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About Propeller

Propeller is an all-male Shakespeare company which seeks to find a more engaging way of expressing Shakespeare and to more completely explore the relationship between text and performance. Mixing a rigorous approach to the text with a modern physical aesthetic, they have been influenced by mask work, animation and classic and modern film and music from all ages. Productions are directed by Edward Hall and designed by Michael Pavelka. Lighting is designed by Ben Ormerod.

Propeller has toured internationally to Australia, China, Spain, Mexico, The Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Cyprus, Ireland, Tokyo, Gdansk, Germany, Italy, Malta, Hong Kong and the U.S.A.

As our times have changed, so our responses to Shakespeare’s work have changed too and I believe we have become an ensemble in the true sense of the word: We break and reform our relationships using the spirit of the particular play we are working on.

We have grown together, eaten together, argued and loved together. We have toured all over the world from Huddersfield to Bangladesh. We have played in National theatres, ancient amphitheatres, farmyards and globe theatres. We have been applauded, shot at and challenged by different audiences wherever we have gone.

We want to rediscover Shakespeare simply by doing the plays as we believe they should be done: with great clarity, speed and full of as much imagination in the staging as possible. We don’t want to make the plays ‘accessible’, as this implies that they need ‘dumbing down’ in order to be understood, which they don’t. We want to continue to take our work to as many different kinds of audiences as possible and so to grow as artists and people. We are hungry for more opportunity to explore the richness of Shakespeare’s plays and if we keep doing this with rigour and invention, then I believe the company, and I hope our audiences too, will continue to grow.

Edward Hall, Artistic Director.
To Teachers

This pack has been designed to complement your class’s visit to see Propeller’s 2012/13 production of The Taming of the Shrew, on national and international tour.

Most of the pack is aimed at A-level and GSCE students of Drama and English Literature in the UK, but some of the sections, and suggestions for classroom activities, may be of use to teachers teaching pupils at Key Stages 2, 3 & 4, while students studying in other countries and those in higher education may find much of interest in these pages.

While there are some images, the pack has been deliberately kept simple from a graphic point of view so that most pages can easily be photocopied for use in the classroom.

The production is being toured alongside Propeller’s production of Twelfth Night; Roger Warren and Edward Hall’s essay *I am not what I am*, exploring the relationship between the two plays, can be found on page 8. There is also a separate education pack relating to Twelfth Night which can be downloaded from the Propeller website.

You can also find video clips, trailers and other resources on our YouTube channel at [youtube.com/PropellerVideo](http://youtube.com/PropellerVideo) and follow the company on tour by keeping up with our blog: [propeller.org.uk/blog](http://propeller.org.uk/blog).

Your feedback is most welcome. You can make any comments on our Propeller Theatre Company facebook page or by email to [caro.mackay@propeller.org.uk](mailto:caro.mackay@propeller.org.uk).

Workshops to accompany the production are also available.

I hope you find the pack useful.

Will Wollen
Education Consultant
Propeller
Taming of the Shrew
Production Credits

DIRECTED by Edward Hall
DESIGNED by Michael Pavelka
LIGHTING by Ben Ormerod
MUSIC by Propeller
SOUND by David Gregory
TEXT adapted by Edward Hall & Roger Warren
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR Dugald Bruce-Lockhart

Biondello
Curtis
Gremio/Vincentio
Lucentio
Tailor/Widow
Sly/Petruchio
Baptista
Tranio
Grumio/Pedant
Hortensio
Kate
Bianca

Ben Allen
Joseph Chance
John Dougall
Finn Hanlon
Christopher Heyward
Vince Leigh
Chris Myles
Liam O’Brien
Benjamin O’Mahony
Gary Shelford
Dan Wheeler
Arthur Wilson

PROPELLER

Artistic Director - Edward Hall
Executive Producer - Caro MacKay
Development Manager - Cathy Baker
Marketing and Publicity - Clair Chamberlain & Stephen Pidcock at The Cornershop pr

Propeller’s Board of Trustees
James Sargant (Chairman), Lydia Cassidy, Gillian Chimes, Susan Foster, Andrew Hochhauser QC, Lynne Kirwin, Jodi Myers, Peter Wilson MBE DL
Synopsis

The play starts with Christopher Sly, who is drunk enough (at his own wedding in Propeller’s production) for a group of noblemen to persuade him that he is a Lord. Sly is given a disguised page as his lady and he is entertained at the noblemen's house with a comedy presented by a group of travelling actors.

The play that Sly watches opens as Lucentio, a student, arrives in Padua. He overhears the merchant Baptista saying that his pretty younger daughter, Bianca, may not be married before her shrewish sister, Katherina. When Lucentio sees Bianca he decides straightaway to woo her and changes roles with his servant Tranio.

Bianca already has two suitors, but cares for neither. The first, Gremio, engages Lucentio, disguised as a Latin tutor, to woo Bianca on his behalf, while the second, Hortensio, disguises himself as a musician to obtain access to her.

Meanwhile Hortensio’s friend, Petruchio, arrives from Verona. He learns about Katherina and resolves to court her, aided enthusiastically by both Gremio and Hortensio. Baptista encourages Petruchio's suit for his extremely reluctant eldest daughter and together the men fix a wedding day. Petruchio arrives at the church in outlandish clothes, and after he is married to his unwilling bride the two of them set off for Verona. On reaching home Petruchio, with the help of his servants, denies Kate all food and rest. In a campaign to teach her to obey him Petruchio will not allow Kate any new clothes. Eventually, worn down by her husband's waywardness, Kate submits and they leave to visit her father in Padua.

On the journey the couple meet Vincentio, Lucentio's wealthy father. The three reach Padua where Hortensio, rejected by Bianca, has married a widow and Baptista has been tricked into believing a passing stranger is Tranio's rich father. While Vincentio attempts to solve the problem his son Lucentio returns from a secret wedding with Bianca.

Baptista holds a wedding feast for both his daughters. After the meal Petruchio devises a scheme to prove whose wife is the most obedient. Bianca and the widow fail to come to their husbands when called while Kate, now much altered, resolutely tells the other women the duties of a wife.

As the play closes, Sly is left to ponder the play he has just seen.
The person we call William Shakespeare wrote some 37 plays, as well as sonnets and full-length poems; but very little is actually known about him. That there was someone called William Shakespeare is certain, and what we know about his life comes from registrar records, court records, wills, marriage certificates and his tombstone. There are also contemporary anecdotes and criticisms made by his rivals which speak of the famous playwright and suggest that he was indeed a playwright, poet and an actor.

The earliest record we have of his life is of his baptism, which took place on Wednesday 26th April 1564. Traditionally it is supposed that he was, as was common practice, baptised three days after his birth, making his birthday the 23rd of April 1564 – St George’s Day. There is, however, no proof of this at all.

William's father was a John Shakespeare, a local businessman who was involved in tanning and leatherwork. John also dealt in grain and sometimes was described as a glover by trade. John was also a prominent man in Stratford. By 1560, he was one of the fourteen burgesses who made up the town council. William's mother was Mary Arden who married John Shakespeare in 1557. They had eight children, of whom William was the third. It is assumed that William grew up with them in Stratford, one hundred miles from London.

Very little is known about Shakespeare's education. We know that the King's New Grammar School taught boys basic reading and writing. We assume William attended this school since it existed to educate the sons of Stratford but we have no definite proof. There is also no evidence to suggest that William attended university.

On 28th November 1582 an eighteen-year-old William married the twenty-six-year-old Anne Hathaway. Seven months later, they had their first daughter, Susanna. Anne never left Stratford, living there her entire life.

Baptism records reveal that twins Hamnet and Judith were born in February 1592. Hamnet, the only son died in 1596, just eleven years old.

At some point, Shakespeare joined the Burbage company in London as an actor, and was their principal writer. He wrote for them at the Theatre in Shoreditch, and by 1594 he was a sharer, or shareholder in the company. It
was through being a sharer in the profits of the company that William made his money and in 1597 he was able to purchase a large house in Stratford.

The company moved to the newly-built Globe Theatre in 1599. It was for this theatre that Shakespeare wrote many of his greatest plays, including, in 1611, The Winter’s Tale.

In 1613, the Globe Theatre caught fire during a performance of Henry VIII, one of Shakespeare’s last plays, written with John Fletcher, and William retired to Stratford where he died in 1616, on 23rd April.

Tam Williams as Lucentio in the 2007 production at The Old Vic
Shakespeare probably wrote The Taming of the Shrew in 1590–1, at the very start of his career, and Twelfth Night in 1601, when he was at the height of his powers, at roughly the same time as Hamlet; but both comedies are about love, marriage, transformation, and deceptions that reveal truth.

The main action of the Shrew is in effect the dream of Christopher Sly, the drunken tinker who is persuaded that he is a lord:

Or do I dream, or have I dreamed till now?
I do not sleep: I see, I hear, I speak.
I smell sweet savours, and I feel soft things.

This interestingly anticipates the language of Sebastian in Twelfth Night when Olivia, mistaking him for his twin, declares her love for him:

What relish is in this? How runs the stream?
Or am I mad, or else this is a dream.
Let fancy still my sense in Lethe steep.
If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep.

But Sly’s dream, as reflected in the Petruchio/Kate story, is harsher than Sebastian’s romantic match with Olivia: in one way, Petruchio’s career is Sly’s wish-fulfilment about marriage; but in another way it is unnerving, since Petruchio is a man who marries without thinking.

The Taming of the Shrew is a cruel play. Kenneth Tynan, reviewing a production at Stratford in 1960, said that he found it ‘a more inhuman play than even Titus Andronicus, since it argues (as nobody in Titus does) that cruelty is good for the victim’. Cruelty is built into the play: the abuse has to be taken seriously — and even the self-abuse. For there is an ironic reversal: Petruchio comes to understand more about himself than Kate about herself. His father has died, and he aims to marry for, and into, money:

I come to wive it wealthily in Padua;
If wealthily, then happily in Padua.

But he learns about himself during the taming process. He is vulnerable, afraid of what he might see if the looked into the mirror: ‘I am not what I am’, as Viola puts it in Twelfth Night. When he meets Kate, he falls in love with her, as his language makes clear. However mocking, his images draw on
the natural world, as Shakespeare always does when he wants to express truth of feeling:

Kate like the hazel twig  
Is straight and slender, and as brown in hue  
As hazelnuts, and sweeter than the kernels.

And Kate? Does she fall for him? The equality of their wit-combats suggests so — in which case their marriage is a negotiated, rather than an imposed, peace. Certainly the author of A Shrew saw it like that. In lines that do not occur in the Folio text, Kate says, after their first encounter,

Yet I will consent and marry him,  
For I methinks have lived too long a maid,  
And match him, too, or else his manhood’s good.

But if her capitulation is negotiated, why does Petruchio proceed with the shrewtaming? Perhaps it is part of his growing-up process; and her final speech reflects what a woman needs to say about her role in a particular society. And here, her father’s attitude is crucial. Kate’s shrewishness arises at least in part from the clear favouritism that Baptista shows towards Bianca — which makes life difficult for Bianca too. If she seems a manipulative minx or Kate a shrew, then maybe their father’s treatment has made them so. Shakespeare takes traditions — the aggressive tamer, the tamed shrew, the commercial society with its marriages for money — and exposes them for what they are. Sly’s dream is a fantasy based on social truth: men discovering how they treat women.

These things become more complex in Twelfth Night. In Illyria, people are one thing in public, another in private. No-one has fulfilled themselves in love: they all crave it, but no-one fully achieves it, except for the twins, whose reunion is the most beautiful thing in the play. But perhaps there’s a beginning for Orsino and Olivia — because of their contact with Viola. Into their claustrophobic world comes Viola, who proceeds to turn that world upside down. The two outsiders (and the central characters), Viola and Feste, hold up mirrors to the other characters. Feste knows everything, sees through everyone: he penetrates Viola’s disguise, criticizes Orsino’s love-melancholy, exposes the excesses of Olivia’s grief; and Viola awakens, brings to the surface, the potential for emotional fulfilment in Orsino and Olivia. The gender reversals are important for this. We are more specific about gender labels than Shakespeare, or the Elizabethans in general, were. When the characters are pretending to be other than they are, they are most themselves. As Helen Gardner says of Shakespearian comedy in general, ‘by misunderstandings men come to understand, and by lies and feignings they discover truth’.
**Main characters**

**Christopher Sly** - The principal character in the play’s induction. We see the action of the play through his eyes.

**Katherine** - The “shrew” of the play’s title, Katherine, or Kate, is the daughter of Baptista Minola, with whom she lives in Padua. She is sharp-tongued, quick-tempered. She has a troubled relationship with her sister, Bianca, who is their father’s favourite.

**Petruchio** - Petruchio is a gentleman from Verona. Boisterous, eccentric, quick-witted, and frequently drunk, he has come to Padua in order to search for a wife who comes with a large dowry. He sees marriage as a business deal. He chooses Katherine before he has even seen her.

**Bianca** - The younger daughter of Baptista. She is much more sweet-tempered than her older sister, Katherine, and she has many suitors. Her father, Baptista, however, will not let her marry until Kate is wed.

**Baptista** - Minola Baptista is one of the wealthiest men in Padua. He, too, sees marriage as a business arrangement, and Kate’s nature is probably derived from the lack of emotional care he gives her.

**Lucentio** - Lucentio comes to Padua from Pisa to study at the city’s renowned university, but falls in love with Bianca at first sight. By disguising himself as a tutor named Cambio, he convinces Gremio to offer him to Baptista as a tutor for Bianca so that he can gain access to her.

**Tranio** - Lucentio’s servant, Tranio, accompanies his master. While Lucentio is pretending to be Cambio, Tranio assumes Lucentio’s identity so that he can bargain with Baptista for Bianca’s hand.

**Gremio and Hortensio** - Two gentlemen of Padua. Gremio and Hortensio are Bianca’s suitors at the beginning of the play. Though they are rivals, these older men also become friends during their mutual frustration with and rejection by Bianca. Hortensio directs Petruchio to Kate and then dresses up as a music instructor to court Bianca.

**Grumio** - Petruchio’s servant and the fool of the play.
Source of the Story

Turnover of plays was very rapid in Shakespeare’s time and there was considerable pressure on playwrights to produce new entertainments for their audiences. Copyright restrictions were not what they are today and writers freely recycled characters and plots. It is believed that Shakespeare wrote *The Taming of the Shrew* around 1590-91, and he appears to have drawn on many sources. Different elements of the play can be traced to different influences.

**The Induction**

Sly’s story - of a poor man tricked into thinking he is a nobleman - was common in Europe and Asia in the sixteenth century and probably predates the story of the beggar, Abu Hassan, in *The Arabian Nights*. Shakespeare also makes reference to his own background in Warwickshire. Sly is ‘old Sly’s son of Burton Heath’; Shakespeare’s aunt lived in Barton-on-the-Heath. ‘Ask Marian Hacket’, insists Sly, ‘the fat alewife of Wincot, if she know me not.’; in 1591 there were Hackets living in a small community south of Stratford, called Wincot. Stephen Greenblatt in his book *Will in the World* suggests that Sly might be partly based on Shakespeare’s own father who, after gaining an important place in the local community, had fallen on hard times and taken to drink.

**The “Shrew”**

Women viewed as opinionated, bossy, and sharp-tongued are found in the folklore and literature of many cultures. The earliest example in English drama is thought to be the character of Noah’s wife in the medieval mystery plays. Shrewish wives featured in a number of sixteenth century plays and often received severe punishments.

Tony Bell as Tranio in the 2007 production
The Taming of a Shrew  

The Taming of a Shrew (as opposed to The Taming of the Shrew) was a play published in 1594 which is very similar to the story we have today. It is generally supposed to be a pirated copy of Shakespeare's play, possibly imperfectly remembered by an actor from his company. The story is very similar, although the language and character names are different. One important difference is that the Sly character returns at various points during the play and the induction story is finished at the end of the play. In the version that we have of Shakespeare's play we don't hear from the characters from the Induction after we meet them at the beginning of the play. Many people think that the completion of the Induction story has been lost from the received Shakespeare text and would have been part of the play as originally performed. Propeller's production incorporates material from The Taming of a Shrew to complete the framework of the play within a play. Some productions solve the problem by removing the induction altogether.

Bianca & Lucentio  

This subplot is derived from George Gascoigne's play Supposes (1566). Gascoigne's play was itself a translation of an Italian play, Ludovico Ariosto's I Suppositi (1509), and many of its elements can be traced back to the classical Latin comedies of Plautus and Terence. Like The Shrew, Gascoigne's play makes much use of disguise and confused identity.

Prologue from George Gascoigne's Supposes  

I Suppose you are assembled here, supposing to reap e the fruite of my travayles: and to be playne, I meane presently to presente you with a Comedie called Supposes: the verye name wherof may perad[van] drive into every of your heades a sundry Suppose, to suppose, the meaning of our supposes. Some percase will suppose we meane to occupie your eares with sophisticall handling of subtill Suppositions. Some other wil suppose we go about to discipher unto you some queint conceiptes, which hitherto have bene onely supposed as it were in shadowes: and some I see smyling as though they supposed we would trouble you with the vaine suppose of some wanton Suppose. But understand, this our Suppose is nothing else but a mystaking or imagnation of one thing for an other. For you shall see the master supposed for the servant, the servant for the master: the freeman for a slave, and the bondslave for a freeman: the stranger for a well known friend, and the familiar for a stranger. But what? I suppose that even already you suppose me very fonde, that have so simply disclosed unto you the subtilties of these our Supposes: where otherwise in deede I suppose you should have hearde almoaste the laste of our Supposes, before you coulde have supposéd anye of them arighte. Let this then suffice.
Other important versions and productions of The Shrew

1611  John Fletcher writes *The Woman’s Prize*, or *The Tamer Tamed*. In this play Katherine has died, Petruchio marries again and his second wife tames him. John Fletcher wrote a number of plays with Shakespeare and would almost certainly have had his blessing to write the sequel. The fact that a sequel is written almost twenty years after the original shows that *The Taming of the Shrew* must have enjoyed enduring popularity. Sequels were, and, of course, still are, a way of cashing in on the success of an earlier play.

C. 1670  During the restoration John Lacy wrote an adaptation called *Sauny the Scot*. In this version Lacy extends the maltreatment of Katherine; she is threatened with violence and having her teeth pulled out.

1735  James Worsdale produces *A Cure for a Scold* which seems to be based on Lacy’s version rather than the original.

1754  David Garrick’s *Catherine and Petruchio* simply concentrates on the taming of ‘Catherine’ and leaves out the Bianca-Lucentio subplots.

1890  At the Globe Theatre (a proscenium arch theatre in London’s West End – not Shakespeare’s original), Constance Benson played Kate. When Petruchio was taking her back to Padua she was led off on a real donkey. When the production toured the provinces she needed a new donkey every week and received a great many bruises from the untrained animals.
1935

A glamorous Broadway production with Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, the king and queen of American theatre actors, featured Katharina being led away on horseback in a her splendid bridal gown, with Petruchio in a cloak and sombrero. When they left the stage at the end of the performance they left behind a spectacle of song, dance and acrobatics.

1939

Tyrone Guthrie’s production at the Old Vic, with Roger Livesey as Petruchio and Ursula Jeans as Katharine, drew on traditional Italian Commedia dell’Arte for its spirit and imagery and was a slapstick spectacle of harlequins and acrobatic tumbling.

1948

*Kiss Me, Kate* is a stage musical by Samuel and Bella Spewack (book) and Cole Porter (music and lyrics), based on Shakespeare’s story, that ran for 1,077 performances. Like Shakespeare’s play it involves a play within a play, telling the tale of two once-married, now divorced musical theatre actors, Fred and Lilli, who are performing as the main lovers in a musical version of *The Taming of the Shrew*. A film of the show was made in 1953, but many of the lyrics were judged to be too racy, and the script was toned down for the big screen.

1954

“Marius Goring took a civilized way with Petruchio. Here was no heavyweight champion battling for a wench, but a fellow of some sensitiveness and perception ... By the time that he and Katharina were on their way back to Padua and that perverse argument about sun and moon was being thrashed
out, we realized that this couple had fallen deeply in love, and Petruchio’s “Kiss me, Kate!” was not so much a command as an invitation.” – TC Kemp referring to George Devine’s 1954 production with Marius Goring as Petruchio and Yvonne Mitchell as Katharina.

1966
Franco Zeffirelli’s film version of the play, starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, completely omitted any reference to the Sly framework, so there was no sense of a play with in a play. This allowed the film to concentrate on the main Petruchio/Katherine story, and avoid the alienation effect of the Sly frame which would have been inappropriate for the film’s realism. The film stresses the economic attraction Katherine holds for Petruchio, and in his bet at the end of the play, Petruchio is clearly enlarging his dowry.

1978
Michael Bogdanov’s RSC production, with Jonathan Pryce as Petruchio and Paola Dionisotti as Katherina, was truly memorable for some. The production was in modern dress and Jonathan Pryce also played a version of the Sly character, starting the show as a drunken tramp in the stalls. He proceeded to climb on stage and wreck the scenery, while an usherette (Dionisotti) tried to stop him. The scene was so realistic that members of the audience sometimes tried to lend a hand in ejecting him from the theatre! As Petruchio, Pryce made another extraordinary entrance on a motorbike. The production emphasised Petruchio’s maltreatment of Katherine, and because it was staged in modern dress the audience were confronted with the idea that misogynistic attitudes were not ancient history.

1992
The RSC production directed by Bill Alexander, in contrast to the Zeffirelli film, expands the Sly framework and makes it a central focus of the play. The main tension in the production came from the antagonism between the classes of the lords watching the play and the actors performing it for them. Petruchio and Kate’s story was almost pushed into second place.

1999
10 Things I Hate About You is a film remake of Shakespeare’s play. The Stratford sisters: pretty and popular Bianca (Larisa Oleynik), and Kat (Julia Stiles), her ill-tempered older sibling, attend a modern American high school. Strict rules in the Stratford household forbid Bianca from having a boyfriend until her odious sister has one of her own – which is not likely soon as Kat is a social disaster. Bianca's desperation for romance turns into a convoluted scheme to match Kat with her male equivalent—a guy whose reputation is so infamous,
Kat might rise to the challenge. Patrick Verona (Heath Ledger) is bribed by Bianca’s boyfriend-to-be (Andrew Keegan) to woo and win Kat, in order to clear his way to Bianca.

2003

At the newly-reconstructed Shakespeare’s Globe attitudes towards misogyny were given a fresh take when The Taming of the Shrew was played by an all-female cast, directed by Phyllida Lloyd. Like all of the productions at the Globe, the show was lit by daylight and the designer’s main work went into sumptuous recreations of Elizabethan clothing. The female actors portrayed a patriarchal ‘laddish’ culture, with Petruchio, played by Janet McTeer, urinating against one of the stage pillars. In this production Katherine (Kathryn Hunter) was not defeated by Petruchio but clearly chose to humour him and her final ‘submissive’ speech became a thoroughly tongue-in-cheek lecture, which involved her standing on the table, lifting her skirts, clearly embarrassing her nervous husband.

Simon Scardifield and Dugald Bruce-Lockhart as Kate and Petruchio in Propeller’s 2007 production

Far from it being an imposition, it really becomes part of the way the play works and the language works. But with Kate it’s more to do with what happens to her and what she goes through. It’s physically uncompromising and quite brutal. I don’t think you could have done it with a woman – it might have been upsetting for an audience in the wrong way. I love the idea that Shakespeare was writing within a culture that believed that gender can be performed. – Simon Scardifield talking to Time Out magazine about men playing women.
Catherine’s harangue to her sister and the widow on the duty of wives to their husbands, if the ladies would read it with a little regard, it might be of mighty use in this age. **Charles Gildon 1710**

It shows admirably how self will is only to be got the better of by stronger will and how one degree of ridiculous perversity is only to be driven out by another greater still. **William Hazily 1817**

I think no woman should enter a theatre where that play is being performed; and I should not have stayed to witness it myself, but that…I desired to see with my own eyes whether any civilised audience would stand its brutality. Of course it was not Shakespeare: it was only Garrick adulterated by Shakespeare. Instead of Shakespeare’s coarse, thickskinned money hunter, who sets to work to tame his wife exactly as brutal people tame animals or children—that is, by breaking their spirit by domineering cruelty—we had Garrick’s fop who tries to “shut up” his wife by behaving worse than she: a plan which is often tried by foolish and ill-mannered husbands in real life, and one which invariably fails ignominiously, as it deserves to. **George Bernard Shaw, Letter to the Editor, Pall Mall Gazette, 8 June 1888, signed Horatia Robinson**

...the last scene is altogether disgusting to modern sensibility. No man, with any decency of feeling, can sit it out in the company of a woman without being extremely ashamed of the lord-of-creation moral implied in the wager and the speech put into the woman’s own mouth. **George Bernard Shaw 1898**

... the trouble about The Shrew is that, although it reads rather ill in the library, it goes very well on the stage...As for Katherine, only a very dull reader can miss recognising her, under her forward mask, as one of Shakespeare’s women, marriageable and willing to mate; a Beatrice opposing a more repellent barrier, yet behind it willing, even seeking, to surrender. - from his Introduction to The Taming of the Shrew by Arthur Quiller-Couch 1928

It is, of course, possible to present Petruchio as pure bully; but half the gaiety is lost if the minds of feminists in the audience are allowed to wander in the direction of handcuffs and iron railings. There is, moreover, a good humour in some of Petruchio’s railery, a lurking pride in Kate’s spirit ... And under her flame of temper isn’t Katherine herself a little enamoured of this disarming termagant, won against her will by his glib and unblushing recital of her charms ... and the note of real admiration she perhaps senses, with a woman’s acuteness, beneath it? **“Old Vic Drama” by Audrey Williamson (Rockcliff, 1948)**
A more inhuman play, I have always felt, than even Titus Andronicus, since it argues (as nobody in Titus does) that cruelty is good for the victim. **Kenneth Tynan 1960, The Observer**

[Recent] productions have tended to soften (the) humiliating demonstration of man’s mastery over women. By a gesture or a wink or a cynical chirp in the voice, Kate’s final submissive speeches have indicated that her surrenders are merely tactical and that in the long run she will again be the boss. **Evening Standard 1960**

The male part of the audience may decently rejoice, not at seeing a woman beaten down by the superior strength of a man, but at seeing the offensive strength familiar in their wives overwhelmed by a man who can nag back just as unreasonably as a woman. **William Empson 1961**

There is, however, a larger question at stake. It is whether there is any reason to revive a play that is so offensive to our age and society. My own feeling is that it should be put back firmly and squarely on the shelf. **Michael Billington 1978**

**The play shows the possibility of marriage as a rich, shared sanity. David Daniell 1986**

Kate has the uncommon good fortune to find Petruchio, who is man enough to know what he wants and how to get it. **Germaine Greer 1986**

**The Taming of the Shrew is not a play about fifteenth-century Italy ... but about the more subtle sexism of the modern world.** - from “Looking at Shakespeare” by Dennis Kennedy (Cambridge University Press, 1993)

**In a post-feminist era, the jury is still out on The Taming of the Shrew. Margaret Loftus Ramald 1994**
This exercise is really about listening. In Shakespeare’s time, the actors would only be given a cue script which contained their lines and three or four words from the person who spoke just before them. They would learn their words and remember to speak when they heard their cue.

The script did not necessarily tell them directly which character they were talking to or where they were on stage. So, with only a few afternoons’ rehearsal, they had to be alert and directing themselves on stage (there was no director as such) so that the story made sense. This was a great skill and actors (all boys and men) would learn their trade as apprentices from the age of twelve. Here is a scene in which several actors are required yet Petruchio does nearly all the talking. It would have been an excellent training scene for the younger actors in the company.

Use the following cue scripts to perform part of the scene where Petruchio brings his new bride back home. The actors simply say their line when they hear their cues. You will need:

- Petruchio – this part needs someone good at sight-reading and might need preparation – sometimes the teacher should do this
- Katherine
- First servant
- Peter
- Three other servants who don’t have a script.
- A dog (maybe quite a lively one!)
- Some props ready offstage to use as: plates of food, cups, a water jug, Petruchio’s slippers

In this scene, Petruchio is the only person who needs stage directions – everyone else needs to listen and do as he tells them!

Text in bold type is your cue. Italics are for stage directions.

If you don’t have any lines it doesn’t mean you have nothing to do – and if you don’t say your line when you get your cue then the scene stops!

- Now imagine you’re playing one of the servants - it’s your first job, aged twelve, and you have thousands of people watching – and no script! In a way Shakespeare is helping you – all you have to do is listen...
Go, rascals, go, and fetch my supper in.

(Singing)
Where is the life that late I led--
Where are those - Sit down, Kate, and welcome -
Sound, sound, sound, sound, sound!

(Re-enter Servants with supper)
Why, when, I say? Nay, good sweet Kate, be merry.
Off with my boots, you Rogues! you Villains, when?

(Sings)
It was the friar of orders grey,
As he forth walked on his way: -
Out, you rogue! you pluck my foot awry:
Take that, and mend the plucking off the other.

(Strikes him)
Be merry, Kate. Some water, here; what, ho!
Where's my spaniel Troilus? Sirrah, get you hence,
And bid my cousin Ferdinand come hither:
One, Kate, that you must kiss, and be acquainted with.
Where are my slippers? Shall I have some water?
Come, Kate, and wash, and welcome heartily.
You whoreson villain! will you let it fall?

(Strikes him)

... 'twas a fault unwilling.
A whoreson beetle-headed, flap-ear'd knave!
Come, Kate, sit down; I know you have a stomach.
Will you give thanks, sweet Kate; or else shall I?
What's this? mutton?

Ay.

Who brought it?

I.

'Tis burnt; and so is all the meat.
What dogs are these! Where is the rascal cook?
How durst you, villains, bring it from the dresser,
And serve it thus to me that love it not?
There take it to you, trenchers, cups, and all;
You heedless joltheads and unmanner'd slaves!
What, do you grumble? I'll be with you straight.

...you were so contented.
I tell thee, Kate, 'twas burnt and dried away;
And I expressly am forbid to touch it,
For it engenders choler, planteth anger;
And better 'twere that both of us did fast,
Since, of ourselves, ourselves are choleric,
Than feed it with such over-roasted flesh.
Be patient; to-morrow 't shall be mended,
And, for this night, we'll fast for company:
Come, I will bring thee to thy bridal chamber.
...will you let it fall?

Patience, I pray you; 'twas a fault unwilling.

... I'll be with you straight.

I pray you, husband, be not so disquiet:
The meat was well, if you were so contented.
...What's this? mutton?

Ay.
...Who brought it?

I.
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;
And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
And not obedient to his honest will,
What is she but a foul contending rebel
And graceless traitor to her loving lord?
I am ashamed that women are so simple
To offer war where they should kneel for peace;
Or seek for rule, supremacy and sway,
When they are bound to serve, love and obey.

Why are our bodies soft and weak and smooth,
Unapt to toil and trouble in the world,
But that our soft conditions and our hearts
Should well agree with our external parts?
Come, come, you froward and unable worms!
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;
But now I see our lances are but straws,
Our strength as weak, our weakness past compare,
That seeming to be most which we indeed least are.
Then vail your stomachs, for it is no boot,
And place your hands below your husband’s foot:
In token of which duty, if he please,
My hand is ready; may it do him ease.

How much has Katherine changed? Look at the several ways she is described in the play:

curst - too rough - a shrew - a most impatient devilish spirit - waspish – bonny - stark
mad - rough, coy and sullen - devil - the devil’s dam - famous for a scolding tongue -
renowned in Padua for her scolding tongue - Katherine the curst - a raging fire -
intolerable curst – an irksome brawling scold - wildcat - shrewd and froward beyond all
measure
Attitudes towards Women in Shakespeare’s Time

- There was no effective birth control so it was pretty much impossible for married women to work full time outside the home. Married women of child-bearing age could expect to have, on average, a baby every two years. Within marriage, husband and wife both worked extremely hard, and both had clearly defined roles. The wife’s role was to look after children and the husband’s role was to work outside the home.

- Only boys went to school. Daughters of rich families might be educated at home by a private tutor and could receive very good educations. Girls were not, however, allowed to go to university.

- Women were not allowed to be doctors or lawyers or join the armed forces. They were not allowed to act upon the stage. They often worked as cooks or domestic servants.

- Women could not inherit their father’s titles – with the exception of a queen. They could, however inherit property, but usually the bulk of any inheritance would go to any brothers first.

- Men were seen to be the head of a marriage, and had the legal right to chastise their wives. Wives were expected to obey their husbands, but that did not mean that all marriages were abusive, and men could be punished by law for being cruel to their wives.

- Marriage was seen as the proper route for a woman (despite the unmarried queen!) and unmarried older women could be regarded with suspicion. They were the most likely candidates to be accused of witchcraft.

She was no sooner made but straightaway her mind was set upon mischief, for by her aspiring mind and wanton will she quickly procur’d man’s fall. And therefore ever since they are and have been a woe unto man...

There are sixe kinds of women which thou shouldest take heed that thou match not thy selfe to any one of them; that is to say, good nor bad, faire nor foule, rich nor poore...For if a woman be never so rich in dowry, happy by her good name, beautifull of body, sober of countenance, eloquent in speech, and adorned with vertue, yet they have one ill quality or other, which overthroweth all the other: like unto that Cow which giveth great store of milke, and presently striketh it down with her foote, such a cow is as much to be blamed for the losse, as she be commended for the gift...

Joseph Swetnam, The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Women, 1615