The Taming of the Shrew 1593

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

A Lord,
CHRISTOPHER SLY, *a tinker,*
Hostess, Page, Players, Huntsmen, Servants, } *Persons in the Induction.*

TRANIO, BIONDELLO, } *servants to Lucentio.*
GRUMIO, CURTIS, } *servants to Petruchio.*
A Pedant.

BAPTISTA MINOLA, *a gentleman of Padua.*
VINCENTIO, *a merchant of Pisa.*
LUCENTIO, *son to Vincentio, in love with Bianca.*
PETRUCHIO, *a gentleman of Verona, a suitor to Katherina.*
GREMIO, HORTENSIO, } *suitors to Bianca.*

KATHERINA, *the shrew,* BIANCA, } *daughters to Baptista.*
A Widow.

Tailor, Haberdasher, *and* Servants *attending on Baptista and Petruchio.*

THE SCENE: *Padua, and Petruchio's house in the country.*

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A new edition, edited with an
Introduction and glossary by
PETER ALEXANDER
Regius Professor of English Language
and Literature, University of Glasgow 1959

David Akenhead, CEO Akenhead crosswords currently enjoying
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Howard Staunton (1810-1874)

In 1593 The Taming of a Shrew springs to light described as sundry times acted by *Right Honorable the Earle of Pembrook* his seruants, which from the remarkable resemblance to the drama acknowledged to be Shakespeare's, may be looked upon almost as a previous edition of the same play.

Nathan Drake (1776-1836)

As to the play itself, the rapidity and variety of its action, the skilful connexion of its double plot, and the strength and vivacity of its principal characters, must for ever ensure its popularity. *Petruchio, Katharina* and *Grumio,* the most important personages of the play, are consistently supported throughout; the wild fantastic humour of the first, the wayward and insolent demeanour of the second, contrasted with the meek, modest and retired disposition of her sister, together with the inextinguishable wit and drollery of the third, form a picture, at once rich, varied and pre-eminently diverting.

August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767-1845)

In the manner in which Petruchio, though previously cautioned respecting Katharine, still runs the risk of marrying her and contrives to tame her, the character and peculiar humour of the English are visible. The colours are laid somewhat coarsely on, but the ground is good. That the obstinacy of a young and untamed girl, must soon yield to the still rougher and more capricious but assumed self-will of a man: such a lesson can only be taught on the stage, with all the perspicuity of a proverb.

The prelude is still more remarkable than the play itself: the drunken tinker removed in his sleep to a palace, where he is deceived into the belief of being a nobleman – The invention, however, is not Shakespeare's but Shakespeare proves himself here, as well as everywhere else, a great poet: the whole is merely a light sketch, but in elegance and nice propriety it will hardly ever be excelled. Neither has he overlooked the irony that the great lord who is driven by idleness and *ennui* to deceive a poor drunkard, can make no better use of his situation, than the latter who relapses into vulgar habits . . . transformed in his sleep into his former condition, from some accident or other, is lost. Moreover, the only circumstance which connects the prelude with the play, is that it belongs to the new life of the supposed nobleman, to have plays acted in his castle by strolling actors. This

invention of introducing spectators on the stage, who contribute to the entertainment, by later English poets (and actors themselves as witnessed in Clifford Williams own contemporary production of this play which I attended, where anything could happen, and did! – D.A.)

David Akenhead (1946 -) retired journalist, crossword editor, actor and stage director.

Permit me to make a very simple recommendation for this play with this link to my Thoughts page on my website https://www.crosswordsakenhead.com/thoughts/ and listen to my commentary on The Curious demise of the Globe Theatre 1613 and witness Howard Staunton's account of Shakespeare's own demise carousing the night away under the Greenwood tree with his friends Michael Drayton and Ben Jonson, ever teenagers at heart and Shakespeare with meticulous planning to the last exiting on the same day as that of his birth! and realise that this man's genius required no justification in devices to appease his critics as that of a drunken tinker in the form of Christopher Sly to justify his Joie de Vivre with the Puritans and purists of his day alongside the barmaids and mistresses at the taverns he used to frequent with his bosom pal Kit Marlowe before the latter's own sad premature demise in a brawl.

No justification necessary, for our upstart crow, for raw, delightful, down-to-earth birds and bees! People totally miss the point of this play when Petruchio says Kiss me Kate unflinching to the stool she's just broken over his head and with a delightful flush of youth springing to her cheeks she has to fight her own inner feelings to realise that at last, she's found her match! Way more interesting than the local riff-raff her unfortunate sister Bianca is lumbered with.

By the time he gets to write As You Like It in 1599 he's already ahead of the game! And the only thing to stand in his way is winter and rough weather! Truthfully, that was the essence of Clifford Williams' wonderful production of the Shrew at Stratford to which I was invited in 1973 by both Alan Bates and Louise Jameson (Bianca) with Susan Fleetwood as Kate.

Sadly on the night I attended, Alan's amorous instincts took a step too far in the wooing scene, and he twisted his ankle, but typical of Alan, with swift improvisation he added the extra line, 'clearly this time you got more than you bargained for' Susan Fleetwood should have earned an Oscar for her straight face on the spot while the

audience absolutely erupted, as the handicapped beau continued his romp undeterred!

Such a nice, gentle guy, he treated me and Louise to toffee apples at the Stratford Fair after the show as he watched us enjoy them on the big wheel; picture this lone, lovely man waving to us supported by his walking stick beneath! Deeply missed.

John Goodwin RSC made much the same observation in his own introduction. I quote from him and the play. "Petruchio sees Katherina as an exciting challenge to his masculinity, he wants to subdue her:

'I will board her though she chide as loud as thunder when the clouds in Autumn crack'. 50 Shades of Grey has nothing on this! Or this from Amiens, in As You Like It.

Under the Greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me And turn his merry
note Unto the sweet bird's throat
Come hither, come hither, come hither,
Here shall he see No enemy
But winter and rough weather.

Story again courtesy of John Goodwin RSC

Settings mostly Padua and sometimes Petruchio's newly acquired country residence nearby.

Petruchio's father, Antonio, a wealthy gentleman of Verona is deceased and it's the age old story, to restrain his father's line of credit, Petruchio must venture forth in want of a wealthy wife. Word has it that the affluent family of Baptista Minola in Padua consists of two girls, Bianca the younger and Katherina, clever, demanding and who has a low esteem for men generally, especially those who expect her to be the perfect wife providing them with obedience and children in that order. But this particular seed of Minola clearly has women's suffrage coursing through her veins and does not suffer fools gladly, but deep down she recognises that she too must find a man, preferably wealthy to support her own father, (reminding me a little of Elizabeth Bennett and Mr Bennett in Pride and Prejudice! – D.A.)

Meanwhile, we have another family, also now resident in Padua and his son Lucentio who is very partial to Bianca, and Gremio and Hortensio from nearby, bees to the honey-pot who are partial to Bianca too, it seems. So she is hardly spoilt for choice, in sharp contrast to her sister who is content for the time being in having none; and then along comes a rather arrogant Petruchio, and though it is love at first sight neither will admit it! On the contrary both are bent on testing their adversary to the limit! and thus the courtship becomes a wrestling match of anything you can do, I can do better. In the production I attended I witnessed a little more than a draw in Katherina's favour!

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