

The Taming of the Shrew

Schools' synopsis by Rebecca Lenkiewicz

Katherina to Petruchio:
'Belike you mean to make a puppet of me.'

The Taming of the Shrew is a play about the battle of the sexes. It is all about man versus woman.

Christopher Sly drinks too much. He is chucked out of an alehouse for smashing glasses. He falls into a drunken stupor. A Lord and his huntsman see Sly and decide to play a trick on him. They drag him back to the Lord's house. When Sly wakes they pretend that he himself is a Lord and that he has been in a fevered state in bed for the past fifteen years. They dress up a page boy as Sly's wife. An acting troupe arrive and put on a play for him which is *The Taming of the Shrew*.

The action takes place in Padua, Italy. Hortensio is a gold digger, Gremio is old and rich and Lucentio is new in town. All three men want to marry Bianca who is beautiful and graceful. But her father Baptista Minola won't let anyone marry Bianca until someone marries her elder sister Katherina or 'Kate'. Known as a 'shrew' Kate is moody, fiery and has no desire to marry.

Petruchio arrives in town and visits his good friend Hortensio. Petruchio's father has died and he is determined to marry any woman who is rich. He doesn't care how old she is or what she looks like. He is told of Kate and her fortune. Petruchio vows that he will marry her despite her reputation for "her scolding tongue." He wants her fortune and the challenge of catching and taming her appeals to him.

At the Minolas' house Kate has tied her sister Bianca up and is making her cry with her vicious behaviour. Their father frees Bianca from Kate's bullying grasp. Kate accuses her father of loving Bianca more than he loves her. Kate is enraged that she will have to marry anyone who comes along just so that Bianca can have her dream wedding. She shouts at her father:

'I must dance bare-foot on her wedding day / And for your love to her lead apes in hell.'

Petruchio meets Baptista Minola who warns him that wooing his daughter Kate will be difficult. Petruchio assures him he is up to it. Meanwhile Hortensio poses as a music tutor and goes in to teach both Kate and Bianca. The class does not last long, Kate swiftly smashes an instrument over Hortensio's head. Petruchio finds this encouraging: 'It is a lusty wench; / I love her ten times more than ever I did.'

Kate is brought to Petruchio. They have a fierce battle of words. He calls her a wasp. She replies:

'If I be waspish, best beware my sting.'

Kate hits Petruchio who shouts:
'I swear I'll cuff you Katherina if you strike me again.'

Kate calls him 'one half lunatic'. He tells her they will marry on Sunday and she absolutely refuses and leaves.

Both Hortensio and now Lucentio pretend to teach Bianca whilst they are really just desperate to spend time with her. Lucentio's servant Tranio pretends that he is Lucentio's master.

The wedding day arrives. Kate waits for Petruchio but he is very late. Kate fears that he is going to stand her up on her wedding day. She feels abandoned and livid and hurt. But then Petruchio arrives. He is dressed like a tramp and rides an old horse and is everything that is the opposite of romantic. Kate is humiliated but he insists that love is not about clothes or image. They marry and then Kate tries to take Petruchio to the wedding feast but he refuses. He won't let her go to it either. Instead he drags her back to his home.

Once they are in his house he starves her of food. He says she must become gentle and obedient before he will feed her. He lets her try on clothes but then he says he won't buy them for her. He even tries to convince her she might be a bit mad by telling her the sun is the moon and the moon is the sun. He tells Kate that she must agree with him in absolutely everything. They travel to Padua to see her friends and family. Petruchio asks her for a kiss in the street and she does not object.

Tranio persuades a visiting schoolteacher to pretend that he is Lucentio's father Vicentio. He will assure Bianca's father of Lucentio's wealth. Now the real Vicentio turns up. But Lucentio and Bianca still get married and are very happy. Hortensio marries a wealthy widow.

Petruchio and Kate come back to town. Petruchio, Hortensio and Lucentio have a bet on whose wife is the most obedient and wager a hundred crowns on it. Kate wins the contest and everyone sees that she is a changed woman. Kate lectures the other wives on obedience. And so the Shrew is tamed...