

## The Taming of the Shrew (Summer 2006)

W. H. Auden proclaimed *The Taming of the Shrew* to be “the only play of Shakespeare’s that is a complete failure,” a position he supports with a sophisticated argument about “the nature of farce” [63]. More likely, Auden just didn’t care enough about Kate and Petruchio—the “curst shrew” and her self-appointed tamer—to cheer on their unorthodox courtship and marriage. Petruchio subjects Kate to hunger, sleep deprivation, and an inexhaustible barrage of contradictions; meanwhile, Kate is Shakespeare’s most violent heroine not named Macbeth—in the course of a single scene she binds and beats her sister, strikes (and probably hurls a stool at) one suitor, and bashes another suitor over the head with a lute. Yet *Shrew*’s continued popularity suggests that most audience members and actors set aside such objections, instead preferring to lose themselves in one of the happiest love stories Shakespeare wrote.

The key lies in Shakespeare’s ability to make us admire—even ourselves fall hard for—his two brawling leads, who in spite of their bad behavior remain the most decent characters in the play. Which means that any honest discussion of *The Taming of the Shrew* must begin with them:

### **Kate and Petruchio**

The best way to appreciate where these lovers end up is to trace the journey from where they started. Kate enters first, alongside her father, Baptista, and younger sister, Bianca. The play’s title notwithstanding, we should resist prejudging Kate. Her critics are clichés, drawn from romantic comedies through the ages: the foolish suitors easily mocked and thwarted:

*Baptista:* Gentlemen, importune me no further,  
For how I firmly am resolved you know.

That is, not to bestow my youngest daughter  
 Before I have a husband for the elder.  
 If either of you both love Katherina,  
 Because I know you well and love you well,  
 Leave shall you have to court her at your pleasure.  
*Gremio*: To cart her rather, she's too rough for me.  
 There, there, Hortensio, will you any wife?  
*Kate*: I pray you, sir, is it your will  
 To make a stale of me amongst these mates?  
*Hortensio*: "Mates," maid, how mean you that? No mates for you  
 Unless you were of gentler, milder mold.  
*Kate*: I'faith, sir, you shall never need to fear:  
 Iwis it is not halfway to her heart.  
 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.

[I.i.48–65]

Given her cloddish targets, Kate's wit is more blunt than sharp. (She'll have a more fearsome adversary soon enough.) Nevertheless, it sets her apart from everyone else onstage (including the dull Lucentio of Pisa, "renowned for grave citizens" [I.i.10], and his servant Tranio, who for the moment at least is subdued). In truth, Kate is more perceptive than witty. Her next scene gives her further occasion to vent against her father, who makes no secret of preferring the (outwardly) mild and obedient Bianca:

*Baptista*: Why dost thou wrong her that did ne'er wrong thee?  
 When did she cross thee with a bitter word?

*Kate*: Her silence flouts me and I'll be revenged.

*Flies after Bianca.*

*Baptista*: What, in my sight? Bianca, get thee in.

*Exit [Bianca].*

*Kate*: Will you not suffer me? Nay, now I see  
 She is your treasure, she must have a husband;  
 I must dance barefoot on her wedding day,  
 And for your love to her lead apes in hell.  
 Talk not to me, I will go sit and weep  
 Till I can find occasion of revenge.

[II.i.30–6]

Modern audiences cannot hear these lines through Elizabethan ears. Whatever Shakespeare's audiences heard—an isolated, frightened young woman or a shrew in need of taming—we want to believe Shakespeare sympathized with his heroine. After all, Shakespearean women guide us through comedy after comedy (even a few tragedies), patiently, compassionately teaching men what it means to truly love. This is the crux of *The Taming of the Shrew*, which, if we are to believe Auden, is a failed farce precisely because its protagonists have too many dimensions.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. For now let us say that Shakespeare sufficiently justifies Kate's tantrums. We cannot say this for Petruchio, who blusters into Padua "to wive and thrive as best I may" [I.ii.55], but apparently not to suffer foolish servants. As Petruchio stands outside the door of his "best beloved and approved friend," Hortensio [I.ii.3] (a truly inexplicable pairing), he orders his servant, Grumio, to announce their arrival by knocking. Like any self-respecting Shakespearean clown, Grumio stretches the obvious pun to the groaning point:

*Grumio:* Knock, sir? Whom should I knock? Is there any man has  
reused your worship?

*Petruchio:* Villain, I say, knock me here soundly.

*Grumio:* Knock you here, sir? Why, sir, what am I, sir, that I should  
knock you here, sir?

*Petruchio:* Villain, I say, knock me at this gate,  
And rap me well or I'll knock your knave's pate.

*Grumio:* My master is grown quarrelsome. I should knock you first,  
And then I know after who comes by the worst.

*Petruchio:* Will it not be?  
Faith, sirrah, an you'll not knock, I'll ring it.  
I'll try how you can sol, fa, and sing it.

*He wrings him by the ears.*  
[I.ii.6–17]

Petruchio's indignant "Will it not be" anticipates his later demands, to Kate, that "It shall be seven ere I go to horse" [IV.iii.188] and "It shall be moon or star or what I

list, / Or e'er I journey to your father's house" [IV.v.7–8]. This brief exchange with Grumio establishes that Petruchio hates to be crossed, even in jest. Yet it reveals something even more striking about the man who soon shall be trading barbs with "Katherine the curst": He can be surprisingly—even dangerously—humorless. His peculiar gift is not wit but hyperbole, in which respect he stands unmatched in early Shakespeare. Petruchio will marry a rich girl, "Be she as foul as was Florentius' love, / As old as Sibyl, and as curst and shrewd / As Socrates' Xanthippe, or a worse" [I.ii.68–70]; when Hortensio explains that Kate is not only rich but also "young and beauteous" [I.ii.85], Petruchio exclaims, "I will board her though she chide as loud / As thunder when the clouds in autumn crack" [I.ii.94–5]. Listening to him rebuke those who remain skeptical, one does not laugh so much as gape at the excess:

Have I not in my time heard lions roar?  
 Have I not heard the sea, puffed up with winds,  
 Rage like an angry boar chafed with sweat?  
 Have I not heard great ordnance in the field  
 And heaven's artillery thunder in the skies?  
 Have I not in a pitched battle heard  
 Loud 'larums, neighing steeds, and trumpets clang?  
 And do you tell me of a woman's tongue,  
 That gives not half so great a blow to th' ear  
 As will a chestnut in a farmer's fire?

[I.ii.198–207]

Petruchio is almost certainly lying; earlier in the scene he confessed to Hortensio that, his father having recently died, he has only now "come abroad to see the world" [I.ii.57]. Yet what does it matter if he tells one lie or one million? As will be demonstrated time and again, reality is what Petruchio says. Few men in Shakespeare rule so confidently and completely.

### The Wooing Scene

Recall how Kate answers when her father asks why she torments sweet Bianca: “Her silence flouts me and I’ll be revenged” [II.i.29]. Silence is Kate’s tormenter—she needs a partner to love, yes, but also to spar with. Because no one in Padua can match her intellectually, Kate asserts herself physically, though she continues to seek openings for conversation. “Of all thy suitors, . . . tell / Whom thou lov’st best,” she demands of Bianca [II.i.8–9]. Shakespearean ladies have great fun cataloguing foolish suitors in both *The Two Gentleman of Verona* and *The Merchant of Venice*, but all Bianca can offer is a lame evasion: “Believe me, sister, of all the men alive / I never yet beheld that special face / Which I could fancy more than any other” [II.i.10–12].

No wonder, then, that Petruchio’s unexpected intrusion strikes such mutual sparks (however loath Kate is to admit it). Her wit powers their first scene together; though Petruchio shall get the last word, he sometimes seems a step behind Kate, who for the first time in her life is able to fully exercise her tongue. “I knew you at the first,” she boasts, “You were a movable,” and his reply (“Why, what’s a movable?”) suggests he plans to play straight man to her humor [II.i.197–200]. Kate’s comeback, “A joint stool,” is a cue to Petruchios everywhere to duck—and proof she has no interest in such a one-sided dynamic. He does better in the lines that follow, introducing or sustaining puns on such loaded words as “asses,” “bear,” and “burden,” though a few still sound like feeble contributions to the scene. (*Kate*: “Too light for such a swain as you to catch, / And yet as heavy as my weight should be.” *Petruchio*: “Should be? should — buzz!” [II.i.207-9]) Perhaps he is merely stalling for time as Kate charges tirelessly at him—he seems to completely lose his footing in the following pass:

*Kate:* What is your crest, a coxcomb?

*Petruchio:* A combless cock, so Kate will be my hen.

*Kate:* No cock of mine, you crow too like a craven.

*Petruchio:* Nay, come, Kate, come, you must not look so sour.

*Kate:* It is my fashion when I see a crab.

*Petruchio:* Why, here's no crab, and therefore look not sour.

*Kate:* There is, there is.

*Petruchio:* Then show it me.

*Kate:* Had I a glass I would.

*Petruchio:* What, you mean my face?

[II.i.229–37]

If he is allowing her here to best him, as part of the “taming” process, he is abandoning the strategy he uses everywhere else. More likely, he has begun to realize he cannot outwit Kate; his best tactic, then, is not to pause for breath long enough for her to chime in. Kate also seems to realize this. Her line “I chafe you if I tarry; let me go” [II.i.242] suggests the only thing preventing her from exiting is Petruchio’s firm grip. Before she can counterattack, he bursts into an overstuffed speech [II.i.243–57] that completely changes the balance of both the scene and their relationship. Whereas previously Petruchio and Kate had more or less alternated lines, from this point on he dominates, speaking 30 of their remaining 34 lines together and continuing in this manner when Baptista enters with his entourage. “Father, ’tis thus,” Petruchio announces, “. . . we have ’greed so well together / That upon Sunday is the wedding day” [II.i.291–8], and though Kate murderously objects—“I’ll see thee hanged on Sunday first” [II.i.298–300]—by the time Petruchio concludes with a splendid couplet (“We will have rings and things and fine array, / And kiss me, Kate, ‘We will be married a Sunday’” [II.i.324–5]), she is speechless. Literally—for the first time in the play Shakespeare does not give her an exit line, though this needn’t prevent actresses from screaming incoherently as they stomp offstage.

For all that, we should not assume Kate has no interest in Petruchio, nor even that she does not wish to marry him. After all, Sunday dawns to find her in a wedding dress, the obedient daughter fulfilling her father's wishes. (It is Bianca who shall elope with an unapproved suitor.) A careful reading of the wooing scene suggests it is more than obedience that sends Kate to the altar. I think we may safely assume that for some time Paduans have uttered Kate's name mainly to curse it, or else to contrast her blemishes with Bianca's spotless reputation. (The name *Bianca* literally means "white.") Yet Petruchio praises "Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom" [II.i.188]; in the wooing scene alone he speaks her name more than 30 times, nearly always with affection and only once in relation to Bianca. Kate's initial reply to this barrage is telling: "They call me Katherine that do talk of me" [II.i.185]. Petruchio ignores this, of course (he says "Katherine" mainly when the blank verse compels him to), but the line suggests she is open to courtship so long as she has a say in the terms.

One more brief point. When Petruchio protests "Why, here's no crab, and therefore look not sour," Kate counters with "There is, there is" [II.i.234–5]. Perhaps I am reading too much into the moment, but I hear in Kate's repetition the tone of someone having fun, as one might call "Come out, come out!" in a game of hide-and-seek. As we shall see, this sense of fun—the pleasure of joining Petruchio in his proffered world of play—is crucial to their relationship. It is what underscores her exit line, "Would Katherine had never seen him though" [III.ii.26], when she fears he has stood her up on their wedding day. Few possibilities are more agonizing than that something good may be lost forever. Better not to have had it at all.

### The Taming Scenes

From here events proceed straightforwardly—if one may consider torture in the service of tranquility straightforward. Shakespeare skirts around this pitfall by keeping the suffering safely offstage; we hear of it through clowns such as Gremio and Grumio. How Petruchio “took the bride about the neck / And kissed her lips with such a clamorous smack / That at the parting all the church did echo” [III.ii.175–7]. How, returning home with Kate after the wedding,

. . . her horse fell, and she under her horse; thou shouldst have heard in how miry a place; how she was bemoiled, how he left her with the horse upon her, how he beat me because her horse stumbled, how she waded through the dirt to pluck him off me; how he swore, how she prayed, that never prayed before; how I cried, how the horses ran away, how her bridle was burst; how I lost my crupper—with many things of worthy memory, which now shall die in oblivion, and thou return unexperienced to thy grave.  
[IV.i.65–75]

By casually dismissing his own humiliation, Grumio encourages us to do likewise. We focus instead on what Shakespeare permits us to see, an explosion of zaniness culminating in Petruchio’s outrageous dismissals of the tailor and haberdasher he has hired to clothe Kate in the latest fashions. (He pays them after they have endured his exaggerated wrath.) As he rejects each item—never mind all was made to his specifications—Petruchio treats us to a series of inspired tantrums. A dainty hat is “lewd and filthy. / Why, ’tis a cockle or a walnut shell, / A knack, a toy, a trick, a baby’s cap” [IV.iii.64–7]. An ornately trimmed gown is “like a demicannon”:

What, up and down carved like an apple tart?  
Here’s snip and nip and cut and slish and slash,  
Like to a censer in a barber’s shop.  
Why, what a devil’s name, tailor, call’st thou this?

[IV.iii.88–92]

When the tailor—supported by Kate—dares to defend his work, Petruchio completes the wall between his reality and everyone else’s. We are too busy gaping to concern ourselves with the apparent unraveling of his sanity:

O monstrous arrogance!  
 Thou liest, thou thread, thou thimble,  
 Thou yard, three-quarters, half-yard, quarter, nail!  
 Thou flea, thou nit, thou winter cricket thou!  
 Braved in mine own house with a skein of thread?  
 Away, thou rag, thou quantity, thou remnant,  
 Or I shall so bemetee thee with thy yard  
 As thou shalt think on prating whist thou liv’st.

[IV.iii.106–13]

Then without warning a switch is flipped and he is all smiles, promising to give Kate what she has doubtlessly been praying for since this “honeymoon” began: a return-trip home to Padua. Nearly lost in Petruchio’s moralizing (“Our purses shall be proud, our garments poor” [IV.iii.168]) is a simple request that, once properly understood, gives Kate the tools to reshape their relationship. Acknowledging their shabby clothing, he instructs her: “If thou account’st it shame, lay it on me. / And therefore frolic” [IV.iii.178–9].

From this point on, Petruchio does not lose—nor even feign to lose—his temper. Instead, he invites Kate to be his accomplice, rather than audience, in a far more satisfying form of playacting. En route to Padua, as Petruchio insists the sun is the moon is the sun once again, Kate agrees just to keep him moving. Then an old man enters—it is Lucentio’s father, Vincentio—and we witness a marvelous transformation. The resulting scene is one of the most delightful in the play:

*Petruchio:* Well, forward, forward! Thus the bowl should run,  
 And not unluckily against the bias.  
 But soft, what company is coming here?

*Enter Vincentio.*

Good morrow, gentle mistress, where away?  
 Tell me, sweet Kate, and tell me truly too,  
 Hast thou beheld a fresher gentlewoman?  
 Such war of white and red within her cheeks!  
 What stars do spangle heaven with such beauty  
 As those two eyes become that heavenly face?  
 Fair lovely maid, once more good day to thee.  
 Sweet Kate, embrace her for her beauty's sake.

*Hortensio*: A will make the man mad, to make a woman of him.

*Kate*: Young budding virgin, fair and fresh and sweet,  
 Whither away, or where is thy abode?  
 Happy the parents of so fair a child,  
 Happier the man whom favorable stars  
 Allots thee for his lovely bedfellow.

*Petruchio*: Why, how now, Kate, I hope thou art not mad.  
 This is a man, old, wrinkled, faded, withered,  
 And not a maiden, as thou sayst he is.

*Kate*: Pardon, old father, my mistaking eyes  
 That have been so bedazzled with the sun  
 That everything I look on seemeth green.  
 Now I perceive thou art a reverend father.  
 Pardon, I pray thee, for my mad mistaking.

[IV.v.24–48]

These are not the words of someone pretending because she has no other choice.

Kate is *good* at this game, and she plays her part with a flair not lost on her attentive

husband. Even Vincentio is charmed; he calls her not “curst” but “merry mistress”

[IV.v.52], and gladly accepts Petruchio’s offer to travel together to Padua. There,

Vincentio forces his son to untangle the subplot, and Kate and Petruchio—once the center

of attention—are now spectators at the true farce, the engagement of Bianca:

*Kate*: Husband, let’s follow, to see the end of this ado.

*Petruchio*: First kiss me, Kate, and we will.

*Kate*: What, in the midst of the street?

*Petruchio*: What, art thou ashamed of me?

*Kate*: No sir, God forbid, but ashamed to kiss.

*Petruchio*: Why, then let’s home again. Come, sirrah, let’s away.

*Kate*: 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’s too late.

[V.i.132–41]

Harold Bloom calls these lines the “subtly exquisite music of marriage at its happiest” [33]. This seems excessive, though not by much. I hear a young man and woman realizing they can be happy together.

Which brings us, at last, to Kate’s (in)famous speech that concludes the play. “Fie, fie, unknit that threat’ning unkind brow / And dart not scornful glances from those eyes / To wound thy lord, thy king, thy governor” [V.ii.142–4], she admonishes her sister, now Signora Lucentio, along with an unnamed widow who has married Hortensio. Bianca and the widow have ignored their new husbands’ requests to come to dinner. Kate can no longer brook such disobedience:

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 labor 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. . . .

[152–60]

I shall not quote the entire speech, which runs 44 lines, though I’m not sure how much we really hear today—we’re too busy wondering if Kate really means it. More troublingly, does *Shakespeare* mean it? Lines like “Such duty as the subject owes the prince, / Even such a woman oweth to her husband” [V.ii.161–2] send us scrambling for ironies that might save Shakespeare from charges of misogyny. Yet why should we think this speech is any less a performance than Kate’s “mistaking” Vincentio’s age and gender? No one worries whether Kate believes an old man is a “budding virgin.”

“I am ashamed that women are so simple / To offer war where they should kneel for peace” [V.ii.167–8], Kate proclaims, and in hindsight her tactics earlier in the play do

seem simple—because disastrously ineffective. She continues, “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” [V.ii.176–80]. We may want her to seem stronger, but Kate has achieved far more through “weak” compliance, and besides, why should she concern herself with our wishes? Her speech is for Petruchio alone, to confirm once and for all their complicity in braving a world that cannot understand them, not when its norms are Bianca and Lucentio, Hortensio and Gremio. The greatest irony is that Kate finally puts Bianca in her place—and the widow, who has proved cruel, and indeed everyone onstage who continues to call her “curst shrew”—by playing the role she has been instructed all along to play.

What I think most frustrates us, more than Kate’s subtext, is Shakespeare’s refusal to show even a glimpse of the lovers in private. (The brief scene in which Petruchio asks for a kiss happens, to Kate’s initial discomfort, in a public street.) A truly private scene would answer so many questions. It would also be a terrible violation. Lovers do not owe anyone proof of how or why or whether their relationship works. Strangely, here our paths merge with Christopher Sly’s.

### **The Induction**

It can be easy to forget *The Taming of the Shrew* begins not with Kate and Petruchio—nor even with Lucentio, proclaiming his noble intention to study—but with a con. A drunken tinker named Christopher Sly is tricked into believing he is in fact a great nobleman. Eventually the tricksters—led by an unnamed Lord—have the bewildered Sly watch a play about the taming of a shrewish wife. After one scene Sly is dozing, and

Shakespeare drops the whole device. However, an anonymous play called *The Taming of a Shrew*—written about the same time as Shakespeare’s—includes the epilogue we might expect, with Sly racing home to “tame” his own wife in the Petruchian manner:

*Sly:* . . . I have had  
 The bravest dreame to night, that ever thou  
 Hardest in all thy life.  
*Tapster:* I marry but you had best get you home,  
 For your wife will course you for dreaming here to night,  
*Sly:* Will she? I know now how to tame a shrew,  
 I dreamt upon it all this night till now,  
 And thou hast wakt me out of the best dreame  
 That ever I had in my life, but Ile to my  
 Wife presently and tame her too  
 And if she anger me.<sup>1</sup>

Inelegant stuff, but the message is clear: Sly has interpreted the tale of Kate and Petruchio as a primer on wife-taming—though one suspects he shall not find his own wife so pliable. The Sly scenes thus become a crude joke highlighting the absurdity of the “real” play. Shakespeare, preferring to end with Kate and Petruchio’s shared triumph, omitted any such epilogue. But then why bother with Sly at all? We might reasonably draw parallels between Sly and Kate or Sly and Petruchio, but for me, the tinker’s true double is Hortensio.

Why is Hortensio in *The Taming of the Shrew*, if not to be on the receiving end of a lute? Following Kate and Petruchio’s wedding, Hortensio journeys to their home in the country. “Faith, he is gone unto the taming school,” Tranio tells Lucentio and Bianca. “Petruchio is the master, / That teacheth tricks eleven and twenty long / To tame a shrew and charm her chattering tongue” [IV.ii.54–8]. Upon arriving at “school,” Hortensio provides commentary on Petruchio’s methods. At first he is skeptical. Withholding a new

---

<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from The Arden Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* [305], edited by Brian Morris. (London: Thomson Learning, 2003. Print.)

hat, Petruchio admonishes Kate, “When you are gentle you shall have one too, / And not till then,” to which Hortensio replies (most likely as an aside), “That will not be in haste” [IV.iii.71–2]. Skepticism progresses to amusement and finally wonder. “I see she’s like to have neither cap nor gown” [IV.iii.93], Hortensio murmurs after Petruchio critiques Kate’s new dress; later, when Petruchio insists on departing at seven o’clock (regardless of the factual time), Hortensio exclaims, “Why, so this gallant will command the sun” [IV.iii.193].

Yet when the party finally sets out for Padua, Hortensio too has learned the rules. “Say as he says or we shall never go” [IV.v.11], he urges Kate after Petruchio halts the procession to re-argue the time of day. Kate must be thinking the same thing, for she accedes to her husband’s whim. The enchanting encounter with Vincentio follows apace, and Hortensio’s conversion is complete:

Well, Petruchio, this has put me in heart.  
Have to my widow, and if she be froward,  
Then hast thou taught Hortensio to be untoward.

[IV.v.76–8]

Unsurprisingly, Hortensio’s execution proves as clumsy as his meter—he loses his battle with the widow immediately, exhibiting none of the bravado required of a Petruchian wife-tamer. The master sits nearby, thoroughly enjoying himself:

*Petruchio:* Nothing but sit and sit, and eat and eat!

*Baptista:* Padua affords this kindness, son Petruchio.

*Petruchio:* Padua affords nothing but what is kind.

*Hortensio:* For both our sakes I would that word were true.

*Petruchio:* Now, for my life, Hortensio fears his widow.

*Widow:* Then never trust me if I be afeard.

*Petruchio:* You are very sensible, and yet you miss my sense:

I mean Hortensio is afeard of you.

*Widow:* He that is giddy thinks the world turns round.

*Petruchio:* Roundly replied.

*Kate:* Mistress, how mean you that?

*Widow:* Thus I conceive by him.

*Petruchio:* Conceive by me? How likes Hortensio that?

[V.ii.12–23]

Their banter is but prologue to the climax, when both Hortensio and Lucentio are embarrassed by their wives while Petruchio is vindicated by his. The shock of the widow's refusal to obey shatters Hortensio's faith in Petruchio:

*Petruchio:* Sirrah Grumio, go to your mistress,

Say I command her come to me.

*Hortensio:* I know her answer.

*Petruchio:* What?

*Hortensio:* She will not.

[V.ii.99–103]

But of course Kate enters on cue, dragging behind her Bianca and the widow. Kate delivers her speech and the happy couple departs for the marriage bed, leaving the rest of the party to figure out what has happened. The final lines do not suggest Hortensio will be much help—like Horatio after him, he has seen much but understood little:

*Petruchio:* Come, Kate, we'll to bed.

We three are married, but you two are sped.

'Twas I won the wager, though you hit the white,

And being a winner, God give you good night.

*Exit Petruchio [with Kate].*

*Hortensio:* Now, go thy ways, thou hast tamed a curst shrew.

*Lucentio:* 'Tis a wonder, by your leave, she will be tamed so.

[V.ii.190–5]

Then again, we are all on the outside with Hortensio, peering in at the most insulated—and, not coincidentally, happiest—marriage in Shakespeare. *We* are Christopher Sly's doubles, and if we are foolish enough to mistake the performance of marriage for the reality, we deserve our humiliation. The partial frame of the induction and the inscrutable ending are pieces of the same puzzle; in a way, so is every Shakespearean love story. In play after play, love is at best comically messy, at worst

cosmically ruinous. How interesting that the one time Shakespeare permits things to work out exactly right, between lovers so obviously perfect for each other, is the one time he explicitly tells us it's only a play.

### Works Cited

- Auden, W. H. *Lectures on Shakespeare*. Ed. Arthur Kirsch. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. Print.
- Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Taming of the Shrew*. Ed. Stephen Orgel. New York: Penguin Books, 2000. Print.