



Rewarding Learning

eGUIDE//English Literature

Shakespearean Genres

Unit A2 1

The Taming of the Shrew

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Starting Point

In this unit there are 5 Assessment Objectives involved – A01, A02, A03, A04 and A05.

A01: Textual knowledge and understanding, and communication

In this examination, the candidate should be able to articulate informed and relevant responses that communicate effectively knowledge and understanding of the selected play.

This Assessment Objective (AO) involves the student's knowledge and understanding of the play, and ability to express relevant ideas accurately and coherently, using appropriate terminology and concepts. Quality of written communication is taken into consideration in all units.

A02: Dramatic methods

In this examination, the candidate should analyse Shakespeare's use of such dramatic methods as characterisation, structure, language and staging.

The student should analyse relevantly the ways in which meanings are shaped in plays. This means identifying dramatic features and showing how these features relate to the key terms of the question.

Discussing dramatic methods – advice to teachers and students:

In this component, equal marks are available for the candidate's treatment of the extract and other relevant parts of the text. As the unit is closed book, examiners will be realistic about the amount of detail from the wider text which can be provided in the time available. Every play has its memorable phrases which come to mind when writing, but it is anticipated that the larger-scale features of form, structure, language and staging will be helpful in constructing a relevant response. The student will, however, be expected to respond in a more detailed fashion to the use of language and dramatic methods within the given extract. A reminder of the process of identification (of methods), illustration, analysis, and relation to the question may be timely.

A03: Contexts

In this examination, the candidate should demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which a play is written and received by drawing on appropriate information from outside the play.

Each question will specify a particular type of context in the stimulus statement/directive. In this unit the stipulated context will be literary and will focus on the nature of a particular Shakespearean genre. Contextual information offered should be of this stipulated type. It should be relevant to the question. And it should be external to the play itself.



Contextual information which is made relevant to the key terms of the question will be rewarded. Students should be aware that little credit can be given for contextual information that is introduced merely for its own sake. They should remember that the text has primacy over the context. A good response will use contextual information sparingly and judiciously.

A04: Connections

In this examination, the candidate should explore connections within a Shakespeare play, and between the extract accompanying the question and the wider text.

The student should explore similarities and differences between characters, plot lines, themes, staging, and other dramatic techniques within the play and its wider context. Significant, pointed connections which are made relevant to the key terms of the question will be rewarded.

A05: Argument and interpretation

In this examination, the candidate should offer opinion or judgment in response to the given reading of the play, taking account of the key terms as the basis of the argument.

This AO is the driver of Unit A2 1 and is of primary importance.

A05 can be satisfied in full by the candidate developing his/her own reading in response to the given reading. If, however, critics are used, they must be

- used with understanding
- incorporated into the argument to reinforce or be seen as an alternative to the student's opinion
- not used as a substitute for the development of the student's own opinion
- properly acknowledged.

Coherence and relevance of argument will be rewarded. Students should be aware of the importance of planning in the sequencing and illustration of the reading they wish to put forward. They should also beware of the danger of replacing the key terms of the question with others of their own choosing which they assume mean much the same thing.

The following information is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a starting point for teachers and students. It reflects some of the stylistic and contextual issues which may be explored and developed further both in the classroom and through teachers' and students' own independent research.



A01: Plot, Characters, Themes

(Words related to key themes have been indicated throughout the summary. Along with knowledge of characters, these themes should be developed and expanded.)

Introduction

The wealthy Minola family of Padua are known for their two daughters – the younger, Bianca, beloved of her father as well as a number of suitors; the elder, Katherine, in contrast ‘Renowned ... for her scolding tongue’ (I.2.99). Feeling the burden of marrying off both daughters, father Baptista proclaims his youngest child’s hand available only when her elder sister is also spoken for. He relies on the fervour of Bianca’s suitors to find Kate a husband, and so they do. Petruccio – recently arrived in Padua – seeks wealth in a wife, and refusing to be dissuaded by Kate’s sharp tongue, the pair are married. So begins Petruccio’s process of ‘wife-taming’ – and ending with a gamble made by each of the newly married male characters as to whose wife is the most obedient. Lucentio, having won the heart and hand of Bianca, believes he will be the winner. Instead, Kate wins the game for Petruccio, proving the latter’s skill with a shrew, **as with falcons**, to have been successful.

Plot Summary

Induction

The Taming of the Shrew opens with a two-part Induction – a plot device which frames the rest of the action, making the main plot a play-within-a-play. Induction 1 introduces a drunken Christopher Sly, the hostess he is verbally abusing, and a Lord desirous of playing an elaborate prank on the former. Three levels of social class are presented in the Induction, with class tension particularly visible between the lower two, and the social power and dominance of the Lord demonstrated in the enjoyment he takes in the abuse of Sly. Inebriated and unaware, Sly is removed to a bedroom in Induction 2, where he awakens to find himself provided with new clothes, servants, a wife and the prospect of any treasure he could desire. Human behaviour is placed under scrutiny as Sly is convinced of his new status. A group of players offer to put on a show, and the recovering but deceived Sly and his deceiving ‘wife’ sit side by side, and enjoy the performance.

Act One

Lucentio, a Pisan, and his servant Tranio are newly arrived in Padua. Lucentio extols the delights of being away from his ‘shallow plash’ (I.1.23), and plans to enjoy both displaying his university learning, and, on Tranio’s advice, developing his personal life. They stand aside as Baptista Minola enters in conversation with two suitors of Bianca – Hortensio and Gremio. Baptista’s daughters are present also, and while Bianca remains silent as her father informs the men of his **conditions for marriage**, Katherine is not so obedient, lambasting the visitors with insults. Lucentio has been at once entranced by Bianca, exclaiming ‘I burn, I pine, I perish’ (I.1.153). Tranio takes charge of the situation, explains



the marriage dilemma, and together they concoct a plan. Master and servant **exchange clothes** – fascinating for the audience in a time when attire had legal regulation and referencing the Sly-Lord exchange; and as Lucentio (now ‘Cambio’) heads off to enter the Minola household as a schoolmaster, Sly is awoken with a jolt and reminded to enjoy the performance.

Petruccio and his servant appear at the house of Hortensio. The timing of the arrival is fortuitous for both men, as Petruccio declares his desire to marry for wealth, regardless of the woman, to which Hortensio offers a rich but ‘shrewd, ill-favoured wife’ (I.2.59). With Petruccio’s declaration that as long as the woman is rich, he will be happy to marry her, the marital dilemma is solved, and his plan of attack, forgoing traditional courtship, is outlined. Gremio arrives with Lucentio in disguise – the former hoping to use the latter to carry his love to Bianca. Tranio – disguised as Lucentio – also appears, and in this confusion it becomes clear that Petruccio is the only suitor who will woo openly. Bianca’s three suitors (Hortensio, Gremio, Lucentio) resort to forms of subterfuge, illusion, and disguise in order to declare their love.

Act Two

A demonstration of sibling rivalry opens Act Two, with Kate harassing her younger sister. Some have read a jest into Kate’s violence, but familial ties are strained, and much can be said of the effect of Baptista’s favouritism for Bianca. The girls depart. Petruccio and Bianca’s suitors arrive, Hortensio now **disguised** as a musician. Immediately, Petruccio is asking for Katherine’s hand, his principal **concern being financial**. Only secondarily is he interested in meeting his future bride. With a feeble reference to the necessity of obtaining ‘the special thing’ (i.e. Kate’s love) (II.1.128), Baptista grants Petruccio his wish – to be allowed to court Katherine. As a forewarning of what he is to expect, Hortensio returns with a lute broken across his head. Petruccio enjoys the anticipation of meeting Kate, declaring ‘I love her ten times more than e’er I did’ (II.1.161). The two meet and so begins a verbal sparring, neither submitting to the other, until Petruccio astonishes everyone in declaring to her father, ‘If she be curst, it is for policy’ (II.1.287). Thus undermined, Kate’s words carry no weight and her fiancé unilaterally declares that the marriage date is set for Sunday.

The Act concludes with a **mercenary bidding** for the hand of Bianca. Gremio and Tranio (this is Tranio the servant disguised as his master Lucentio), for the benefit of Baptista, engage in a bidding auction, each declaring in detail the wealth Bianca would receive if she paired with him. Gremio is humiliated, with Tranio exiting triumphant in search of Lucentio. Where Bianca is treated as a commodity open for trade, Kate at least had a suitor who was interested in arguing with her, for a time at least.

Act Three

Hortensio and Lucentio – in the guise of **school**-masters – go about their attempts to **teach** and court the younger Minola. Bianca is neither shocked nor overly impressed by the disguises. She neither encourages nor discourages Lucentio, responding with the courtly ‘presume not...despair not’ (III.2.43). Dismissed by Bianca, Hortensio astutely notes his own lack of success, and promises himself to quit Bianca if her affections rest elsewhere.

The wedding day arrives with Petruccio nowhere to be seen. Kate speaks words of fear of further humiliation, perhaps revealing a growing affection for her absent groom. When he turns up, Petruccio displays a ridiculous appearance, but cares little for the negative reaction. Although requested to change, he declares ‘To me she’s married, not unto my clothes’ (III.2.117), drawing further attention to the **idea of disguise, and the lack of**



honesty among others. Baptista fears the shame Petruccio will bring on them, unaware that the **taming games** have begun. All exit to attend the ceremony.

Gremio appears on stage, claiming an inability to endure the wedding any longer, and thus is able to describe what happened within the church. Petruccio, it is reported, treated the priest with disdain, threw wine in the face of the sexton, and kissed Kate loud enough for all to hear. His contrariness continues when the party returns, with him refusing to attend the wedding feast and declaring that no-one shall touch his wife, nor stop her from departing immediately with him. Kate is forcibly removed from sight, 'rescued' (III.3.109) from those around her. Gremio declares that 'Petruccio is Kated' in the madness of the groom's behaviour, completely unaware of Petruccio's purpose and policy.

Act Four

Grumio arrives at the home of Petruccio, rousing the servants to ensure all is prepared for the newly-married couple's arrival. The audience learn that the journey was not a pleasant one, Kate having fallen from her horse, and the horses having run away. Petruccio continues his undermining and manipulation of Kate's behaviour upon arrival. When his flagon of water is knocked over, Petruccio is outraged and reacts with violence. It is Kate who responds with gentleness – an inversion of behaviour that suggests that change is already taking place. Kate is neither fed nor allowed to change nor even to sleep, as the taming continues. When she speaks without gratitude, her fault is criticised; when she wishes for something, it is denied; when the sun appears, she is to call it the moon. The soliloquy that ends Act Four scene One sets out Petruccio's plan for taming Kate, which he puts into effect in this Act. When the Act concludes, Kate is prepared to call an old man – Lucentio's father – a young lady, and then reverse her calling at Petruccio's whim. It would appear that Kate has been tamed.

Meanwhile, the subplot gains speed as Hortensio is tricked by Tranio into observing the lovers Lucentio (still disguised as Cambio) and Bianca 'kiss and court' (IV.2.27). Thus rejected, Hortensio and Tranio (the latter still disguised as his master Lucentio), swear an 'unfeigned oath' (IV.2.32) to end their attempted wooing of the younger Minola. In this way the clever servant, Tranio, clears a path for his young master. Hortensio turns his sights instead upon a widow who 'hath as long loved [him]' as he had loved Bianca (IV.2.38). Lucentio's servant Biondello appears, having discovered a man who is willing to pass for the former's father. This 'Pedant' is manipulated into performing the role of father and remains faithful to his commitment even when the real Vincentio appears. Tranio and the Pedant, as his doubly pretend father, distract Baptista with conversation and food. This absence allows time for Lucentio and Bianca to marry in secret.

Act Five

When they return from their nuptials, Lucentio must untangle a weave of escalating violence and deception and explain why both Vincentio and Baptista have been fooled by Tranio, the Pedant, Biondello and himself. Lucentio is fortunate that his father promises to 'content' Baptista (V.1.127). Kate and Petruccio look on in amusement, for once not the centre of the fray. They exchange a kiss - whether in good humour or as a final test of her obedience is dependent on the players.

All the characters come together in the final scene, and despite Lucentio's attempt to set a friendly tone, squabble among themselves. Petruccio is unimpressed with the entertainment, and he stirs things up by encouraging Kate to respond to Hortensio's new wife's barbed comment about her being a shrew. The three women – including Bianca – exit the stage, allowing the men an opportunity to bet upon which wife is most obedient.



No-one expects Petruccio to succeed, but succeed he does – with the added triumph of using Kate to bring the hitherto obstinate wives back with her. When asked to remove and destroy the cap she has been wearing, Kate's actions arouse the horror of the women (the joke being a private one between Petruccio and Kate – referring back to an earlier scene with the tailor). Petruccio pushes this further, instructing Kate to condemn the other wives and teach them how they should behave. An elegant, but controversial speech unfolds, where Kate scorns the actions she has seen from the other two women and encourages, at some length, an understanding of the hows and whys of wifely behaviour. She concludes with a statement that she is willing to place her hand beneath her own husband's foot. Petruccio's 'Why, there's a wench' (V.2.185) has drawn much attention over the years, but with expressions of joy in each other, the pair leave the stage, leaving the other husbands to look on, incredulous at Kate's change of behaviour.

Characters

Petruccio

The character of Petruccio depends much on the director's intentions and the actor playing him. He is at once highly entertaining, violently volatile, quick-witted and eloquent; as well as controversial and challenging. Indeed, even more challenging if he doubles for the character of Christopher Sly – the implications of which are numerous. For Shakespeare's audience, as well as a modern audience, Petruccio was exciting and intriguing. In a time when obedience from a wife was crucial for a husband to maintain dominance, the need for Kate to 'succumb' to Petruccio would have spoken directly to a man's ear. Modern critics have been quick to condemn Petruccio – labelling him a psychological bully – but there are a variety of ways to interpret this fascinating character, without condemning him outright.

Some of Petruccio's first actions on stage are violent ones. He is quick to mislead and punish his servant Grumio – with the latter letting us know that this is not a one-off. This has been a trigger for many a critic – the willingness and ability of Petruccio to react violently. Kate is also physically and wilfully abusive in the early stages of the play – she is also stubborn and impossible to please. When she strikes Petruccio in Act Two, his response is immediate – 'I swear I'll cuff you if you strike me again' (II.1.218). She doesn't, and neither does he.

Petruccio is the most honest character of the entire play. He arrives with an open declaration that he needs and desires money. Money is paramount to all, including the notion of love, *'that is nothing'* (II.1.130). The financial benefits of marrying Kate are openly discussed. This reflects negatively on the other suitors who do not speak of Bianca's money, and yet must think of it. Petruccio also does not disguise himself, nor hide his true identity. When dressed in outrageous clothes at his wedding, he owns the situation and does not hide within the garments. When with Kate, he speaks in 'plain terms' (II.1.263), there is no diversion or ruse to attain entry or seek marriage.

Throughout the play, Petruccio is boisterous, eccentric and quick-witted. He pits himself and his wit, against that of Kate – the 'lusty wench' in whom he finds something to admire. He is complicated and mysterious in his intentions, despite making clear his desires when he claims her. If he only wished for wealth, why does he continue to attend to Kate following their marriage? Is he honourable in his treatment, or bullying in his need to 'break' her? Is he domineering or domesticating the 'shrew' he has married? If she was a consummate shrew, the tradition would be to abuse and belittle her, and



yet Petruccio seems invested in Kate's improvement. He removes Kate from the society that has ignored and belittled her, and with a disregard of the inherent rights her status commands, he trains her to earn the privileges she desires. He makes her worthy of her status. It is possible that Petruccio's tyranny is a fiction, but regardless of the intensity of the tyrannical behaviour, and whether or not Kate truly capitulates, Petruccio has helped Kate develop, and he grows to trust her – even putting his reputation on the line in the final scene.

Katherine

Katherine Minola is a shrewish female, a character straight out of Elizabethan character typology, but to complicate matters, Shakespeare adds layers of motivation to her behaviour, encouraging the sympathy of the audience, rather than immediate and cruel dislike. Kate's treatment at the hands of her father, and the verbal abuse spoken by Bianca's suitors, create a back-story that speaks of neglect and belittling, which goes a long way in explaining why she has become 'Renowned in Padua for her scolding tongue' (I.2.99). Paduan society has not been kind to Kate, and Katherine feels the embarrassment of Petruccio's late arrival upon their wedding day:

'Now must the world point at poor Katherine
And say, 'Lo there is mad Petruccio's wife,
If it would please him to come and marry her.' (III.2.18-20)

However, it is Petruccio's mad-hatter behaviour that quickly deflects the insults from Kate to himself, and although the Widow openly calls Kate a shrew in the final scene, Kate is prepared to respond and succeed in such a situation, rather than be the continued butt of the joke.

Katherine, like Petruccio, is quick-witted and sharp of tongue. She jests and jibes with him at their first meeting, working her words to match his own – and the barbed exchange is enjoyable to hear and to observe. The equality is quickly shattered however; after all, Katherine is the eponymous heroine who is to be tamed by her husband, Petruccio. It is in her inability to be understood, her silence, and her inability to alter the action of Petruccio's possession of her, that we feel uneasy. Katherine relies on using her voice to express 'the anger of ...[her]heart, (IV.3.77), promising Petruccio, 'I will be free...in words' (IV.3.79-89). There is no doubt that the Kate we meet in the early scenes is free to make use of her words, and her flailing arms, to her advantage, but by the conclusion of the play, are her words freely spoken, or have they been forced from her as a means of survival? With no asides spoken by the character, it is in the acting of the role that different readings will be made. We have no way of knowing what Kate thinks, or what she believes to be true.

The taming plot, and whether it really can be called a transformation, rather than subterfuge and survival on Kate's part, are open to criticism and debate. It has been argued that Petruccio sets out to reveal to Kate the effects of her own disruption – he becomes the shrew, to highlight and counter-correct Katherine's actions. He, not she draws attention; he, not she hits the servants; he, not she obtusely argues and fights with the tailor. Throughout, Kate is starved of food, sleep and sympathy – all with the cumulative effect of changing her personality and encouraging an utter and complete obedience to her husband. The argument continues: was the change necessary for her own survival; was she broken and brow-beaten into mindless obedience; or is she performing a mimicry, a mere gesture of capitulation? Can she really be convinced that the sun before her is actually a moon? Or does she speak in jest, a repetition of words spoken only in accordance with the demands of her husband? Is the capitulation itself a



complete breaking of the strong Kate from earlier? A certain intonation, a wink, or raise of the eyebrow would be enough to let us know where the irony is to be read – and this, once more is only evident in performance.

The actor will reveal more in their playing of the role, but by the end, Kate has by no means been muzzled – which would truly have been a depressing conclusion. Instead, she is given the stage and provided with the lengthiest and most eloquent speech of the play. She has mastered herself; what she says is both controlled and appropriate – and her words are heard. The partnership now has mutual benefit – she won the day for Petruccio, and she has positively gained the ears and attention of her peers. The praise is given to Petruccio of course, but there is no doubting by whom the praiseworthy words were spoken, and they exit the stage together, in full enjoyment of each other's company.

Bianca

Designed to be the foil to her shrewish sister, Bianca is the obedient, sweet and submissive daughter who delights their father and is his favourite. The modesty which attracts Lucentio, as well as Hortensio and Gremio is but one aspect of Bianca, however. 'Sacred and sweet was all [Lucentio]...saw in her' (I.1.174), as do the other men – but as the play unfolds, we are privy to a character who is more than one-dimensional in her obedience. Bianca exclaims discontentedly (I.1.80) when access to potential suitors is curtailed; she is selfish and wilful, 'I'll not be tied to hours nor 'pointed times' (III.1.19); and indulges in bawdy jests and insults, even against inoffensive characters: to Gremio, '[I] Would say your head and butt were head and horn' (V.2.43). Despite her father's imposed prohibition regarding suitors and marriage, Bianca is aware of the disguised suitors within her house, does not wholly discourage them and definitely does not reveal them to her father. Indeed, she is fully prepared to continue with the ruse, and marries in secret, without the consent of the father she praised in the earlier scenes. **Appearances have been deceptive**, the reality is left to unfold.

Lucentio

Lucentio, son of the wealthy Vincentio, is newly arrived in Padua when he falls in love with the first woman he sees. A romantic character, he does not hear her speak but is immediately enchanted, and the hyperbolic comparisons he makes and the desires he feels demand immediate action. With no real reasoning, though with the claim that 'If thou ask...why, /Sufficeth [his]...reasons are both good and weighty.' (I.1.245-6), Lucentio decides to enter the Minola household in disguise, and from this vantage point woo the younger daughter. His wooing is successful, and the pair are married in secret, while Bianca's father is distracted.

Lucentio wilfully misguides his new wife's father, and he also places his own father in a situation of humiliation. He thinks little of others, and with an arrogance born of status, lives a life bent on self-gratification, ignoring the need to consult and request permission from others. This subplot is all quite unnecessary except to act as a foil to the honest, brutally honest, wooing of Kate by Petruccio.

When he leaves the stage for the final time, Petruccio commends Lucentio for having attained 'the white' (V.2.191), namely Bianca. However, it will come as a surprise to Lucentio that he has gained a wife who calls obedience to husband 'a foolish duty' (V.2.130) and who, when he calls, tells him she 'cannot come' because 'she is busy' (V.2.87). Who has married the shrew, after all?



Tranio

Without his servant Tranio, Lucentio would have been quite lost. Acting as stage manager to Lucentio's actions, Tranio sets up the situations which allow for Lucentio's unchallenged and uninterrupted wooing of Bianca and later for the wedding. Intelligent and diplomatic, Tranio is able to adopt the role of Lucentio, as well as abruptly return to his own position by the end. Having involved himself in the action throughout the play, and having spoken to all characters at different times, Tranio can be lauded as the cleverest and ablest character, always working with Lucentio's best interests at heart.



A02: Dramatic Methods

Staging

Disguise

Acting, role-playing and deception – enhanced with the use of disguise – are introduced in the Induction – and remain a key theme for the rest of the play. Sly, Tranio and Pedant are physically dressed above their station, in luxurious garb; and Lucentio and Hortensio adopt the attire of the lower orders. For a time, social barriers are fluid, allowing for new behaviours and attitudes to be temporarily adopted. The re-dressing of Sly gains laughs for the preposterousness of the situation, and paradoxically in allowing this movement from the lower order to the upper rank, the tight reins of the social order are reinforced. Tranio's servitude is also only temporarily exchanged for nobility – easily reversed when Vincentio reveals his true identity – 'his name is Tranio' (V.1.76). The reality is uncovered and the ruse is ended.

Disguise, for several of the characters, is a temporary rearrangement of the exterior, to hide the true interior. Humour is the main purpose: consider the complicated maintenance of falsehood when Vincentio appears. However, the innocent comedy gives way to a tremor of fear as the wronged father promises 'I will... be revenged for this villainy' (V.1.127). On the other hand, Petruccio does not allow his use of disguise to hide his true self or true intentions. The attire he wears to his own wedding is significant because his words reject the very idea of disguise – 'To me she's married, not unto my clothes' (III.2.117). His honesty is in stark contrast to the devious plotting of the disguised characters placed about him.

Does Kate adopt a disguise? When discussing Kate, the notion of disguise overlaps with the idea of transformation, and we wonder whether the Kate of the conclusion is a permanent change, or merely a wife playing a role. Interpretations vary: some mention the classical allusions in the Induction, as indicative of a more terrifying and complete re-creation of Kate in the final scene. Others believe we could read the pair as actor and director, both playing their roles.

Shakespeare leaves us with no explicit moral for the use or abandonment of disguise – and why should he, considering the theatre was one place where identity, like clothing could be put on and taken off?

Structure

The main action of *The Taming of the Shrew* is quite consciously performed as a play-within-a-play. The framing device of Christopher Sly and the elaborately played joke opens the whole performance with an Induction, he speaks twice more, and is not heard of again. He is – visibly – 'enjoying' the performance of the taming tale, alongside the real, i.e., paying audience themselves.

The main action of the play is the taming of Kate by Petruccio, the sub-plot being the



relationship of Bianca and Lucentio. The plot-framing device should not be dismissed however, though it often has been reduced, or even omitted from film and written versions of the play. It introduces a number of key themes relevant throughout the action, and establishes links between characters, further deepened if doubling is employed. For example – the characters of Sly and Petruccio have been doubled by some directors – leading to a different interpretation of the ending – delusion, rather than assurance. Alternatively, keeping Sly present at all times on stage, and allowing for his input, helps to pierce the illusion of the action, reminding us that we are watching a play being acted. This reminder that *The Taming of the Shrew* is ‘just a play’ can also be judged as lessening the severity of the plot – the patriarchal austerity which some modern readers are quick to condemn. Petruccio is just a player – on several levels; so too Kate is simply acting a role - the implication of all of which is only evident when the Induction remains in place.

The anonymously written play *The Taming of a Shrew*, which appeared in print earlier than Shakespeare’s, contains a number of further Sly scenes. It is believed that the ‘a Shrew’ version may have been a record of the Shakespeare play as seen in performance. One of the extra scenes it records is the reawakening of Sly, in his original garb, who departs believing himself in possession of strategies which will tame his own wife. The absence of these scenes from the Folio Edition may indicate Shakespeare’s editing of the play. He does not book-end the entire plot with Christopher Sly, choosing only to open it – a suggested reason being Shakespeare’s desire to depart from a neatly resolved conclusion. Indeed, the use of Sly and return to his character throughout the play is useful in pointing to the theatre’s own self-consciousness of being a performance – further enhanced by Sly also watching a performance – and perhaps a return to Sly and a further recognition of the theatrics, would be too self-conscious for the audience, and would not allow for the lessons and messages spoken in the final scene to retain their impact. The audience is instead left laughing, and then questioning that laughter, forming their own interpretation, rather than recalling that of Sly

Language: Animal Imagery

If the name didn’t make the implication clear, then the arrival of a Lord and his hounds, having returned from hunting, introduces the language of animals into *The Taming of the Shrew*. Whether domesticating wilder creatures, training them in obedience, or hunting with them, this play is peppered with figurative and literal references to the animals of nature (including the proudest animal of all – human).

There is a good deal of humour generated from the animal imagery – consider the sting and tail joke shared between Kate and Petruccio – but great feeling is also stirred when Kate is included among Petruccio’s possessions, aligned with his animals and ‘things’. Shakespeare’s contemporaries considered a wife to be a possession, an issue which is sharpened when seen through twenty-first century eyes. To Kate however, there may also have been insult, as Petruccio wastes no time on flattery of his new wife. There is however an undertone of care and protection – she is as important to him as all else he possesses, and Petruccio was not silent about his mercenary desires.

The taming of Katherine is the main thrust of the play – and where the word ‘breaking’ is applied to a human relationship, the psychological implications are also evident. More animal references have been made regarding Kate, than any other Shakespearean heroine. Indeed the ‘wilder’ Kate appears, the more excited Petruccio becomes – he enjoys a challenge: ‘I am he...born to tame you Kate,’ (II.1.270). He will transform the ‘wild Kate’ into a ‘household Kate’ (II.1.271-272). Petruccio has been depicted as bestial in his own motives – as one who ignores the ‘nothing’ that is love (II.1.130), seeking only a mate and



financial comfort. He certainly reveals himself to be a breaker of animals – arriving at the wedding with a pathetic creature of a horse, one which falls and runs away when directed home. The indications are ominous – a majestic creature brought low by its owner, desirous to flee rather than stay with him.

However, when it comes to Kate, Petruccio assures the audience that ‘all is done in reverent care of her’ (IV.1.190). He professes knowledge and success with winged creatures, naming Kate as ‘My falcon’ (IV.1.176). Hawking was not an exclusively noble pursuit and members of a contemporary audience would have had more knowledge of its intricacies than a modern one. Hawking requires respect and dedication on the part of the falconer – Petruccio deprives himself as well as Katherine – and although the falconer remains master, the hawk is not enslaved, nor broken – the aim being to generate a partnership between hawk and falconer. To consider this knowledge, is to consider a further level of meaning in the relationship of Kate and Petruccio.



A03: Contexts

In Shakespeare's Comedies the universal theme was love, the overcoming of external or internal obstacles to this love, and a conclusion of contentment between and for the lovers. As a general rule, if the story ended happily, it was a comedy; and this happiness was usually cemented by a wedding and celebration – as in this play. Baptista is quick to establish in Act One the complication that could create problems for his daughters. Petruccio's arrival apparently removes the distressing potential of Baptista's first obstacle. Next there is a financial battle, followed by the consent provided by Lucentio's father. Baptista ensures there are more obstacles placed in front of his favourite daughter's hand, notably displaying a less intense 'fatherly regard' (II.1.281) for his elder daughter. It is Kate herself who comprises the internal obstacle to love – her 'shrewish' personality stands in her own way. It can be argued that it is Petruccio who removes this obstacle.

The plot of a comedy often arises from some form of trouble – usually of the marital or courtship variety – and as the plot develops, the problem is solved. A multi-stranded plot detailing the actions of contrasting pairs of lovers was also common (as for example in *As You Like It*) – drawing into the light the variety of ways a wooing and courtship may succeed. The theme of love ran throughout a comedy and it is interesting to note that the couple who were most romantic in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Bianca and Lucentio, may perhaps be less maritally content than the pair who never explicitly confirmed a feeling of mutual love between them. Petruccio and Kate do not proclaim an undying love, and they were not victims of love at first sight. However, they do seem to exist in a more harmonious and reciprocally respectful relationship than the younger lovers. Such unexpected twists are also typical of Shakespearean Comedy.

Another theme of comedies is disguises and mistaken identity, and the comedies delight in showing us the paradox of emotional truth being discovered through these mistakes and deceptions.

The tone of a comedy was genial and tolerant, rather than cutting and acerbic. Humour played an important role in the Comedies and a variety of both verbal and physical humour was employed: farce, slap-stick, puns, banter, caricature, satire, dry wit. An element of social criticism or satire may also be present. Scenes depicting a 'battle' between the sexes (always a favourite topic) could be both tolerant and critical, although humour would win out. When the upper- and lower-class worlds, the masters and the servants, were set in opposition in a comedy – the arising interaction was also ripe for humour, and humorous comment. Modern audiences are not as quick to note the humour of *The Taming of the Shrew*, especially when they view it from a feminist perspective, or seek to analyse the relationship of Petruccio and Kate psychologically. Tastes in humour have changed, but when context is understood, it is easier to acknowledge the enjoyment a Shakespearean audience would have taken from the play. A potential which still remains today.



A04: Connections

Students should be keenly aware that there are equal marks available for their treatment of the extract and the wider text in the exam. The focus should be on parallels or connections between the extract and the wider text which are relevant to the key terms of the stimulus statement. It may be beneficial for students to prioritise connections that also reveal their knowledge and understanding of the dramatic methods (A02) and the nature of Shakespearean Comedy (A03).

When studying the play, you will note many connections and it may be useful to track elements which show parallels or contrasts.



A05: Argument and interpretation

For your response to convince the examiner, it is important to have a well-structured argument so you need to plan before you write. It is a good idea to underline the keywords of the question before you begin to read and annotate the extract given – it will help you focus on the most relevant features.

Constructing an essay argument requires you to write thematically rather than chronologically, so make this easier for yourself by adding any relevant references from the rest of the play next to the notes that relate to them. You will be able to link them more easily and avoid missing connections that could have earned you marks before you go on to your next paragraph.

A very strong argument will examine alternative interpretations and explain why these have been dismissed as infeasible or ill-fitting. This does not need to form a large part of your essay, but it will show the examiner that you have thoughtfully considered other points of view and made an informed decision to reach your own conclusions.

Specimen Question:

Throughout the comedy as a whole, men are presented as the real winners in the battle of the sexes.

By referring closely to **Extract 3** and to other appropriately selected parts of the text, show to what extent you would agree with the view expressed above.

Your argument should include relevant comments on Shakespeare's dramatic methods, and relevant external contextual information on the nature of Shakespearean Comedy.

N.B. Equal marks are available for your treatment of the given extract and other relevant parts of the text.

A01

Consider

- the battle between the sexes is both literally and metaphorically presented here
- Petruccio 'charges' Kate to speak, commanding her – is she his weapon?
- metaphorically, a battle is being played out – and women are to be on the losing side – but how serious is this battle – is Kate playacting (women win); is she conforming to his will (men win); is she demonstrating a private understanding between herself and Petruccio to the awe of others (both win)?
- the words which Kate speaks are from a variety of sources – she is not simply a mouth-piece for Petruccio:



- Petruccio's speeches (being listed as a possession)
- ironic observation (typical male employment)
- her own experience (not being allowed food or drink, etc.)
- the laws of the land (traitor to husband)
- the words of Elizabeth I (heart and strength)
- and older marriage traditions (hand under foot)
- she is preaching – a forbidden action for women – have women won?
- her words reflect the political reality of the day, the conservative orthodoxy of Elizabethan life – men are the winners?
- the audience is reminded of their sovereign Queen – should she too be 'ashamed...[to] seek for rule, supremacy and sway'?
- the terms in which women have been discussed and exchanged in earlier scenes – as a ship to be 'boarded', as financial gains, as animals, as servants to male whims – the men have spoken these terms, but who has won the day?
- other battles – father and daughter – who has won in this relationship? Lucentio and Hortensio have 'won' other wives – who guided this win, men or women?
- does a win necessitate loud and obvious triumphance? Is man's apparent success really a defeat, while women silently triumph? Or are women the obedient, subservient party, and men the winners in all areas?

A02

Disguise

- Bianca (and the widow's) disguise have been revealed – they are not the obedient women they were presumed to be – necessitating this speech is Kate even more in disguise than before, or has she shaken off the disguise of 'Shrew', because of Petruccio's instruction?

Staging

- Kate is the speaker – at length – appreciated by Petruccio, but without need to be encouraged. She stands before everyone who belittled her and can exit triumphant with the man who considered her worth something
- staging of the kiss, as climax of this speech

Language and Imagery

- variety of figurative language in Kate's speech
- consider earlier imagery employed to depict male vs female relationships
- consider the language employed in earlier scenes where men and women were pitted against each other – Petruccio and Kate's first meeting; Bianca and Lucentio's love scenes
- comment on the repartee, humour and verbal wit of such scenes
- consider Petruccio's use of the word 'wench'

A03

- central theme of love, and the obstacles to love, internal and external
- 'battle of the sexes' - a favourite subject
- frequent use of a double or multi-strand plot
- disguise - a frequent theme and staging device in Shakespearean Comedies
- a 'happy' ending; celebratory and unifying. In Shakespearean Comedies this is sometimes gently subverted

**Remember:**

- Stick to the key terms used in the question.
- Think what the question is really asking you.
- Argue clearly – explore opposing points of view but explain why they don't sway you.
- Make connections throughout the text, demonstrating your knowledge of the play and your ability to link concepts, ideas and references.



General Glossary for A2 1

– this glossary is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive.

Antagonist	The main character who opposes the protagonist or hero in a narrative or drama; in simple terms he/she is the villain. (See protagonist.)
Aside	A brief remark made by a character during dialogue which is understood not to be addressed to or heard by other characters. In an aside true feelings are voiced, as distinct from what is being said for others to hear. See also soliloquy.
Blank verse	Non-rhyming lines of poetry, the standard verse form of Elizabethan drama, also known as 'iambic pentameter'. Each iamb is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one, like the sound of a heartbeat – five iambic feet make a ten syllable pattern per line, a rhythm frequently used in Shakespeare's work.
Characterisation	The means by which a character's traits are established, often through action and dialogue in drama.
Climax	The moment of greatest tension in a drama. It is usually near the end of the play where the rising conflict results in a high point of intensity.
Costume	The clothes or outfit worn by a character.
Denouement	The plot resolution of a narrative.
Dialogue	The words spoken between two or more characters in a play, novel or poem.
Dramatic convention	A set of rules which all parties in a dramatic performance accept (including, importantly the audience), e.g. the 'Three Unities' in classical Greek drama, the Shakespearean soliloquy, the missing fourth wall of a traditional nineteenth-century stage set, the impenetrability of disguise in Shakespearean drama.
Dramatic irony	A stylistic device where the audience is aware of the implications of a speech or act, but the character(s) involved is not. The audience has an understanding that the characters do not have.
Figurative language	Non-literal language – similes, metaphors, hyperbole and synecdoche, for example – used by writers to communicate additional meaning about characters and situations.
Imagery	This word generally applies visually, to vivid or figurative language used in a more than literal way that stimulates a picture in the imagination. Tactile imagery appeals to the sense of touch.



Auditory imagery appeals to the imagination by echoing or creating sound effects.

Juxtaposition

Placing two contrasting characters, things, ideas close together to illuminate meaning or create tension.

Lighting

Refers to the way the stage is lit and the equipment which provides artificial light effects.

Metaphor

Where one thing is described directly as another, to enhance meaning or effect. When this is used for a more protracted purpose it is called an extended metaphor.

Meter (or metre)

The pattern of rhythmic accents in poetic verse, formed of stressed and unstressed syllables in certain numbers and combinations.

Metonymy

A form of figurative speech in which a closely related term is substituted for an object or idea. One example would be referring to royalty or a monarch as “the crown”.

Motif

A dominant or recurring idea or figure of speech within a work of art or within the work of an artist, musician or writer.

Pathos

A quality of a play’s action or dialogue that stimulates the audience to feel pity for a character. Pathos is always present in tragedy, and may be present in comedy as well.

Props

Items used on stage by the actors.

Protagonist

The principal character in a novel or drama (See antagonist).

Soliloquy

A speech in which a character’s true feelings or intentions are voiced, usually but not always when that character is alone on stage. In general, soliloquies are longer than asides, which have the same revelatory function, and do not always involve turning ‘aside’ from an ongoing dialogue.

Sound effects

Sounds on the stage used to create the setting or atmosphere of the play, or for other dramatic effect.

Stage/Set design

This refers to the visual scenery on the stage, the creation of the background in which the play is set.

Stage directions

The directions written in the play script to indicate how the characters should speak and move. Shakespeare seems to have written very few explicit stage directions. These were added by later editors. There are however plenty of implicit stage directions in the Shakespearean text.

Structure

The way in which the parts of the plot are organised.



Synecdoche

A form of figurative speech where the whole concept of something is referred to by one of its parts. An example would be calling a car “wheels” or asking if someone can “lend a hand”.

Theme

A main idea or concern explored in a work of art.