

## ***The Taming of the Shrew***

### **Conventions of Elizabethan Theater**

#### **The play-within-a-play**

A play performed as part of the story for some dramatic purpose. For example, in *Hamlet*, Hamlet asks a group of players to perform a play with a plot similar to what he suspects are the actual events of his father's murder. The main action of *The Taming of the Shrew* is a play-within-a-play.

#### **The use of disguises**

A character puts on a disguise to hide, trick, or spy on others. Shakespeare's audience accepted the fact that none of the other characters ever recognized the person disguised. Students can look for examples of this in the play.

#### **Love at first sight**

This is a common device in romantic comedies. Lucentio falls head over heels the minute he sees Bianca. Students may be asked to look for other examples in the play.

#### **Fluid action**

Shakespeare's stage used little in the way of set or props; everything was portable. Modern critics called Shakespeare's plays filmic, since the action can move quickly from one locale to another in much the same way a movie script can. The action of this play shifts between various locations in Padua and Petruchio's house.

#### **Asides**

Shakespeare's characters often make comments to each other or to the audience the other characters never hear. These asides usually comment on the action. For example:

*Hortensio*. I promised we would be contributors and bear his charge of wooing, whatsoe'er.

*Gremio*. And so we will, provided that he win her.

*Grumio*. [Aside] I would I were as sure of a good dinner.—(I, ii, 214-217)

#### **Soliloquy**

Speeches in which characters think out loud, alone on stage, for the benefit of the audience. Sometimes they are talking directly to the audience, sometimes not. Petruchio does this prior to his first meeting with Kate.

I'll attend her here

And woo her with some spirit when she comes.

Say that she rail, why then I'll tell her plain

She sings as sweetly as a nightingale.

Say that she frown, I'll say she looks as clear

As morning roses newly washed with dew.

Say she be mute and will not speak a word,

Then I'll commend her volubility

And say she uttereth piercing eloquence.

If she do bid me pack, I'll give her thanks

As though she bid me stay by her a week.

If she deny to wed, I'll crave the day

When I shall ask the banns and when be married.

But here she comes, and now, Petruchio, speak.—(II, i, 168-181)

## Invective

Vivid expression of anger.

*Petruchio.*

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 bemeete thee with thy yard

As thou shalt think on prating whilst thou liv'st.

I tell thee, I, that thou hast marred her gown.—(IV, iii, 106-114)

## Types of language

**Prose** is generally reserved for servants or other low-born characters. Sly, when he believes that

he is himself, speaks in prose:

What, would you make me mad? Am not I Christopher

Sly, old Sly's son of Burton-heath, by birth

a peddler, by education a cardmaker, by transmutation

a bearherd, and now by present profession

a tinker? Ask Marian Hacket, the fat ale-wife of

Wincot, if she know me not. If she say I am not

fourteen pence on the score for sheer ale, score

me up for the lying'st knave in Christendom.—(Ind, ii, 17-24)

But when he thinks he's a gentleman, he speaks in **poetry**, the language of the well born:

Am I a lord, and have I such a lady?

Or do I dream? Or have I dreamed till now?

I do not sleep: I see, I hear, I speak,

I smell sweet savors and I feel soft things.

Upon my life, I am a lord indeed

And not a tinker nor Christopher Sly.—(Ind, ii, 67-73)

Most of the time, Shakespeare's dialogue is written in **blank verse**, unrhymed iambic pentameter. The rhythm of iambic pentameter (unstressed syllable, stressed syllable) is considered to be closest to conversational speech.

Occasionally the characters speak in rhymed verse or **couplets**. A couplet often ends an act or a scene:

*Hortensio.*

The motion's good indeed, and be it so.

Petruchio, I shall be your *ben venuto*.

(I, ii, 279-280)