

Of Sex and the Shrew

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IN CONSIDERING ANY PLAY we rightly pay attention to what is given dramatic emphasis, and in *The Taming of the Shrew* dramatic emphasis is on the relation of the sexes rather than the sexual relation. Critics of this play have not yet examined what the allusions to sex do besides amuse the audience,¹ presumably because there seems little to examine. Although, Bianca's suitors remind us, the man who would "rid the house" of the shrew must not only wed but bed her (I.i.149-50)² the play does not force us to consider sex by challenging conventional mores or by constantly alluding to sexuality³ — *The Taming of the Shrew* is, statistically, one of Shakespeare's less indecent works.⁴ Nevertheless, the significance of bawdy lines cannot be judged solely by their number. For instance, position gives weight to Kate's first words and to Petruchio's last, both of which deal with sex. Shakespeare must have believed the bawdry important: he uncharacteristically⁵ went out of his way to "dirty up" his sources for the Induction, which in telling of a trick played upon a drunken sleeper to illustrate the vanity of life do not include sex among life's fleeting pleasures.⁶ What Shakespeare considered important enough to add is certainly important enough for us to consider.

We should not avoid this subject just because classifying a passage as indecent exposes our thinking as well as the playwright's. Enrichment of the text rather than the critic's character should be the basis upon which to decide whether there is bawdry in, for instance, Grumio's assessment of Bianca's aged suitor:

Hor. So shall I no whit be behind in duty
To fair Bianca, so beloved of me.

Gre. Beloved of me; and that my deeds shall prove.

Gru. And that his bags shall prove. (I.ii.175-78)

The few editors who bother to gloss "bags" explain it as "moneybags," but Gremio's "that my deeds shall prove" already contains a reference to money in the pun on deeds as titles to property, and for Grumio to repeat the boast by saying that cash as well as property will show the strength of Gremio's love would be pointlessly anticlimactic. If, however, the bags Grumio refers to are not moneybags but what the Wife of Bath terms a man's "nether purs," Grumio's aside interestingly suggests that the only one of Bianca's suitors we do not see adopting a disguise is in effect already wearing one, presenting his senile lechery as youthful capability. Because Shakespeare's use of sexual references illuminates the play, it needs to be more carefully studied. *Honi soit qui mal y pense.*

We should not, of course, rush from prudery into prurience. Shakespeare cautions his audience against lascivious imaginings through an exchange between Petruchio and Grumio after Petruchio tells the tailor to take back the gown ordered for Kate:

Pet. Well, sir, in brief, the gown is not for me.

Gru. You are i' the right, sir, 'tis for my mistress

Pet. Go, take it up unto thy master's use.

Gru. Villain, not for thy life: take up my mistress' gown
for thy master's use!

Pet. Why, sir, what's your conceit in that?

Gru. O, sir, the conceit is deeper than you think for:
Take up my mistress' gown to his master's use!
O, fie, fie, fie! (IV.iii.157-65)

Like Petruchio, we may feel that Grumio protests too much, for he censures a lechery undreamt of by Petruchio, the tailor, or the tailor's master. Grumio's ostentatious rebuke of the immorality only he imagines criticizes Petruchio for phrasing which seems to authorize adultery, but Shakespeare clearly means us to see Grumio as "dirty-minded."

Because Grumio's misinterpretation is more laboured than laughable, we recognize that this indecency is different from others in the play — that in this instance effort is more apparent

than wit, moral or immoral. This recognition is accompanied by a far more important one, that in this play sexual innuendo is almost always morally instructive. The purpose of Shakespeare's indecencies is that of other Renaissance art forms: to teach as well as to delight. The punning of the bawdy wordplay comically introduces serious values, and the action leads us to see in the shrew-tamer a moral sensitivity defined negatively.

The subject of *The Taming of the Shrew*, as the title proclaims, is transformation, and our first perspective on this process comes from the Induction, which presents sexual desire as a powerful influence for bringing about transformation or acceptance of transformation. This perspective makes us wonder why Petruchio refuses to use such an effective means of taming his shrew, especially when he has the right to demand this marital duty, when others expect him to do so, and when he manipulates his bride through her other bodily needs. Obviously, Petruchio can "scarcely be expected to tup Kate onstage,"⁷ but the playwright could easily indicate that such action occurs offstage — as he does in Petruchio's final "Come, Kate, we'll to bed" (V.ii. 184), which bespeaks sex rather than sleep. The tamer's rejection of sex as a means of subduing his shrew shows his understanding of the "right supremacy" which will bring him and Kate "what not, that's sweet and happy" (V.ii.110). Our understanding of Petruchio's refusal comes largely from our awareness of the difference between his behaviour and that of the Lord and Sly in the Induction.

When he first comes upon the besotted Sly, the Lord sees the tinker as a "monstrous beast . . . like a swine" (Ind. i.33); since the swine had long been a symbol of lechery as well as gluttony,⁸ the Lord consciously or unconsciously connects the first transformation in the play, the apparent turning of a reasonable man into a senseless brute, with sex. Liquor and lechery have ever been closely linked, though as the Porter in *Macbeth* observes, the value of this relationship is dubious: "Lechery, sir, [drink] provokes and unprovokes; it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance" (II.iii.32-33). The association of drunkenness with sensuality apparently suggests that the "swine-drunk"⁹ tinker can be manipulated through his desire for sex, for when the Lord

begins to specify how to “manage well the jest” (Ind. i.45), almost the first detail he thinks of is “wanton pictures” (Ind. i.47), illustrations of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* depicting preludes to rape which show lust in pursuit of satisfaction as the cause of transformation. The Lord’s judgment proves correct: the tinker, who in his stupor calls out for ale and a wench (Ind. ii.89), specifically rejects as unfit for the likes of him the offered clothing, delicacies, and fine drink, but he does not reject the prospect of viewing those “wanton pictures.” After the servants describe the titillating scenes, Sly opportunisticly decides to accept appearance as reality — and the “lady” at his disposal if he is a lord. Our awareness that the Lord fosters Sly’s lust for his own “sport” (Ind. i.91) helps us see that Petruchio, in contrast, deprives Kate of sex for their mutual good, to bring about “love and quiet life” (V.ii.107). He denies Kate food, sleep, and sex less to make her crave the physical necessities of life than to make her appreciate spiritual values she has neglected, so she can become a wife who will be a friend and companion rather than a mere sexual convenience.

Petruchio’s wedding night refusal to indulge in sex contrasts with Sly’s attempt to capitalize on the discovery that he has a “wife” at his command. When the tinker is informed that as a lord he has at his service “a lady far more beautiful / Than any woman in this waning age” (Ind. ii.64-65), he forthwith adopts his new identity and its advantages:

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

 Upon my life, I am a lord indeed
 And not a tinker nor Christophero Sly.
 Well, bring our lady hither. (Ind. ii.70,74-76)

The “lady’s” lament at languishing “abandoned from [his] bed” (Ind. ii.117) is to Sly more a cue for passion than evidence of his identity; after he is introduced to his supposedly sex-starved “wife,” he immediately proposes to do what comes naturally.

Servants, leave her and me alone.
 Madam, undress you and come now to bed. (Ind. ii.118-19)

We laugh at both Sly's advances toward the "lady" and Petruchio's wedding night "sermon of continency," but Sly's eagerness to bed a "wife" he has barely met makes us respect Petruchio's refusal to enjoy Kate's body before their minds are properly matched. The Induction helps shape our reaction to Petruchio's refraining so that our initial surprise is followed by appreciation rather than puzzlement.

Yet another insight into Petruchio's behaviour on the first night of his marriage comes from Sly's reaction to the need for continence on what is for him a sort of wedding night. Eager to play the lord to the hilt, but cautioned to restrain himself a little longer lest he relapse into believing himself a tinker, Sly refrains most unwillingly "in despite of the flesh and the blood," though "it stands so that [he] may hardly tarry" (Ind. ii.128-29). How reluctantly Sly contains himself is shown by the puns on "stand" and "hardly" and by his hope that the substituted diversion will have a similar appeal: when his "lady" assures him (Ind. ii. 139-43) that their entertainment will be "more pleasing" than "a comonty, a Christmas gambold or a tumbling-trick," what Sly thinks of as more pleasing is "household stuff," and "stuff," as Partridge tells us, is "a pejorative collective noun for *whores*"¹⁰ If Petruchio is to tame rather than be tamed by his shrew, he must reject uxoriousness like Sly's.

The Induction's theme of the power of sexual desire reappears in the suitors plot in a minor key. To go back to Grumio's pun it seems that the contest of Bianca's suitors will be decided on the basis of "bags," in one sense or another. Baptista's aim for his daughter is moneybags, with all the gold he can get in them; Bianca's aim is somewhat lower — at least one of her suitors accuses her of this. Hortensio, finding that in courtship Bianca and Lucentio are "quick proceeders," gives up his futile wooing of "such a one as leaves a gentleman, / And makes a god of such a cullion" (IV.ii.20). Since "cullion" means not only "low fellow" but also "testicle," Hortensio implies that the relationship of the lovers is not courtly adoration but common lust. He may to a certain extent be right: the words of the outraged suitors who eavesdrop on Bianca and Lucentio contain stage directions

which indicate that the lovers do not exactly observe the proprieties:

Hor. See how they kiss and court!

.....
Tra. See how beastly she doth court him! (IV.ii.27,34)

Physical expression that *feels* heavenly can *look* ungodly, but even granted that perspective is likely to affect attitude toward sex, Tranio's "beastly," a term implying animalistic appetite, underlines and supports Hortensio's perception of disorder and intensity. After the disgusted Hortensio leaves, forswearing his suit, Tranio greets the lovers bawdily:

Mistress Bianca, bless you with such grace
 As 'logeth to a lover's blessed case! (IV.ii.44-45)

Since Shakespeare often puns on "case" as "pudendum,"¹¹ the blessing Tranio wishes is both heavenly and earthy. Shakespeare gives no evidence that Lucentio and Bianca have slept together, but Tranio's observation that he has caught the lovers "napping" encourages the suspicion that they are quite ready for bed.

Lucentio's words to Tranio on first discovering he is in love reinforce the idea that physical passion is irresistible and disorderly:

[Thou] art to me as secret and as dear
 As Anna to the Queen of Carthage was,
 Tranio, I burn, I pine, I perish, Tranio,
 If I achieve not this young modest girl. (I.i.158-61)

This whole speech is exaggerated to suggest extreme emotion, but Lucentio's violation of decorum in comparing men to women without derogation is so striking it calls attention to the result of overindulging desire. The comparison suggests that Lucentio gives sex too much importance, for Virgil's Dido, who pined and perished of her burning passion for Aeneas, represents not only desire's intensity but also its destructiveness to self and society.¹² Lucentio should master the passion he allows Bianca to control.

These suggestions of sensuality and social disorder in Bianca's relationship with her lover prepare us to see Bianca's bawdiness and her domineering as a bride. We should not be surprised that

by the end of the play Bianca and Kate seem to have reversed roles; as Bianca changes from sweet to shrewish, the emphasis on her character shifts from docility to sensuality. In this play Shakespeare uses indecency as a mark of shrewishness in his female characters: Kate speaks bawdily only when she is a shrew; Bianca does not speak bawdily until she shows herself a shrew.

Shakespeare's association of sensuality and shrewishness is deliberate rather than dictated by the anti-feminist tradition: though sensuality is a dominant characteristic of the Wife of Bath, it does not appear in Xanthippe or Noah's wife. The native dramatic tradition allows Shakespeare to choose whether or not to indicate shrewishness by disorderly sexuality. Although in *John John, Tib, and Sir John* the shrewish wife has taken the parish priest for her lover, in *Tom Tyler and His Wife* the shrew's sexual behaviour is not an issue. In *The Taming of the Shrew* lewdness shows the unbalanced self-interest of shrewishness which contrasts with the balanced wholeness brought about by a proper love relationship. Through bawdry Kate protests being treated as a sex object; through bawdry Bianca announces that she is one.

The play presents transformation motivated by sexual desire as neither real nor lasting. The page may be "transformed" into a "lady" to lead Sly to accept his "transformation" into a lord, but the Induction makes clear that both transformations are illusory and temporary. The suitors plot also shows that transformation brought about by sexual desire cannot be lasting if it involves a distortion of natural and social order, for Hortensio scorns his disguise when he finds its end unworthy, and Lucentio and Bianca shed theirs once they are safely married. In the Induction and in the suitors plot transformation is clearly linked to desire; in the taming plot transformation is carefully divorced from desire.

As the taming plot begins, the shrewish Kate is presented to us as a sexual object. When Kate's father offers his daughter for wooing by Gremio or Hortensio, Gremio retorts (I.i.55) that she is "too rough" and should be not courted but carted, that is, punished as a prostitute is punished, by being driven around in

an open cart. Responding to this suggestion that she has not found a proper means of expressing her sexuality¹³ Kate's first words in the play proclaim to her father that she wants no part of any marriage which is simply a kind of sanctioned prostitution: "Is it your will to make a stale of me among these mates?" (I.57-58). In her opinion Gremio and Hortensio are "mates" (low companions) and therefore not fit to be her "mate" (husband); she feels that her father's arranging to join such unequal spirits in a union which could only be physical would make her a "stale" (laughingstock) no better than a "stale" (prostitute). Despite the unavoidable commercialism of the dowry negotiations, Kate's love cannot be purchased, and Petruchio does not treat Kate as a "stale." Though he publicly announces that his wife is a chattel like "[his] horse, [his] ox, [his] ass, [his] any thing" (III.ii.232), on his wedding night he does not use Kate as though she were merely an ass he bought. As a bachelor Petruchio assumes that to wive wealthily is to wive happily; as a husband, however, he seems aware that money alone cannot make marriage happy, for he uses bawdry to point out to Kate's father that a man and woman go to bed with each other, not with the material trappings of a respectable union:

To me she's married, not unto my clothes:
 Could I repair what she will wear in me
 As I can change these poor accoutrements,
 'Twere well for Kate and better for myself. (III.ii.119-20)

Money cannot restore to Petruchio what he will give of himself to Kate. Through their bawdry the tamer and the shrew show not only that they both have spirit, but that they both have spiritual values which make for a good marriage.

That the marriage of these two will be a match, not just a mating, appears in the extended bawdry of their first encounter (II.i.200-19, 226-28), where Petruchio's lewdness in wooing Kate shows his awareness of natural order, and Kate's lewdness shows her different understanding of it. The arguing between these two is distinctly *ad hominem* and *ad feminam*. When Petruchio observes that Kate would make a good mother, Kate retorts that Petruchio would make a poor father: by calling him

a jade she impugns his sexual staying power of virility — as the O.E.D. points out, the primary sense of “jade” (a worn-out horse) is almost never applied metaphorically to a man, and its alternative sense (a disreputable woman) also disparages his masculinity. The proposition they dispute, that “women are made to bear, and so are you,” can refer either to a woman’s position during the sexual act or to a woman’s carrying a child. Kate rejects the first possibility (“no such jade as you”) and Petruchio reassures her about the second (“I will not burden thee”), shifting the responsibility for her not bearing a child from his inability to hers (she is “but young and light”). And so it goes, as their wordplay moves from a discussion of things made to bear and of the burdens proper to them, into an analysis of the nature and fitness of male animals: the buzzard, a hawk useless for hunting, which cannot take (capture) even a turtle (dove) but can take (copulate with) a buzzard for a turtle (lover); the gentleman, who cannot use force on a woman and remain a gentleman; and the combless cock, which to impress a mate must stand up rather than cower. Though the wooing scene is usually played as such knockabout farce that the words get lost in the scuffle, these lines should not be thrown away. Petruchio’s indecency makes a serious point, that as a woman Kate is designed for marriage and motherhood. Kate’s response makes a different yet equally good point about what is fit for her: she should not be matched with a jade or country boy, but with her equal.

Kate’s retorts reveal both a sense of order and an inability to recognize how it applies to her. She accuses Petruchio of not seeing how unmatched they are, of mistaking her for a lover as a stupid hawk mistakes a dove for another hawk. We see, as she does not, that in challenging his replies she shows herself more hawk than dove, and that she accepts her wooer’s comparison of her to a wasp as she compares him to one. In the convolutions of their sparring about where their stings are, Kate misses the point her punning assumes: they are buzzards both, fitted for each other in tongue and tail. Their bawdy exchange, however, makes clear to Petruchio that it takes more than the assertion of his masculinity and the appeal to her femininity to win Kate’s respect,

for to approach Kate as a “combless cock” is to strike Kate as craven — that is, to flaunt his virility as his chief virtue is unmanly. The man she will accept as her proper mate must challenge her on her own terms and conquer her “in her own humour” (IV.i.183). Kate in effect asks from her wooer what she gets from her husband.

Petruchio does not present himself to his bride as a combless cock, though according to Elizabethan theory, sex implies marriage, and marriage, sex: the wedding service enjoins man and wife to copulate for the increase of God’s kingdom.¹⁴ Whether or not this was their motivation, Shakespeare’s contemporaries demonstrated considerable enthusiasm for sex; *The Book of Common Prayer* reflects the need for admonition that marriage not be entered into “wantonly, to satisfie mens carnal lusts and appetites.”¹⁵ For a married couple, however, abstinence from intercourse was no more acceptable than lust. Elizabethan manuals of domestic conduct regularly quote St. Paul’s insistence (I Cor. 7:3-5) that between man and wife intercourse is a debt or “due benevolence,” and a widely read discussion of married life terms the sexual relation the “actual worke of mariage.”¹⁶ Whether the attraction between the bride and groom is spiritual, physical, or financial, the woman could count on finding out, as Petruchio puts it, “to [a man] she’s married, not unto [his] clothes.” Petruchio’s refusal to do his marital duty is thus both unorthodox and unexpected.

How Kate looked forward to this conjugal duty we can only guess,¹⁷ but we know her reaction to Petruchio’s postponing it:

She, poor soul,
Knows not which way to stand, to look, to speak,
And sits as one new-risen from a dream. (IV.i.187-89)

In our amusement at Petruchio’s timing of his “sermon on continency” we must not forget the Elizabethan audience would initially be as stunned as Kate at his refraining.¹⁸ Petruchio has made it plain he will not be married in name only: to a Gremio shocked that he is “marvellous forward” in setting about his wooing, Petruchio explains, “I would fain be doing” (II.i.74), and “doing” as the OED notes, is euphemistic for “copulating”;

while wooing he informs Kate that he means to warm himself in her bed (II.i.269) and that “women are made to bear, and so are you” (II.i.201). Petruchio is not indifferent to Kate’s physical charms, for he tells her that her beauty “doth make me like thee well” (II.i.266). Nor is he disheartened by the shrew’s spirit, for the sight of Hortensio crowned with a lute only makes him proclaim, “Now, by the world, it is a lusty wench. I love her ten times more than e’er I did” (II.i.161-62). Petruchio’s reaction shows the truth of his earlier declaration (I.ii.73) that no amount of shrewishness can remove his “affection’s edge”; it will, to borrow Hamlet’s phrase, cost Kate a groaning to take that edge off. Petruchio’s abstaining from intercourse, unexpected because of his intention to consummate his marriage, is further surprising in that the wedding night is the natural time for the tamer to establish physical mastery over his shrew.

That it was acceptable for a man to use sexual power to give his wife a taste of male superiority appears in many versions of the shrew-taming story. In the play’s popular analogue, *A Merry Jest of a Shrewd and Curst Wyfe*, the husband who intends that his wife should “shrinke / And bow at my pleasure, when I her bed”¹⁹ capitalizes upon the occasion of the wedding night to introduce his wife to the force of a will other than her own, and even his shrewish mother-in-law approves! When in the morning the bride complains that because of her husband’s rough love-making she “could not lye still, nor no rest take / Of all this night,” her usually sympathetic mother merely says “here is nothing done amis” and offers her another nightgown to replace the torn one. In the anonymous *The Taming of a Shrew* Sander cannot understand why his master has not taken the direct approach to taming Kate:

And I had been there to have woode hir, and had this
 Cloke on that you have, chud have had her before she
 Had gone a foot furdur. (Scene V, II.64-65)²⁰

In Shakespeare’s play Grumio, who knows his master well, predicts that Petruchio will use his virility²¹ to tame his shrew: “An she stand him but a little, he will throw a figure in her face and so disfigure her with it that she shall have no more eyes to see

withal than a cat" (I.ii.113ff.). Petruchio is well aware that sex can be used as a weapon, for he informs Kate's father that even a "meacock wretch" can make the "curstest shrew" tame "when men and women are alone" (II.i.314-15). Furthermore, he can expect Kate to make her bed a battlefield, for a shrewish wife psychologically emasculates her husband — indeed, a scolding woman may have been called a shrew partly because this venomous mouse supposedly attacked male sex organs.²² Yet on his wedding night, against all expectation, Petruchio refuses to take the advantage allowed him.

Petruchio's refraining does not necessarily mean that he wishes to stimulate a hunger for sex in order to lure Kate into submission. This interpretation, chosen for the film starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, is attractive in that it emphasizes the consistency of the tamer, who in bed as at board provokes desire but takes away performance, and in that it makes the refraining immediately intelligible in terms we can understand.²³ Nevertheless, Shakespeare does not encourage this interpretation of Petruchio's motives. In a soliloquy (IV.i.201-10) the shrew-tamer explains that the purpose of the sermon on continency is to deny Kate sleep; he does not suggest that the purpose of the continence is to cause her sexual frustration. In *The Taming of the Shrew* Shakespeare mentions how sex can be used destructively only to make us aware that Petruchio and Kate do not use it thus.

We know what Petruchio tells us is his reason for refraining; we can only speculate about what he tells Kate in his "sermon on continency." Since he presents all his actions as motivated by "perfect love" (IV.iii.12) and "reverend care" (IV.i.117) of her, he may have explained that he abstains from intercourse because, as many conduct books caution, husbands are not "to turn their wiues into whores . . . by [their] immoderate, intemperate, or excessive lust."²⁴ Or he may have recommended that he and Kate devote themselves to prayer rather than to sex: St. Paul allows couples to "defraud" each other by continence "for a time only" to give themselves to fasting and prayer (I Cor. 7:5), and Petruchio and Kate are already fasting. Of course, if Petruchio is still applying the technique he used as a wooer,

asserting that the shrew's behaviour is precisely the opposite of what it appears, he may have exhorted Kate to control her excessive desire for him! Both Petruchio and Kate are choleric, and according to Elizabethan medicine those of "an hot dispositiō are very much inclined to lust and venerie."²⁵ Odd as it may seem, this is thus an appropriate time for a sermon to the passionate on restraint of passion.

Whatever Petruchio may have preached to Kate, Shakespeare comically illustrates a point which Elizabethan preachers make seriously, that "vnlesse there be a ioyning of hearts and a knitting of affections together, it is not Mariage in deed, but in shew and name."²⁶ As the most compendious Elizabethan analysis of marriage duties observes, because the husband "may force the bodie, but not the will, in the which all loue and amitie doth consist," he "ought not to be satisfied that he hath robd his wife of her virginitee, but in that he hath possession and vse of her will."²⁷ Since on their wedding night the tamer and shrew are not yet one in mind and will, Petruchio shows both moral awareness and sensitivity in not sealing his marriage with a rape sanctioned by ceremony.

That Petruchio and Kate can be matched in mind appears in their indecencies, which characteristically direct attention beyond the physical relation to a spiritual one. After marriage, however, they abandon sexual puns. As Kate learns obedience she turns from shrewish bawdiness to the modest dignity appropriate for a wife; she is "ashamed to kiss" in the street (V.i.151) and does not contribute to the randy banter at the wedding feast. Petruchio turns from bawdy puns to the moral lectures expected of an Elizabethan husband: the bachelor who informs Kate she cannot leave "with [his] tongue in [her] tail" (II.i.218) becomes the husband who insists that grace be said at his table (IV.i.162). The timing of Petruchio's wedding night sermon may surprise us, but his sermonizing should not. Nor should the fact that in the bawdy repartee of the wedding banquet he acts primarily as "straight man," setting up Hortensio's puns.

Bawdy banter is to be expected at a wedding feast — Petruchio invites the guests at his to "carouse full measure to Kate's

maidenhead" (III.ii.227) — but even here the indecent puns enforce morality:

Wid. He that is giddy thinks the world turns round.

Pet. Roundly replied.

Kath. Mistress, how mean you that?

Wid. Thus I conceive by him.

Pet. Conceives by me? How likes Hortensio that?

Hor. My widow says, thus she conceives her tale.

Pet. Very well mended. Kiss him for that, good widow.

(V.ii.20-27)

Petruchio's mock alarm ("Conceives by me?") calls attention to the bawdy implication in the Widow's words, yet he deflects this from himself by passing the question to Hortensio; Petruchio's deferring functions as an indirect reproof of the Widow, who should refer matters of conception to her husband. When Hortensio in attempting to correct the suggestion of his wife's straying simply slides into another bawdy pun, Petruchio sets things in good order, instructing the Widow to kiss her husband for the legitimate conception of her tale. But when Petruchio bets that in the wives' verbal combat Kate will put the Widow down, Hortensio objects, protesting "That's my office" (V.ii.36). In Petruchio's "taming school" (IV.ii.54) Hortensio has learned at least one lesson, the technique of instructive innuendo. Because his bawdry advocates proper social and sexual order, he wins Petruchio's approving toast, "Spoke like an officer: ha' to thee, lad!"

Petruchio, however, does not approve of Bianca's part in the bawdy conversation.

Bap. How likes Gremio these quick-witted folks?

Gre. Believe me, sir, they butt together well.

Bian. Head, and butt! an hasty-witted body
Would say your head and butt were head and horn.

Vin. Ay, mistress bride, hath that waken'd you?

Bian. Ay, but not frightened me; therefore I'll sleep again.

Pet. Nay, that you shall not: since you have begun,
Have at you for a bitter jest or two!

Bian. Am I your bird? I mean to shift my bush;
 And then pursue me as you draw your bow.
 You are welcome all. (V.ii.38-48)

Gremio describes the thrust and parry of wits by playing on "butt" as a verb and as a conjunction; Bianca, who thinks of a different kind of thrust, plays on "butt" as a noun, making the stock Elizabethan jest about head and horn, phallus and symbol of cuckoldry. Vincentio's question, "Mistress bride, hath that awaken'd you?", both teases Bianca by alluding to her wedding night awakening and reproves his new daughter-in-law, who as a bride should display virginal blushes instead of bawdry. Bianca's retort that her bridegroom's horn impresses her so little she'll go to sleep is such a put down that Petruchio intervenes, promising a "bitter jest or two," which would doubtless instruct her that any putting down should be *of* the wife *by* the husband. Bianca, however, does not stay to listen to his jests but departs with a suggestion unlikely to delight her bridegroom — that Petruchio pursue her with his weapon drawn. The bawdy banter of the last scene prepares for Kate's winning the contest in obedience and for her lecturing the other women on the right relationship of husband and wife.

Shakespeare's treatment of sex in *The Taming of the Shrew* as a whole makes certain that Petruchio's last speech, "Come, Kate, we'll to bed," signals not only sexual desire but the "marriage of true minds" expressed in the physical union of man and wife. The amusing bawdry of the Induction, by establishing wedlock as "bedlock," frees Shakespeare to concentrate in the rest of the play on marriage as a social rather than physical relationship. The dramatic importance of lust in the Induction leads us to expect that in the taming plot sexual desire will have an importance it simply does not have. This expectation, however, makes us note that neither Petruchio nor Kate uses sex as a weapon and that neither offers sex as a means of persuasion. Where the Induction shows a "husband" who refrains most reluctantly, the taming plot shows a husband who does not ask for his conjugal right until his wife can give it gladly. When we consider the Induction we realize that the tamer and the shrew are lusty but not lustful; when we consider their bawdry, we see

through the indecency their consciousness of moral order and responsibility. In *The Taming of the Shrew* Shakespeare uses sex as a touchstone for character and values.

Those who study Shakespeare's references to sex naturally turn first to the plays after 1600, for here indecency is clearly used seriously and significantly. In these plays it cannot be ignored: not only are references to sex more frequent than in the early comedies and histories, but the references are integral, for the "bawdry of disillusion and insanity"²⁸ reveals how character can be distorted by the pressure of tragic experience. Critics have not ignored the indecencies of the problem plays, tragedies, and romances, but have earnestly studied the sexual references as images of disorder and reordering. They need, however, to recognize that one reason Shakespeare is able to use sexual references so seriously and skilfully in the plays after 1600 is that before 1600, as early as *The Taming of the Shrew*, he learned how to use them comically to question or embody values.

NOTES

- ¹ E. A. M. Colman, *The Dramatic Use of Bawdy* in Shakespeare (London: Longman, 1974) treats the bawdy in this play almost entirely as "verbal gymnastics"; he does not adequately explore his most astute observation about this play, that Shakespeare here begins "the controlled use of bawdy as one indicator of dissident or anarchic traits in a personality" (p. 41). Though I arrived at my somewhat different conclusions independently, we necessarily deal with some of the same material. Michael West, "The Folk Background of Petruchio's Wooing Dance: Male Supremacy in *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Shakespeare Studies*, VII (1974), 65-73 is aware of the sexual tension between Kate and Petruchio, but he deals with the sexuality of their courtship only generally. The interpretation by William J. Martz, *Shakespeare's Universe of Comedy* (N.Y.: David Lewis, 1971), pp. 25-26, 50 strikes me as grossly wrong-headed.
- ² All citations are from Hardin Craig's edition of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1971).
- ³ Colman notes that "apart from the wooing scene and the wedding-feast, *The Shrew's* scurrilities are only intermittent and inessential" (p. 40).
- ⁴ Eric Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy* (New York: Dutton, 1948), pp. 54-55.
- ⁵ Alfred Harbage, *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions* (London, 1952; rpt. N.Y.: Barnes & Noble, 1968) demonstrates that "the popular school of dramatists not only failed to cultivate chances for erotic treatment but took considerable pains to avoid it" (p. 206). In noting that Shakespeare expurgated his source for the subplot of this play, he does not notice how Shakespeare added the emphasis on sex to the Induction: we tend to see what we expect to see.

- ⁶ Most of these versions, which probably derive ultimately from the tale "The Sleeper Wakened" in the *Arabian Nights*, are printed together in Appendix II of F. S. Boas' edition of *The Taming of a Shrew, Being the Original of Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew* (London, 1908). A translation of the letter from Juan Luis Vivis to Francis Duke of Béjar, most likely known to Shakespeare as related by Heuterus, can be found in Foster Watson, "Shakespeare and Two Stories of Luis Vivis," *Nineteenth Century*, LXXV (1919), 303-304. Grimston's translation (1607) from Goulart is given in Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1957), I, 109-10. Shakespeare added sex to the delights offered the dreamer and subtracted the more elevated pleasure of a Lord's privilege at worship; while the solemnity of the sacrament obviously had no place in the Induction, Shakespeare need not have substituted sex for it.
- ⁷ West, p. 71.
- ⁸ An Elizabethan explanation for this appears in *Christs Teares Over Ierusalem*, in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. R. B. McKerrow (London, 1910), II, 113: "Luxury, ryot, and sensuality we borrow from the Hogge: and therefore we call a leatcherous person a boorish companion."
- ⁹ This Elizabethan expression for Sly's condition is implicit in the comparison the Lord makes; Shakespeare uses this term in *AWW* I.iii.286.
- ¹⁰ Page 197.
- ¹¹ Partridge, pp. 84-85; Colman, p. 187.
- ¹² On the difference between the historians' and the poets' view of Dido see Don Cameron Allen, "Marlowe's Dido and the Tradition," in *Essays on Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Drama in Honor of Hardin Craig*, ed. Richard Hosley (Columbia, Mo.: Univ. of Mo. Press, 1962), pp. 55-68.
- ¹³ The play as a whole does not suggest that sexual frustration causes shrewishness: Bianca reveals her shrewishness when her desire is about to be fulfilled, and Kate abandons hers before her marriage is consummated.
- ¹⁴ "The Forme of Solemnization of Matrimonie," *The Book of the Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments, and other rites and ceremonies of the Church: after the use of the Churche of England* (London, 1549), fol. xiii, proclaims that marriage was ordained primarily for "the procreation of children," and only secondarily for "a remedie agaynst sinne" and for "the mutuall societie, helpe, and coumfort."
- ¹⁵ *Ibidem*, fol. xii.
- ¹⁶ Heinrich Bullinger, *The Christian State of Matrimony*, tr. Myles Couerdale (London, 1575), fol. 26.
- ¹⁷ A feminist critic could rightly point out that Kate may feel pleasantly surprised rather than deprived at not being bedded by a man who seems totally insensitive to her needs despite his verbal concern for her well being. Though Kate is a "lusty wench" (II.i.161), in Shakespeare's day "lusty" could mean "full of vitality" instead of "full of sexual desire." That Kate has no wish to "lead apes in hell" (II.i.34) does not mean that she's hot for the nearest male—the assumption that women are ruled by lust smacks more of medieval misogynists than of Shakespeare. If we grant to Kate and Petruchio the depth of comic characters rather than the flatness of farcical ones, we must recognize that at this moment Kate might well feel relieved at Petruchio's refusal to push a point.

- ¹⁸ Although Vives in *The Office and Duetie of an Husband* (quoted in Carroll Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman*, N.Y.: Elsevier Press 1952, p. 102) advises newlyweds to abstain from intercourse for the first three nights of their marriage so they may be blessed with healthy children, this pious act seems to have been honoured more in the breach than in the observance.
- ¹⁹ *A Merry Ieste of a Shrewd and curst Wufe, Lapped in Morrelles Skin, for her good Behauyour* (London, 1580), p. 49. The importance of this work is noted by Richard Hosley in "The Sources and Analogues of *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, XXVII (1963-64), 295-98.
- ²⁰ Bullough, p. 78.
- ²¹ On the erotic meaning of this speech see Richard Levin, "Grumio's 'Rope-Tricks' and the Nurse's 'Roper'," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, XXII (1971), 82-86.
- ²² Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes* (London, 1607), p. 538; Noel Hudson, *An Early English Version of Hortus Sanitatus* (London, 1954), p. 58.
- ²³ Shakespeare's contemporaries would also have understood them. In John Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize or the Tamer Tamed*, Petruchio's second wife barricades the bedroom against her new husband, showing him the power of sex from a new perspective by refusing him his conjugal rights.
- ²⁴ R[obert] C[leaver], *A Godlie Forme of Householde Government* (London, 1598), p. 158.
- ²⁵ Petrus Pomerius Valentinus, *Enchiridion Medicum: Containing an Epitome of the Whole Course of Physicke* (London, 1608), p. 10. Although the sanguine temperament is more prone to lechery than the choleric, some authorities, such as *Batman vppon Bartholome his Booke De Proprietatibus Rerum* (London, 1582), note that choler "also provoketh to the works of Venus" (fol. 32).
- ²⁶ *The Sermons of Maister Henrie Smith, gathered into one volume* (London, 1593), p. 36.
- ²⁷ Cleaver, pp. 216, 168.
- ²⁸ Colman, pp. 117.