoned, disjunctive ones substituted. Shakespeare's farcical plot is totally episodic. Its elements have no inevitability, and the minute-to-minute responses of the characters to one another are only loosely linked.

When Shakespeare finally brings Kate and Petruchio onstage again, they have come back to Baptista's house for the wedding feast. Petruchio is orchestrating a new surprise for Kate—or is it for us? They are already man and wife—and Petruchio is (again) given the intention of making a hasty exit. They must, he proclaims, start for Verona immediately; business requires his presence at home. Shakespeare adopts this entirely new context to present that clash of wills between Petruchio and Kate that has seemed so necessary since Petruchio arrived in his old jerkin and thrice-turned breeches. Now that they are married, now that the wedding reception is in full swing, Petruchio will proclaim that they must go, and Kate that they will stay. The question as the comic action now develops is, **Will Kate leave the house with Petruchio?** This is but another of those unpredictable shifts that are so characteristic of act three.

What follows from Petruchio's stated intention, "I must hence, and farewell to you all," by which he means, of course, that "**we** must hence," is a cumulative series of entreaties, increasingly urgent. Tranio entreats Petruchio to stay at least "till after dinner." It may not be. Gremio entreats him. It cannot be. And then Katherina takes her own part: "Let **me** entreat you." Petruchio's "I am content" sounds like acquiescence—and thus a reversal—but he qualifies his pleasure nicely:

> I am content you shall entreat me stay—
> And yet not stay, entreat me how you can. (3.2.204-05)

This plea from Katherina is the first **entreaty** on her part. She even pleads again ("Now if you love me, stay"). First Petruchio has appeared to reverse, and now Kate seems to be yielding. But Shakespeare is only laying the foundations for another collision of wills. The change in Kate does not last. Far from having softened, she remains herself.

Shakespeare has let Petruchio proclaim his will. He announces the absurd plan of departing from Padua with his bride before the wedding meats are on the table. Since this is obviously not a proposal that is going to appeal to Kate, we wonder how the plan will succeed. **Will Kate go with him?** Kate then takes her stand. The give-and-take here is skillful—and direct; there is no elaborate embellishment. Kate stands her ground with all the power that we know she possesses. "I will not go today." "No, nor tomorrow, till I please myself." "Father, be quiet; he shall stay my leisure." Kate, commending her own "spirit to resist," orders the guests "forward to the bridal dinner." Petruchio, no doubt, commends her spirit as well, but he will not be overcome. Let Kate's command that the guests go in to enjoy their dinner be obeyed, but "my bonny Kate, **she** must with me." Petruchio asserts his control over the rebellious Kate. And to add to the merriment, Petruchio casts the wedding guests as robbers, himself and Grumio as the rescuers of a maiden besieged. With sword raised and gleaming, he goes off victorious bearing Kate along with him.

In the concluding lines of the segment, the wedding guests acquiesce to the game ("Nay let them go, a couple of quiet ones") and make their bets on which of the two members of this "mad match" will subdue the other. Petruchio has won yet another round.

But Petruchio has succeeded in marrying Kate, more or less because, during the farcical romp invented to get the couple married and Petruchio's impatient desire to get the taming action under way without waiting upon ceremony, no account was taken of the character that had been established for her. Kate's behavior was being determined by the needs of the plot.

Act Four: Can Petruchio tame Kate?

If the flamboyant entrance of Petruchio in the previous act as the one and only Wife-Tamer hasn't sufficiently alerted us to the presence in the play of a strong scent of farce, then certainly the opening of act four, which might be regarded as the softening-up process preliminary to the actual taming, supplies enough of the aroma to dispel any doubts. Accordingly, the role of Grumio grows apace. More reporting. Shakespeare will have him entertain Curtis and us for over one hundred lines with a pun-laden report of the happenings that transpired on the road from Padua to Verona, the gist of which is that the once-proud wench whom we last saw proclaiming that "I see a woman may be made a fool / If she had not a spirit to resist" (3.2.222-23) is presently going to arrive at her new domicile cold, wet, dirty, and hungry. Once onstage, her conduct is markedly in contrast to her volubility in the previous scene. Here, in a scene of some one hundred ninety lines, she barely manages to contribute two not-very-scintillating remarks to the conversation.

Alas, the further we get into the play, the less it looks like what so many wish to see it as, a war of the sexes. Would that it were, but poor Kate is no warrior. We will have to wait for when Beatrice takes the field to see the sparks fly from the clash of steel on steel. But more important, **The Taming of the Shrew** fails as a rendering of the war of the sexes for one of the significant reasons that it fails as a play. Far too much of the important action that we have been led to expect to see takes place offstage and is then wittily reported to us by one of the servants. It is as if the war was being conducted in a foreign country, and we must be satisfied with CNN correspondents' reports of the action from the front lines. Biondello reports of the approaching Petruchio in act three, and Grumio performs a similar function in act four. But the most peculiar of all these reporting scenes that substitute for battle scenes in this supposed war is Petruchio's soliloquy that ends 4.1, after Petruchio has conducted Kate to her bridal chamber. Most reports detail events that have already occurred, albeit offstage. This soliloquy sets forth the strategy that one of the antagonists plans to pursue in the future encounter. One might protest that it is incorrect to call the soliloquy an instance of reporting: Petruchio's soliloquy resembles soliloquies by Iago or Macbeth, which no one regards as examples of reporting. And for good reason. Iago and Macbeth are forewarning us concerning action we will see on the stage. Their soliloquies have the effect of whetting our appetite for a dish Shakespeare intends to serve up later. And when Petruchio spells out for us in such tantalizing detail his program for how they are to spend their forthcoming night, we assume that he too is presenting us with the menu for what he has in store for us. And what more intriguing spectacle could Shakespeare dangle before our eyes than the wedding night bedroom scene of Petruchio and Kate, as designed by him:

> Last night she slept not, nor tonight she shall not. . .
> And in conclusion she shall watch all night.
> And if she chance to nod I'll rail and brawl,
> And with the clamour keep her still awake. (4.1.185, 192-93)

Not only has Petruchio spoken to us. So has the playwright. He himself has told us what will happen. Imagine the scene that he has all but promised us. The half-starved, exhausted, sleep-deprived but still feisty and willful Kate finding on her first night as a married woman her husband has taken it into his head that her marriage bed is to serve as a schoolroom for recalcitrant wives. The soliloquy ends. The scene shifts to the subplot. We tolerate the delay—it supplies the necessary interval that allows Kate and

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Petruchio to prepare for their wedding night. Then scene three opens. Grumio again! Where, O, where is the bedroom scene? Like the wedding, it was only reported. We are told that it will happen; then we are told that it did happen. Somehow it apparently never occurred to Shakespeare that we might like to be there when it happened. Talk about missed dramatic opportunities! Doubly missed because firmly promised.

Though 4.3 is no wedding-night scene and is far from what we were promised and anticipated, much can be said for it on its own account. In fact, it is quite marvelous, so well conceived and executed that many a playwright further advanced in his craft than Shakespeare was when he wrote it would be proud to count it among his achievements. There is not a false note struck anywhere in it. Yes, once more we are confronted with an action that is structured cumulatively, and, though Shakespeare seems overly fond of this style of plotting, this time it is appropriate because Shakespeare managed to make it look as though this is a plot devised by Petruchio. All the elements flow from his imagination, and they have the quality of being what we could expect from him. He will stimulate a desire in Kate, raise her expectations that her desire will be fulfilled, only to dash her hopes while dangling a fresh desire before her eyes. Grumio taunts her with the promise of meat but produces none. At the point when her frustration with him drives her to beat him, Petruchio enters with the promised meat. Before she can eat, he diverts her attention to the prospect of returning to her father's house splendidly attired with a fine new cap, which he produces for her admiration. While she is engaged with contemplating this new article, Hortensio wolfs down the meat. No sooner is the meat gone but she finds that she won't have the cap either. Yet these are trifles. Before she can lament the loss of the cap, Petruchio bewitches her with the view of a gorgeous gown."I never saw a better-fashioned gown." But Petruchio finds that it wouldn't do any better than the cap. And so, amid a barrage of nonsensical cross-purpose chatter between Grumio and the tailor—all orchestrated by the guiding hand of Petruchio—the gown too disappears. Volpone has an apt expression for this type of manipulation. He speaks of "letting the cherry knock against [her lips], / And drawing it, by [her mouth], and back again" (**Volpone** 1.1.89-90). But unlike Volpone in his manipulations of the birds of prey, Petruchio stresses "that all is done in reverent care of her." However, lest the lesson be lost on Kate, there is a brief coda at the end of the scene that is meant to make clear to Kate the full import of the little show that she had just witnessed:

Petruchio. Let's see, I think 'tis now some seven o'clock,
And well we may come there by dinner-time.
Katherina. I dare assure you, sir, 'tis almost two,
And 'twill be supper-time ere you come there.
Petruchio. It shall be seven ere I go to horse.
Look what I speak, or do, or think to do,
You are still crossing it. Sirs, let't alone.
I will not go today; and ere I do,
It shall be what o'clock I say it is. (4.3.184-92)

There is a great deal more that must be said of this scene, but before going on, I want to take a brief look at the next scene in the Petruchio/Kate plot, 4.5. This is the reversal scene, the moment when the arc of the plot is completed. Here, Kate is transformed.

Hortensio. Petruchio, go thy ways, the field is won. (4.5.23)

That is, the shrew is tamed! Hortensio makes this announcement in line 23; however, the climactic moment actually occurs a few lines earlier. Kate says:

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. (4.5.12-15)

This is the moment we have been anticipating from the beginning of the play, the reversal of Kate the Shrew to Kate the Kind. Such a momentous conversion as Kate's renunciation of her shrewishness must needs have been triggered by something of equal magnitude: thunder is only heard after lightning. But the scene has hardly begun when Hortensio entreats Kate to "say as he says, or we shall never go" (4.5.11). Are we to believe that these few words, words spoken to her not even by Petruchio but by a minor character, are sufficient catalysts to work such a reversal? Or is it the preceding ten-line exchange between Kate and Petruchio that is to have wrought this miracle? There has been no breaking of mirrors, no sword's point to the throat, just a brief difference of opinion as to whether it is presently day or night. Being in her right senses, Kate knows it to be day. For his part, Petruchio cares not whether it is day or night, he will have his way. The burden of Hortensio's plea is, "let him have his way so we can get on with it." Her surrender to his entreaty sounds more like, "all right, anything for a little peace and quiet" than like a moment that signals a major character overhaul. Yet this is the long-awaited reversal, the climax of the play. We can confirm this merely by proceeding to the second half of the scene where the transformed Kate baffles Vincentio by addressing him as a young virgin. He finds her a "merry mistress." No one before has regarded Kate as such.

There are two ways in which Kate's reversal seems problematic. First, its achievement seems much too rapid. And second, even if we grant that Petruchio's methods could have the effect of altering a woman's behavior, is it likely that it would shift in the direction that Kate's has? As to the first point, there is obviously no set number of lines of dialogue established by Aristotle or anyone else that are required before the reversal in a character's behavior can be believably achieved. Yet it does seem logical that the more intransigent and defiant the character in question, the longer it will take to convince him of the appropriateness of change.

Just for the sake of comparison, it might be informative to examine what might be called the raw amount of persuading deemed sufficient to render the character's reversal persuasive to the audience. Obviously, cases vary: what would change one person's mind would be a totally useless tack to use on someone else. But in all cases, one is confronted with a natural degree of resistance that it will require time to overcome. Put in dramaturgical terms, the question is, how rapidly can the playwright present the reversal as having been achieved and have it accepted by the audience as having been accomplished **as a result of the interaction of the characters on stage** and not merely as a plot device inflicted upon the unwary characters by a manipulative author?

Take Iago's efforts to move Othello from "Perdition catch my soul / But I do love thee! / and when I love thee not, Chaos has come again" to the opposite pole, "All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven. 'Tis gone." Admittedly, Othello is a hard case, yet Iago is no slouch when it comes to wily intrigues; still, it takes him the better part of a five hundred-line scene to believably turn Othello around. Or what of Lady Macbeth? She knows her husband wants to do what he is allowing some trifling moral quibbles to interfere with his achieving. Approached correctly, he will prove putty in her hands. Yet it takes her forty-five lines of fierce persuasion to move him from "We will proceed no further in this business" through the arc of his conversion to "I am settled, and bend up / Each corporal agent to this terrible feat"—considerably shorter than Iago's efforts, but Macbeth had already agreed to kill the King; he was simply getting cold feet.

But let's return to the comedies. Beatrice wants dearly to have someone kill Claudio for her. Benedick has told her "to bid him to do any thing for her." However, when she puts it to him straight, "Kill Claudio," his knees buckle, and he proves not to be a man of his word. "Not for the wide world!" He does come round, but it takes Beatrice forty lines of fuming over Claudio's unparalleled injustice to Hero before Benedick reverses his stand and declares, "Enough, I am engag'd."

We could go on, but I hope the point is clear. In his later plays, where reversals are the keystone to his concept of dramatic action, Shakespeare is quite meticulous in allocating sufficient stage time when the question is the necessity of altering the motives and goals of a character.

This would be an appropriate time to return to 4.3, because the reversal witnessed in 4.5 is obviously to be seen as the climactic result of the build that is begun, and all but culminated, in the earlier scene. Now while there is much to be admired in 4.3 as an example of a well-developed scene, at this point, in the light of what we know its function in the play to be, one must ask another question, does 4.3 do the job assigned it in the plot, that is, does it serve as the foundation for Kate's reversal? It is in this regard that the scene is troublesome, to say the least. The question isn't so much whether or not Kate will change. She has, after all, been sent to school to be changed, and Petruchio means to succeed. The question is larger than that: Given Petruchio's appraisal of the challenge before him, which he likens to the taming of wild animals, and given the methodology he has adopted, which seems appropriate for such an endeavor—given these considerations, what is the likelihood that the chosen procedure Kate has been forced to undergo would produce the results Shakespeare wants us to believe it has? Would Petruchio's efforts achieve their desired effect of working a change on Kate? I think not. What we are confronted with here is a radical disjunction between (1) the aspirations of the plot and (2) what the audience is willing to believe is achievable by the actions that are presented on the stage. We are shown a fatigued, hungry, and frustrated

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Kate subjected to one example after another of Petruchio's persistent and gleeful contrariness, during which she seems less like a combatant in the war of the sexes than a frightened and confused child overmastered by the neighborhood bully. For the most part, she has nary a word to say in her own cause. Such a demonstration of dominance on the part of Petruchio may be a very fitting part of the entertainment in a farcical taming of a shrew. The school that Petruchio operates is licensed by the traditional rules governing farce, not by the inner needs of a drama designed to move a character toward greater self-realization. But Kate has become more than a shrew to us. She is a woman. And what we are forced to witness is not the breaking of her headstrong willfulness but the breaking of her spirit.

Though the scene is skillfully constructed to show her desires being thwarted, none of the things she is provoked into wanting show any perversion in her character. There is nothing distorted or willful in desiring food and clothing. Instead of enlightening Kate regarding her own behavioral problems, Petruchio, in denying her sleep, food, and clothing, teaches Kate only that he will brook no opposition, even to his most capricious whims.To all of this she resignedly submits. But at this point, who is it that appears in need of character reformation? Petruchio has all of the charm of a thuggish lout lording it over his abused wife, who has the choice of flattering the brute or fleeing to the nearest shelter for abused women.

Reading the play in its entirety makes it quite clear that such a harsh interpretation of Petruchio's endeavors creates a gross distortion of the intended relationship of Petruchio and Kate. Alas, such considerations are not sufficient to prevent playwrights and directors from appropriating the play to their purposes. Charles Marowitz has produced an adaptation in which Petruchio tortures the chained Kate until she goes mad, and scholars, for their part, have matched his absurdity with similar interpretations of their own concocting, most frequently with the theme of Kate as the victim of domestic violence. Admittedly, the scene fails to achieve the necessary effect, because there is a disconnect between what actually happens onstage and what the plot requires to be achieved in order to move on to the next stage, but one would have to be tone-deaf to miss the lighthearted farcical atmosphere established throughout.

Even though we acknowledge that a true reversal wasn't achieved, is it possible to determine what should have occurred in the scene? I think we can answer yes. We know what is at stake, **Can Petruchio tame Kate?** Petruchio, who is conducting this school for the headstrong, should be driving Kate toward a similar position to that in which Beatrice finds herself when she is forced to utter "What a fire is in mine ears? Can it be true? / Stand I condemn'd for pride and scorn so much?" Unfortunately, the traditional farcical schools for wives did not have character formation as part of their curriculum. Shrews were regarded as individuals with incurable discipline problems, from whom the best that could be hoped for was a kind of reluctant submission. But such recognition as Hero effects in Beatrice and as Petruchio believes has been effected in Kate only comes when one's own foibles have been exposed.

There are, certainly, those critics who claim that, in fact, what Petruchio is doing is showing Kate an image of herself with his over-the-top behavior: it is all meant to make Kate aware of how her antics are viewed by others. Though I don't believe that is actually to be found in the play, it is at least in keeping with the spirit of the whole. And playing the scenes this way might be justified as "playing the subtext." How **justified**? Though **Taming** is a failed play, it is not so bad that we can't follow the arc of the action, even when individual scenes fail to perform their assigned function. From the second half of 4.5 on to the end of the play, there is a clear throughline. We are invited to see Kate's warped nature straightened. The unhappy virago we met in act one is now transformed into a free and open spirit capable of enjoying the frolicking nature of her merry, madcap husband. So at least Vincentio sees the situation in 4.5, for he regards her as a "merry mistress" and the pair of them as "pleasant travelers."

In 5.2, Petruchio and Kate, though onstage during most of the scene, are all but silent observers ("Prithee, Kate, let's stand aside and see the end of the controversy"). It is only at its very end, when all but totally alone, that they actually speak to one another:

> **Katherina.** Husband, let's follow, to see the end of this ado.
> **Petruchio.** First kiss me, Kate, and we will.
> **Katherina.** What, in the midst of the street?
> **Petruchio.** What, art thou ashamed of me?
> **Katherina.** No, sir, God forbid, but ashamed to kiss.
> **Petruchio.** Why then, let's home again. (**To Grumio**) Come, sirrah, let's away.
> **Katherina.** Nay, I will give thee a kiss. Now pray thee, love, stay.
> **Petruchio.** Is not this well? Come, my sweet Kate.
> Better once than never, for never too late. (5.1.129-40)

Many have commented on these few lines and most to the same effect. Perhaps Harold Bloom has caught the tone as well as any when he says that "there is no more charming scene of married love in all of Shakespeare than this little vignette on a street in Padua" (32). Or, as Lucentio says in the first lines of the next scene:

> At last, though long, our jarring notes agree,
> And time it is when raging war is done
> To smile at scapes and perils overblown. (5.2.1-3)

Though Lucentio's lines might be a fitting end to the play, Shakespeare has one more cumulative plot interlude in him—the crow!

Act Five: Staging the Triumph

We come now to act five and the scene in which Shakespeare has Kate explain to the other wives in the play—and indirectly to the rest of us—precisely what she has learned. But, as we saw earlier when we looked at Oliver's assessment, Kate's final tameness "lacks appeal"for the play's audiences—performers, critics, and viewers alike. Kate's submission to Petruchio is not acceptable. "Generations of actresses have found it difficult to render Kate's climactic soliloquy with the required degree of sincerity." And so on. I have already shown the dramaturgical weaknesses that make Kate's conversion less than credible. I have indicated too that there is some confusion about the timing of the play's climax. The **comedy** climaxes—or should have—with Kate's resigned acknowledgment that Hortensio talks sense: she may as well let Petruchio run the show. Yet the **farce** wants to delay that climax in order to give Petruchio the applause he deserves for having shown that **he** is truly the one "that knows better how to tame a shrew."

Obviously, this last act is to be another show. Petruchio has to parade his prize student before the audience. But there is another wrinkle in the fabric that Shakespeare wishes to iron out, another "goal" that Petruchio hopes to achieve before he leaves the stage. Kate's reputation has to be restored. This is one of the inspirations Shakespeare has in mind in writing act five, and it's not a bad idea to show that Petruchio's heart is really in the right place. But the structure Shakespeare gives to 5.2, imbued as it is with all the brazen assurance of the showman and plotted in the form of a wager, impresses upon us, once again, a sense that Petruchio is taking the bow at the expense of Kate.

Here's the set-up. Kate and Petruchio have returned to Baptista's house, her schooling behind her and a new truce proclaimed between her and Petruchio. Those who have never left the parental household still retain an image of the old Kate. They cannot conceive of any change in her. Petruchio, of course, knows the new Kate. Furthermore, he relishes the idea of crowing a bit over his achievements. In act five, Shakespeare utilizes the situation to its fullest.

First, in terms of the artist and his art. The play is a comedy. Comedies have happy endings. All the better if the harmony is symbolized by a wedding party.

Second, in terms of the plot. Shakespeare apparently wished to render Kate's transformation in as dramatic a manner as possible. It is to be a public event—not to be revealed in far off Verona—but to be announced in no uncertain terms in Padua at the family banquet. The reversal is to be seen and applauded by all. Shakespeare makes it a public declaration, in which Petruchio demonstrates that Kate is no longer Kate the Curst but gentle Kate, peaceful Kate. Her unnatural temper has been put off, and she is now in harmony with nature. This final aspiration of Shakespeare's plot is the whole reason for his withholding from us an earlier and fuller awareness of the change that has taken place in Kate: he saves the "surprise" for his fifth act, so that the tale he is narrating will end on a note of triumph.

Third, in terms of experience, self-knowledge, moral awareness—what might be called the thematic elements of the play. As a young man, Shakespeare shapes his action to teach a moral lesson—one that embodies the conventional wisdom of his time and our own insofar as we still acknowledge Christian precepts. Petruchio is the proponent of this wisdom, but Shakespeare makes Kate its spokesman.

All of these are concerns this particular playwright had in bringing this particular play to closure. How is all of this rendered?

The Taming of the Shrew is about two marriages, not just Petruchio's to Kate but also Lucentio's to Bianca. Shakespeare begins act five with the resolution of this subplot: Bianca and Cambio return from church as man

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and wife and, lo—the onstage audience receives a surprise here too—Tranio is not Lucentio, and Cambio is not Cambio. To close the romantic plot of the comedy, Shakespeare creates not a reversal but a conventional unveiling: "Cambio is changed into Lucentio" (5.1.111). These unveilings set the scene for what Shakespeare's plotting offers as the climactic moment in his dramatized version of the shrew's reversal.

Petruchio has taken much abuse for the farcical setting Shakespeare gives to his means of displaying the new Kate. Has she not been belittled enough? Must he treat her like a horse at the post who has to come in first—or as it is in this case, last—since Bianca and the Widow refuse to come in before her? Lucentio, the host, initiates the scene with his announcement that "raging war is done" and "jarring notes agree." Hardly do the words leave his mouth, however, before challenges are issued to Petruchio. If there be "jarring notes" still, the tone derives from "quick-witted" folk who cannot forbear to jest, and it soon becomes established that the guests at this party are ready to make Katherine's formidable reputation the butt of every joke. Kate and Hortensio's Widow tangle over this subject at table:

> **Katherina**. 'He that is giddy thinks the world turns round'—
> I pray you tell me what you meant by that.
> **Widow.** Your husband, being troubled with a shrew,
> Measures my husband's sorrow by his woe,
> And now you know my meaning. (5.2.26-30)

This Widow means to gloat. Tranio carries on the jest when he taunts Petruchio:

> 'Tis well, sir, that you hunted for yourself.
> 'Tis thought your deer does hold you at a bay. (5.2.55-56)

And Baptista speaks for all when he sums up the general opinion:

> Now, in good sadness, son Petruchio,
> I think thou hast the veriest shrew of all. (5.2.63-64)

Kate, it seems, is still the shrew—to everyone but Petruchio. Thus comes one more, one final, test for Kate. **Is Kate or is she not still "the veriest shrew of all"?** That becomes the dramatic question of Shakespeare's final scene, and Petruchio wagers a hundred crowns upon his wife.

There is much at stake in this scene,which seems at first to be little more than a comic wager in the farcical plot of an otherwise conventional comedy. There is much at stake for Petruchio—his manhood, Heaven help us!, which has been attacked three times in as many minutes. And must he not defend the reputation of his School? The Master Teacher is being dismissed as a braggart! Petruchio has worked hard to purge Kate of her warlike nature and can't be blamed for wanting to have the final crow. But there is much at stake for Kate too. Is she to be viewed as her former self for the rest of her life? It is not pushing things too far to say that Shakespeare gives her an opportunity to silence once and for all this plethora of jests made at her expense. And so, in this final moment of the play, Kate is put on trial:

> 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. (5.2.65-69)

For once, the narrative is mounted on a sturdy dramaturgical structure. There is a distinct dramatic question: **Will Kate appear when Petruchio sends for her?** The outcome of the wager remains a matter of suspense, as it must if Petruchio's trick is to work; nobody (excepting her Tamer) knows how Kate will react. The cumulative build is masterfully controlled. When Lucentio summons Bianca, Bianca sends word "that she is busy, and she cannot come." When Hortensio entreats the Widow to come forth, the Widow says "she will not come; she bids **you** come to **her**." Petruchio does not "bid" or "entreat" his wife to come but "commands" it. No one onstage expects to see her. Then, of course, comes the climactic moment as Shakespeare has prepared it: "**Enter Katherina**."

And in the lines with which Shakespeare graces her entrance, the reversal that this play was structured to effect is displayed and confirmed: "What is your will, sir, that you send for me?" With yet another gracious touch, Shakespeare arranges matters so that Kate is given the task of bringing in the **disobedient** wives. At this long-awaited climactic moment, Shakespeare has indeed transformed narrative into action.

What emotion does Shakespeare call forth from us in response to Kate's performance here? As usual, the desired effect is located in the responses of the characters who witness Kate's performance. Lucentio gasps, "Here is a wonder, if you talk of a wonder." Hortensio confirms it: "And so it is. I wonder what it bodes." Shakespeare assigns the explanation to Petruchio:

> Marry, peace it bodes, and love, and quiet life,
> An awful rule, and right supremacy;
> And, to be short, what not that's sweet and happy. (5.2.108-10)

All is well. And all is well that ends well. But granting that Shakespeare's "wager scene" is dramatically powerful—a triumph both for Petruchio and for Kate, does the play **as a whole** end well? Should not the play end here? What are we to think of the spontaneous impulse that makes Petruchio desire to "win my wager better yet, / And show more sign of her obedience, / Her new-built virtue and obedience"? What are we to think of his insistence that Katherine throw her cap on the floor and stamp on it. "A foolish duty," says Bianca. What are we to make of the lengthy monologue Shakespeare writes for Katherina when Petruchio charges her to "tell these headstrong women / What duty they do owe their lords and husbands." **Must** the author of **The Taming of the Shrew** carry his project for the reversal of dear Kate this far? Could he only have foreseen what further ammunition he was giving to enterpreneurs in ages to come who would "discover" that Petruchio had carried his enthusiasm too far and created an automaton, who would have this Petruchio wake up in the manner of Christopher Sly at the end of the show to perceive that his glorious dream of transforming Kate had become a nightmare!

How easy it is for the Monday morning quarterback to replay the game. Of course, Shakespeare could have shortened Katherina's homily. Of course, he might more aptly have placed her admission that "My mind hath been as big as one of yours, / My heart as great, my reason haply more, / To bandy word for word and frown for frown" (5.2.170-72) and other words to this effect back in act four where they were needed. But everyone will agree, I hope, that though Shakespeare made several unfortunate choices in rendering the character and the methods of Petruchio, the most costly of them comes not so much in allowing Kate to win Petruchio's wager for him, for that is **her** triumph as well as his. When, on that Monday morning, the very **worst** has been said, it must also be admitted that the play still holds its own when allowed to unfold as merrily as it is written and to conclude in its original glory with a climactic presentation of the new spokesman for the family of Minola, gentle Kate. The other wives at the banquet have been cheeky. We can enjoy the spectacle, and the irony, of their being corrected by "curst Kate." We can suspect that Kate and Petruchio are in league now in their merry jests—that perhaps the encounter with Vincentio on the road has taught Kate that wit can be playful as well as rough, and no doubt the actresses who have played Kate have let us smile at some of the exaggerations that Kate includes in her moral lesson. Shakespeare certainly does not expect us to take her new moderation as abject.

Much as we may feel that Shakespeare, in his readiness to give Petruchio so many chances to crow over his triumph and in his own zeal to show the worthiness of the transformed Kate, has become heavy-handed in rendering the final moments of the reversal, one has to acknowledge that many a Kate becomes very attractive when coming forward to command all attention and show her hard-won wisdom. Those productions that make much of the cries of "Kiss me Kate" that Petruchio issues more and more frequently toward the end of the play and conclude with the happy couple going off to enjoy their conjugal bliss in private send the audience away with sweet satisfaction. What better test for any young playwright's endeavors than that his vision "works" on the stage.

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