



The Taming of the Shrew

The Atlanta Shakespeare Company

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Artistic Director's Note

The genius of Shakespeare was that he crafted stories that fell well within the bounds of what the censors would allow, i.e. stories very much in keeping with the official propaganda of his Queen's government, yet he populated these stories with characters that lived well beyond such limitations.

And so it is with *The Taming of the Shrew*. From my perspective, Kate and Petruchio are two extraordinary individuals, neither of whom have any chance of true happiness within the cultural norms of the society they inhabit. But in each other, they find their soul-mate and perhaps more to the point, they find their equal. In their first encounter, it's imperative that they recognize this in each other. The journey of the play is thus the story of how they navigate the conventions, stereotypes, and limitations of the world of the play and turn them to their own mutual benefit.

There's a line in the play that I have cut in previous productions because I did not understand it. It's after Katherina comes to her husband and is sent to fetch her sister and the Widow. Hortensio says "I wonder what it bodes" to which Petruchio replies: "Marry, peace it bodes, and love, and quiet life, an awful rule and right supremacy . . ."

Obviously, if Petruchio is speaking of his own "awful rule and right supremacy" the line is offensive to the modern sensibility. But if the line is spoken with Love itself being the implied subject, then Petruchio predicts marital bliss predicated on both partners being ruled by their mutual Love for one another.

Can the line be interpreted the other way? Of course it can. *The Taming of the Shrew* has often been—and will one day again—be a tale of misogynistic toxic masculinity and domination.

But it will never be that at the Shakespeare Tavern Playhouse!

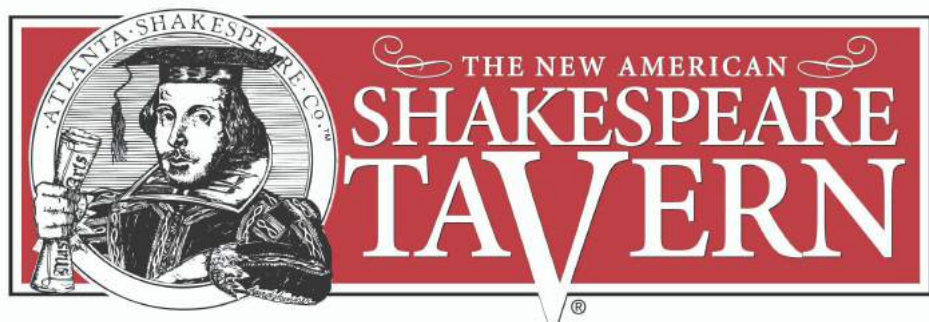




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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare (1564-1616) wrote thirty-seven plays, which have become staples of classrooms and theatre performances across the world.

The son of a glove-maker, Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, where he received a strong education in Latin and rhetoric at the local school. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, and they had three children: Susanna, Hamnet, and Judith.

By 1592, Shakespeare had journeyed to London, where he became an extremely successful playwright and actor in the Lord Chamberlain's Men. He profited from being a shareholder in the Globe after its construction in 1599.

Shakespeare's plays were popular with all types of people, including the two monarchs who ruled England during his lifetime: Elizabeth I (1533-1603) and James I (1566-1625).

Shakespeare found both artistic and commercial success through his writing. He amassed a sizable fortune, acquired valuable real estate in Stratford, and purchased a coat of arms, which gave him and his father the right to be called gentlemen. Shakespeare was well-known in England at the time of his death in 1616, and his fame only increased following the publication of his plays in The First Folio in 1623.

2016 was the four hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death, and celebrations honoring Shakespeare's contribution to literature took place around the world.

“He was not of an age, but for all time.”
- Ben Jonson on Shakespeare

Shakespeare: Did You Know?

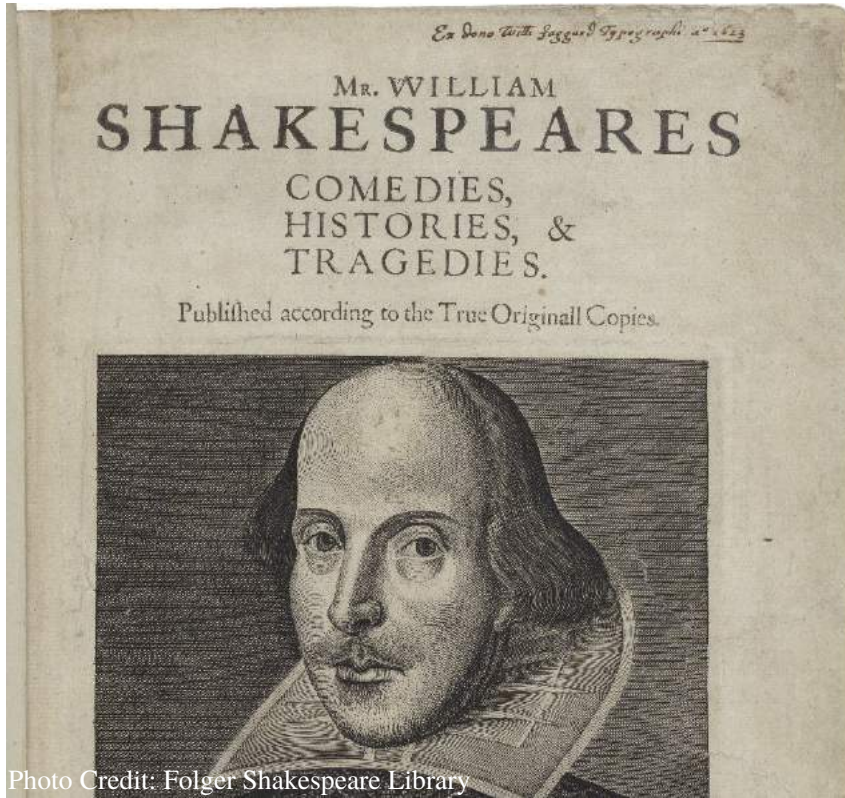


Photo Credit: Folger Shakespeare Library

Shakespeare's Reception and Legacy

While Shakespeare enjoyed great popularity in his time, he did not escape some criticism. Robert Greene, a jealous contemporary writer, warned Shakespeare's fellow playwrights, Thomas Nashe, George Peele, and Christopher Marlowe, that Shakespeare "supposes he is well able to bombast out blank verse as the best of you; and...is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in the country" (Dunton-Downer 11). While Shakespeare received some criticism in the following centuries for the inconsistent quality of his plays, most critics have looked on Shakespeare very favorably. Similarly, while his popularity has risen and fallen over the years, Shakespeare has been predominantly popular and well-loved by readers. Shakespeare was so popular in certain eras like the Victorian era that critics came up with the word *bardolatry* to describe intense admiration of Shakespeare. Shakespeare is proving very popular in modern times as well. His plays are performed across the world and they have been adapted into successful films and television series.

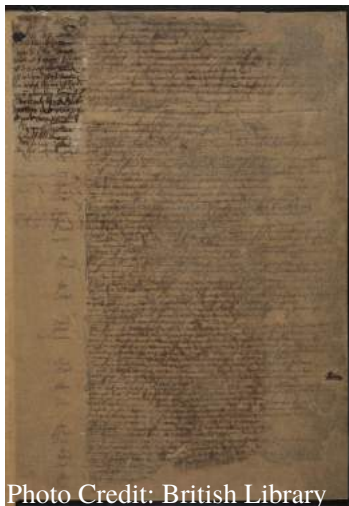


Photo Credit: British Library



Photo Credit: Samantha Smith

**Shakespeare penned
884,647 words and
118,406 lines.**

Did Shakespeare write his own plays?

Yes. Over the years, people have made arguments that Shakespeare's plays were actually written by Sir Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe, and Edward de Vere. However, scholars firmly believe that Shakespeare wrote his own plays, citing at least fifty references in Elizabethan and Jacobean texts that connect Shakespeare to his plays. Scholars also cite the fact that the actors John Hemminge and Henry Condell, who put together the First Folio, and Ben Jonson, a contemporary playwright who wrote the dedication of the First Folio, all credit Shakespeare with authorship of his own plays.

Did Shakespeare get along with his wife?

Probably, but we'll never know for sure. Shakespeare spent a lot of time away from his wife, Anne, but that was because he needed to spend time in London to build his career. In his will, Shakespeare left Anne the family's "second best bed" ("Shakespeare FAQ"), but he was not snubbing his wife because that bed would have been the one that he and Anne shared.

Shakespeare's Handwriting Shakespeare's Last Wish

The only record that we have of Shakespeare's handwriting is a play script of *Sir Thomas More* (above), which Shakespeare helped revise in 1603. Shakespeare added at least 147 lines to the play. His handwriting was not necessarily bad but it is hard to decipher for modern-day readers who are not experts in Elizabethan *paleography*, the study of old handwriting.

Shakespeare was buried in 1616 at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford. His grave reads "Good friend for Jesus sake forebeare, to dig the dust enclosed here: blesete be [the] man [that] spares these stones, and curst be he [that] moves my bones" ("Shakespeare FAQ"). However, a recent radar scan suggests that Shakespeare's head might have been stolen by grave robbers.

Understanding the Elizabethan Era

"I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too..."

- Queen Elizabeth I to troops at Tilbury facing the Spanish Armada in 1588

The Elizabethan era refers to the period of time in which Queen Elizabeth I ruled England from 1558–1603. The Elizabethan era is often referred to as the Golden Age of England. Elizabeth's reign saw a substantial decrease in the political and religious turmoil that defined the decade before she assumed the throne. Under her rule, England asserted its power, famously triumphing over the invading Spanish armada in 1588. While Elizabethans did endure plague and some unrest, conditions of the era were reasonably favorable.

Playwriting flourished under Elizabeth's reign; Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare found great success during this time. Theatre during the Elizabethan era was a touchy subject; theatres themselves were not allowed to exist within the city limits and moralists decried the frivolity of theatrical outings and the numbers of unsavory characters and pickpockets attending public theatres. However, Queen Elizabeth enjoyed theatrical performances when the actors came to her court. Moreover, she actively involved herself in theatre of the age by forming and serving as the patron of The Queen's Men in 1583. Elizabeth I died in 1603 and was succeeded by her Scottish nephew James I.



ELIZABETHAN LONDON WAS...

HIERARCHICAL

A sense of hierarchy dominated the Elizabethan worldview. Elizabethans believed in the Great Chain of Being, in which God and the angels were superior to humans, who in turn were superior to animals and the natural world. On earth, the English monarch was superior to all his or her subjects, and nobles were superior to people of lesser socioeconomic stations. Everything from clothing that people wore to where they sat in a playhouse--if they attended public theatres at all--showed their status.

PATRIARCHAL

Despite having a female queen, the world was very patriarchal, with men controlling many if not all of the actions of their female relatives.

CROWDED AND DIRTY

200,000 people lived in London when Elizabeth took the throne. Without modern conveniences, the city was overflowing in certain places and ripe with the smell of people and animals.

Playing Shakespeare Through the Ages



The Globe, built in 1599 on the south side of the Thames, was an open-air theatre where many of Shakespeare's plays were performed. The Globe likely was able to hold up to 3,000 tightly-packed audience members. Poorer spectators paid a penny to stand during the performance while richer theatre-goers paid two pennies for a seat and another penny for a cushion. Audience members, especially those standing in front of the stage, were loud and opinionated, often talking to each other or even voicing their thoughts on the play to the actors onstage. Performances took place at 2:00 or 3:00 p.m. to take advantage of the day light, but the time of day meant that many people skipped work to attend the plays, which contributed to conservative politicians' dislike of theatre. While the original Globe does not exist today, a reconstruction, seen in the picture to the left, was built in 1997 in Southwark, London.



The Shakespeare Tavern Playhouse, built in 1990 on Peachtree Street in Atlanta, Georgia, features a stage with similar features to the Globe's stage. ASC strives to create productions that are also very similar to the ones that Shakespeare's audience would have seen. All ASC productions incorporate Original Practices, which involve the active exploration of the Elizabethan stagecraft and acting techniques that Shakespeare's own audiences would have enjoyed nearly four hundred years ago. Performances at the Playhouse feature period costumes, sword fights, sound effects created live by the actors rather than pre-recorded sounds, and live music played on the stage. ASC's actors are trained to speak Shakespeare's words directly to the audience instead of using the more modern acting convention of ignoring the audience's presence as if there was an imaginary "fourth wall" separating the actors and audience. Audience members at the Shakespeare Tavern Playhouse should gain a better understanding of Elizabethan style, language, and drama by seeing it performed as Shakespeare's own company might have performed it.



The ASC touring set, which is used in ASC touring productions, is a playhouse-inspired unit with three curtained entrances from which actors can enter and exit. Like a production at the Shakespeare Tavern Playhouse, all touring productions employ Original Practices. However, the connection between ASC's productions and the performances Shakespeare's contemporaries would have seen is not limited to period-inspired costumes and direct address to the audience. The act of taking a performance on tour echoes the Elizabethan practice of actors touring the countryside when outbreaks of the bubonic plague forced theatres, which fostered the spread of disease by enclosing many people in a small area, to close. Elizabethan theatre companies often brought a condensed set, props, and costumes to perform at country estates for noble families or at inns for the common people when the London theatres were closed. In bringing productions on tour, ASC strives to carry on this Elizabethan tradition of bringing live theatre to people outside the city.



Characters

Katherina (Kate): Referred to by all in Padua as a shrew because of her fierce temper and outspokenness, Kate marries Petruchio and becomes more gentle and easygoing by the end of the play.

Petruchio: He wins Kate's hand in marriage, but he behaves outrageously until he is able to subdue his tempestuous bride.

Lucentio: Suitor of Bianca, he disguises himself as Cambio, a poetry tutor, so that he may gain access to Baptista's sequestered daughter, Bianca.

Bianca: Kate's younger sister, she is often the victim of Kate's violent temper. Bianca is the love-interest of three suitors, and she eventually marries her favorite suitor, Lucentio.

Tranio: A witty servant of Lucentio, he pretends to be his master so that Lucentio may pose as Bianca's poetry tutor Cambio.

Hortensio: Suitor of Bianca, and old friend of Petruchio, he disguises himself as the music tutor Litio to gain access to Bianca. However, he decides to marry a wealthy widow instead of Bianca.

Baptista Minola: A wealthy lord of Padua, he is the father of Kate and Bianca.

Grumio: Servant of Petruchio, his irreverence gives Petruchio plenty of practice in the art of taming those of spirited disposition.

Vicentio: Father of Lucentio, he comes unexpectedly to Padua from Pisa to visit his son and is outraged to discover that he is being impersonated by an old schoolteacher.

Gremio: Foolish, wealthy, and elderly, Gremio has long pursued the beautiful Bianca, but he is unsuccessful in winning her hand in marriage.

A Tailor: He designs a lovely gown, which Petruchio rejects as part of his elaborate scheme to tame Kate.

Biondello: Second servant of Lucentio, he is not thrilled about having to pretend that his fellow servant, Tranio, is his master Lucentio.

Curtis: He is one of Petruchio's many servants.

A Widow: A wealthy widow, she wins Hortensio for a husband.

A Haberdasher: He makes hats for Kate.

A Pedant: A schoolteacher visiting Padua from Mantua, Lucentio and Tranio persuade him to impersonate Lucentio's father Vicentio, until Vicentio angrily discovers their scheme.



Plot of *The Taming of the Shrew*

With his obliging servant Tranio, Lucentio comes to Padua to study philosophy. However, when he sees the beautiful Bianca, Lucentio falls in love and his plans for studying are quickly derailed. Lucentio eavesdrops on Bianca's father, Baptista, who explains to suitors Gremio and Hortensio that he is determined that Bianca will not marry until her older sister Kate is married. Baptista proclaims that his daughters shall be confined at home to study music and poetry under tutors. Gremio and Hortensio decide to apply themselves to the considerable task of finding a husband for Kate so that they may woo Bianca. Lucentio schemes to gain access to the sequestered Bianca by posing as a tutor. He asks his servant Tranio to assume his identity and the two exchange clothes.

Accompanied by his surly servant Gremio, Petruchio arrives in Padua with the goal of finding a rich wife. Petruchio's old friend Hortensio tells Petruchio about Kate, warning that she is intolerably shrewish. Interested in the substantial dowry that Baptista will give his daughter's husband when she is married, Petruchio decides he will woo Kate despite her shrewishness. Hortensio explains to Petruchio that he intends to disguise himself as a tutor to woo Bianca. Gremio arrives with the poetry tutor "Cambio," who is actually Lucentio in disguise. Gremio and Hortensio are both upset to meet Lucentio, who is Tranio disguised as his master, who announces his intention to also woo Bianca.

At their house, Kate interrogates Bianca about which of her suitors she loves best, but Bianca swears she loves neither Hortensio nor Gremio. When Kate strikes Bianca, Baptista angrily chastises her for her shrewishness before he welcomes the suitors who have just arrived at his door. Petruchio introduces the music tutor "Litio," who is really Hortensio in disguise, and announces himself as Kate's suitor. Gremio introduces the poetry

"Cambio," who is really Lucentio in disguise, while Tranio, disguised as his master Lucentio, expresses to Baptista his intention to woo Bianca as well. The tutors leave to instruct Bianca and Kate in their lessons, but "Cambio" soon returns because Kate smashed his lute on his head.

Baptista demands that Kate meet Petruchio, and she displays her well-known shrewishness as he attempts to woo her. Petruchio tells the unruly Kate that her father has given his blessing for them to be married, and he departs for Venice to buy wedding clothes while her family prepares the upcoming marriage ceremony. The delighted Baptista informs Gremio and "Lucentio" that Bianca's hand is now available to the wealthiest suitor. The quick-thinking Tranio, who has successfully convinced Baptista that he is indeed Lucentio, boasts to Baptista of his extensive wealth. Since it appears that "Lucentio" is the richer man, Baptista promises Bianca to him so long as Lucentio guarantees that his father, Vincentio, will confirm his son's substantial inheritance.

Within Baptista's house, "Cambio" and "Litio" bicker over the order of Bianca's lessons. Reminding them that the choice is hers, Bianca instructs "Litio" to tune his instrument while "Cambio" tutors her in poetry. Lucentio reveals to Bianca his true identity while pretending to translate a passage of Ovid. Hortensio tries a similar trick with a musical scale, but Bianca is less charmed.

When the wedding day for Kate and Petruchio arrives, Petruchio is late and, when he does arrive, he is dressed in ridiculous clothes. When Baptista insists that Petruchio change into appropriate clothing, Petruchio justifies his dress, saying that Kate will marry him, not his clothes, and he defiantly departs for the church. In an aside, Tranio plans to find an impersonator of Vincentio, needed to seal the marriage of his master and Bianca. Gremio returns from the wedding ceremony, explaining that his master Petruchio



Plot of *The Taming of the Shrew*

behaved wildly and strangely. The wedding feast finally commences, but Petruchio shockingly refuses to attend. Instead, he leaves for his home in Verona with his unhappy wife in tow.

Gremio arrives home ahead of his master to tell fellow servant Curtis about the horrendous journey; Curtis notes that Petruchio seems more shrewish than Kate. When the newlyweds arrive, Petruchio disturbs Kate by cursing and striking his servants. Alone, Petruchio describes his plan to tame Kate by depriving her of food and sleep, explaining that his plan is motivated by the hope that if he can change her shrewish ways they will live a long, happy life together.

In Padua, Hortensio observes that Bianca clearly prefers “Cambio,” so he decides to stop pursuing her and instead marry a widow who loves him. When a schoolmaster arrives in town from Mantua, Tranio, still disguised as his master Lucentio, persuades him to impersonate Lucentio’s father, Vincentio of Pisa. At Petruchio’s house, Kate is famished and fatigued, but her new husband continues to deny her any sustenance or sleep. A tailor and a hatmaker display items Petruchio ordered for his new wife but, to Kate’s dismay, he lashes out at them. Petruchio declares that the couple shall return to Padua in humble attire to see Kate’s father.

Back at Baptista’s house, the schoolmaster impersonating Lucentio’s father Vincentio successfully convinces Baptista of Lucentio’s wealth, and Baptista expresses his approval of Lucentio marrying Bianca. Still disguised as the tutor “Cambio,” the real Lucentio prepares to marry his love as soon as possible.

On the road to Padua, Petruchio torments Kate with impossible commands like demanding that she call the sun the moon. As soon as she follows his instructions, he corrects her again.

Petruchio pretends that a man they encounter on the road is actually a young girl and instructs Kate to embrace “her.” When Kate obeys her husband, Petruchio corrects her again, informing her that the person before them is actually an elderly man. Kate changes the way that she addresses the gentleman to fit her husband’s wishes. When the man introduces himself as Vincentio, father of Lucentio, on his way to Padua to see his son, Petruchio embraces him and the group travels to Padua.

In Padua, Petruchio brings the real Vincentio before the home of Lucentio who, in his guise as “Cambio” the poetry tutor, is in the church marrying Bianca. When the schoolteacher posing as Vincentio refuses claims to be the father of Lucentio, Vincentio is furious. Baptista is outraged when “Cambio” returns with Bianca as his bride. Lucentio asks his father, Vincentio, to forgive him and Tranio, explaining that their deception was motivated by his love of Bianca. Gremio, meanwhile, is sorry his quest to marry Bianca failed, but he plans to join the others at the feast.

At Lucentio’s house, everyone bandies about witty remarks and jokes. Kate, Bianca, and Hortensio’s new wife leave to chat on their own. Petruchio proposes a bet to determine which of the newly married women is the most obedient. Lucentio calls for Bianca, but she says that she is busy and cannot come to him. Hortensio’s wife simply refuses to come when he calls her. To everyone’s surprise, Kate arrives at once and delivers a speech ostensibly about the duty women owe their husbands. Petruchio is delighted and kisses his new wife, while the other husbands are left to wonder how Petruchio tamed the shrew.

Understanding Perceptions of Shrewishness in Shakespeare's Time

In the late sixteenth century when Shakespeare wrote *The Taming of the Shrew*, shrews were women who did not conform to societal expectations enforced by women's fathers and husbands that women should be demure, gentle, nurturing, obedient, and largely silent in a world dominated by men. Men saw having a shrewish wife as more than just an obstacle to happiness in marriage; women who were seen as shrews disrupted the very order of society because their actions challenged the widely held idea that the ideal woman was a submissive one.

A range of actions could garner a sixteenth-century woman the accusation of being shrewish; a woman who scolded, abused, cheated on, or publically embarrassed her husband would definitely have been deemed a shrew, but a woman who was opinionated, stubborn, assertive, or even just overly talkative would also likely have been called a shrew. When Kate terrorizes her younger sister, breaks the lute on her tutor's head, and speaks assertively to Petruchio during the first wooing scene, she displays behavior that would certainly have been seen by Shakespeare's audience as shrewish.

The response to shrews' actions in Shakespeare's England was as varied as the definition of a shrew. Some punishments were incredibly cruel and involved dunking the offending woman into a river using a "cucking stool" or forcing the woman to wear a "scold's bridle," which prevented the woman from speaking and was often tortuously painful. Despite the availability of these awful punishments, many preachers encouraged men not to resort to violence against their wives and to treat them with respect and affection. Scholars suggest that Petruchio's methods to "tame" Kate, which include depriving her of food and sleep and forcing her to go on long journeys but which do not include physical violence, would not have been met with universal approval by Shakespeare's original audience. However, the majority of the audience would have been pleased with Kate's ultimate transformation into a gentle and obedient wife because her new-found demeanor better fit societal expectations for women.



Q&A About ASC's *The Taming of the Shrew*

Who's the real shrew: Kate or Bianca?

In a time period in which a woman's shrewishness was linked to the extent to which she followed the directions of her father and her husband, Shakespeare's original audience would likely have identified Bianca as displaying shrewish qualities. A scholar named Andrew Gurr described Bianca's behavior in the play as "conventional posturing" (180); she pretends to be meek and obedient to her father but ultimately marries the real Lucentio without her father's full consent and refuses to obey her husband at the end of the play by coming to him when he calls her.

Are Kate and Petruchio in love?

While it confounds modern audiences that a man who supposedly loves his wife would treat her in the way that Petruchio treats Kate, Petruchio professes at the end of the play that Kate's new gentle manner indicates they will enjoy "love and quiet life" (5.2.112). In an interview, lead actors Dani Herd and Matt Nitchie described the "attachment, or intrigue at first sight" that Kate and Petruchio experience when they first meet, and the choices that Dani and Matt make during the play reassure the audience that Kate and Petruchio share genuine affection and love in this production.

What does Kate's final speech mean?

Actresses playing Kate have interpreted the speech differently depending on the type of production their company has created. In a production of the play that is dark and reinforces the absolute authority of men over women in the sixteenth century, an actress might choose to interpret the speech as Kate truly endorsing absolute female obedience to men. In more recent, light-hearted productions, some actresses deliver the speech tongue-in-cheek. In ASC's production, Kate has a great deal of agency in the speech. Dani Herd explains her choices as poking fun at the game that Petruchio is playing and reflecting on how Kate has found someone she loves after years of not being understood by others.

Why still perform this play in 2022?

The fact that Petruchio's behavior towards Kate is so intrinsically linked to what was socially acceptable during in the 1590s makes this play extraordinarily challenging for modern actors and audiences. Today, actors have the opportunity to bring modern nuances to the text that can make Kate and Petruchio's journey together seem heartfelt, genuine, and eventually very loving, as it is in ASC's production. However, the discomfort that this play engenders necessitates having ongoing dialogue about the way we view interactions between men and women in modern society.





An Interview with Dani Herd (Kate) and Matt Nitchie (Petruccio) from 2017

What stands out to you about Kate and Petruccio and their relationship?

DH: “I think what struck me so much in examining her text and in playing her, which had never necessarily hit me from just hearing the play, which I think sometimes is the most exciting part about playing a character... is the loneliness and the sense of isolation. I think that’s part of what makes these plays so unique and personal; there are gaps to be filled in... I think Kate and Petruccio go off in the end, and they’re weird, and I think they’re still jerks, but it’s their rules. It’s their thing. And so what struck me is, I think, and I think this is even literally true in the play, Petruccio is the only person who actually stays in a room with her when she is herself. Everybody else just leaves. She starts to rail and be 'shrewish,' and people just get out of her way, which I think is something she has cultivated as a defense mechanism, I think almost to put a reason behind why people don’t stick around her. She’s way sadder than I thought, when it started. I think she’s lonely and sad, and that’s why she needs you [Matt/Petruccio].”



MN: “I think he’s lonely and sad too. And I don’t think he even really knows it, or knows how to process it, or comprehends it, or can directly attack it. They attack it through this dance that they do.”

DH: “Two people who do not know how to communicate with other humans, at all... Absolutely disinterested in other people! That’s just something in my bones, as playing Petruccio, that he’s just not interested in what anyone has to say. All the little subplots that are happening... nothing really hits. I make a joke about it, I toss it off.”

DH: “So what hits about her? I know we’ve talked about this a lot, but I’m curious. Why?”

MN: “Let me see if I can think of some sort of analogy... Have you ever played badminton?...I hate sports. I hate sports, but then you start playing that one game that’s like “Oh, okay. I get this”

DH: “She’s badminton! That’s so sweet!”

MN: “Well, it’s the back and forth.”

DH: “Yeah, they return each other’s serves.”

DH: “And then weird people find each other. It’s like, this is our language. I don’t need you to understand it. They don’t need anyone else. It’s weird, and it works for them.”

MN: “The world at large not making sense, and then accusing you of being strange, there’s a hypocrisy to that. So when you finally find someone who also not only beats to their own drum but also synchronizes with yours, even in an adversarial sense.”



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