
The Taming of Kate

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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *The Lotus Magazine*, Vol. 7, No. 7 (Apr., 1916), pp. 325-330

Published by:

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20543752>

Accessed: 17/02/2012 10:20

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THE TAMING OF KATE

STRANGE indeed were the circumstances of my first meeting with Petruchio. The day it happened my father had announced to various suitors for the hand of my younger sister, Bianca, that he would not promise her to anyone until he had found a husband for me. As I was renowned for my sharp tongue and high temper, so much so that throughout Padua I was known as "Kate, the Shrew," and had threatened, if any man made love to me, I would comb his noddle with a three-legged stool, there appeared slim chance of marriage for Bianca. In fact, when her suitors put their heads together, I heard them considering whether my father with all his wealth ever would be able to find a husband for me.

"Husband!" exclaimed one of them, "You must mean 'devil,' for only a devil would marry such a she-Lucifer."

These words were just to my liking. For, although I am ashamed to confess it now, I was proud then of my froward temper and lashing tongue, and rejoiced to hear myself called "wildcat" or to be told that, when my voice was pitched in passion (as it generally was) mortal ears scarce could endure the din.

Later in the day my music master—rash man—told me that I mistook the frets on my lute. "Frets," I shouted, "I'll teach you how to 'fret!'" seized the instrument and broke it over his head, leaving the frame to hang about

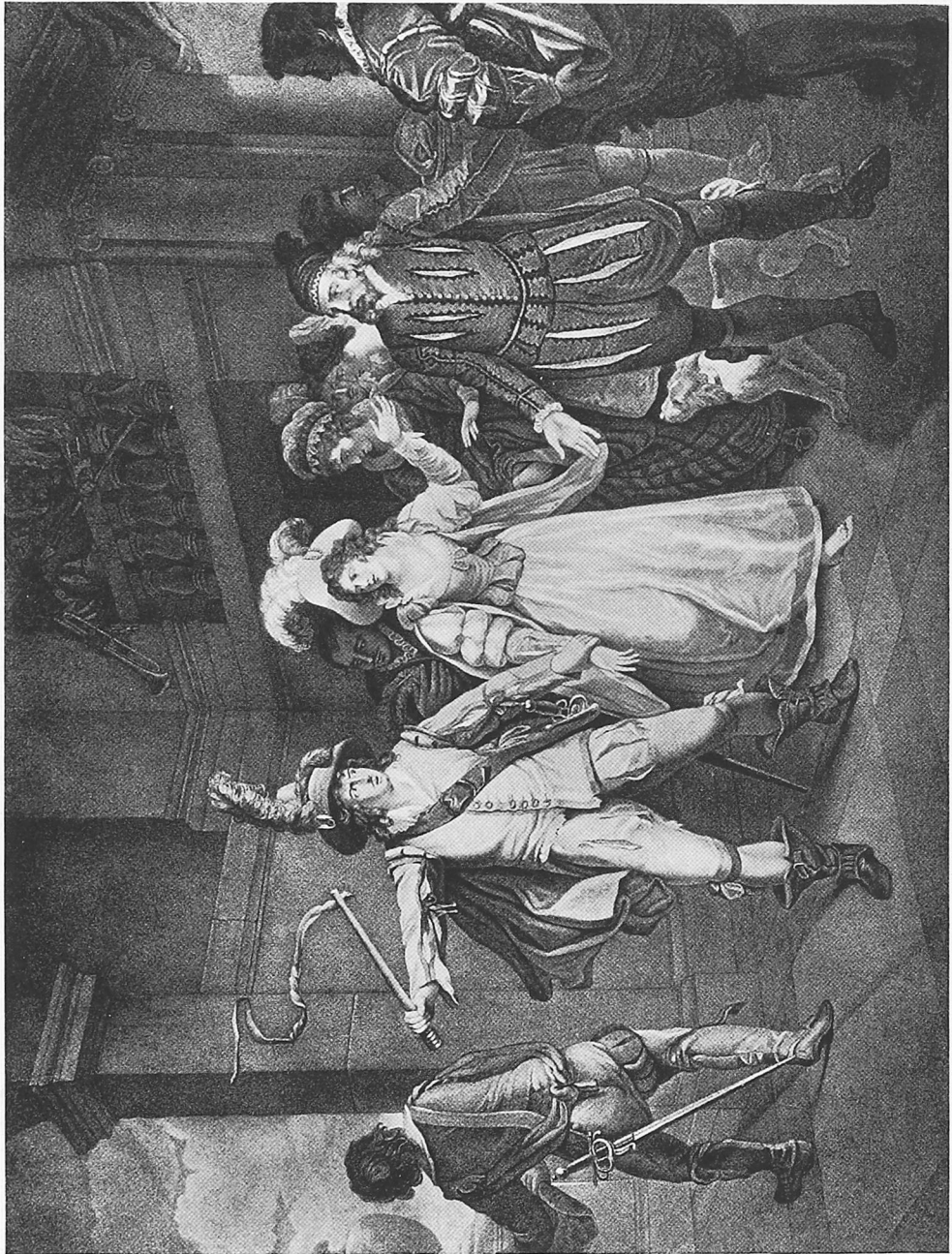
his neck like a collar. With a great outcry he ran to seek my father and I after him railing at him in my most raucous voice.

When we burst in upon my father there was another man with him. This man was dark, handsome, strongly knit and of easy carriage, things that I noted even in my anger, though I took care not to show him that I did. He had a sense of humor, too. For when he beheld the broken instrument about the music master's neck, he laughed at the droll sight.

For these reasons I might have held my peace with him, which I rarely did with any one, even strangers. But when, my father and the lutist having left us, he turned to me and said with blithe effrontery, "Good morrow, Kate, for that's your name, I hear," I answered sharply, to hold my own, "They that address me call me Katherine."

"Not so, in faith," he said breezily, "but bonny Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom, a superdainty Kate. Therefore, Kate, having heard your mildness praised in every town, your virtues extolled and your beauty sounded, though not so loudly as it deserves, I am moved to woo you for my wife."

When he had spoken, he smiled, showing two well curved lips with firm white teeth between—a handsome man, as I have said, who stood there and laughed at fate and me. That is what angered me—that he laughed at me whom others feared. So when he said



The Taming of the Shrew. Act II., Scene II. Baptista's House.
Petruchio, Katherine and others.
From the Boydell Prints.

with a kind of masterful swagger, as if he already owned me, that he was "moved" to woo me for his wife, I flew into a passion and cried out, "Let him that moved you hither remove you hence," and poured a torrent of abuse upon him.

Instead of seeming amazed or giving back in kind, he smiling put the very opposite construction on everything I said. "Whoever says that you are rough and sullen, Kate, regards not the truth," he answered. "Sometime, indeed, I should like to see you frown or look askance and bite your lip after the fashion of women when they are angry. For though you are pleasant, gamesome and courteous, you are too slow and smooth in your speech. But you are handsome, Kate—as straight and slender as a hazel twig, as brown in hue as hazel nuts, and sweeter than the kernels, and I am going to marry you, although you are a trifle too gentle to suit my humor."

At this I stamped my foot. Yet what was I to do? For when my father and some of his friends, wondering what the outcome of Petruchio's wooing of "Kate, the Shrew," might be, came in, and I protested that I would not be wed to a kind of half lunatic who thought he could make me over by constant misconstruing of all I said, his comment was, "Father, we have agreed so well together that we have fixed on Sunday for the wedding."

"I'll see you hanged on Sunday first," I cried, whereupon he coolly said to my father, "It is bargained between us that when we are with others she may be as shrewish as she wishes, but I assure you, sir, that when alone with me, she is the kindest Kate, hanging

about my neck and giving kiss on kiss. So now I'm off for Venice to buy rings and fine array. Provide the feast, father, and bid the guests; and kiss me, Kate, for we shall be married on Sunday."

Thereat, would I or no, and struggle as I might, he roughly pinned me in his arms and kissed me; then, like a madcap, dashed off as he had come, leaving me to storm and rage after the humiliation he had brought upon me in sight of others.

Was ever woman wooed in so mad a spirit? But my father had given his hand upon the match, and, rail as I might, it would alter nothing. So, churlishly I own, I watched the preparations for my wedding, save that I saw closely to the cut and fitting of my gown. For though other men who went about prating of my tongue and temper had not discovered that I was comely too, I had perceived that he had not spoken in jest when he had said that I was as straight and slender as a hazel twig and as brown in hue as hazel nuts. Therefore I was determined to look my best in my bridal robes—the more, after marriage, to shrew it over him and make him rue the insolence of his wooing.

The appointed day came, the hour drew nigh, but no bridegroom had arrived. My father was growing nervous. "What mockery!" he exclaimed. "The priest attends, the friends are bid, the feast is prepared. What will people say to this shame of ours?"

"Ours!" I shrieked. "Not ours, but mine! Here I am forced to give my hand to the first rude man who offers, a mad-brain jester, who woos in haste but means to marry at leisure, seeking to

punish me for the hate I showed him by making me a bride without a bridegroom, so that all Padua shall point to me and say, "Behold Katherine, the Shrew, and mad Petruchio's wife—if it shall please him to marry her!"

With this I rushed from the room and into my own, where, bolting the door behind me, I burst into tears for the first time in my life, the outcome was so at odds with what I had planned. For Petruchio being a handsome man, as I had been obliged to acknowledge to myself, and I by no means ill-favored, and becomingly arrayed, I knew that we were certain to make a brave appearance in church. Therefore it was in my mind that the very people who had inveighed against me would be moved to envy me, seeing that I had found a husband, and a rich and handsome one, while their own sheepish daughters, who had been held up to me as models, still went without. But now my name would be the jeer and gibe of all Padua. So there I sat in tears, partly of passion that I had been tricked, partly of chagrin that my plan to punish those who had offended me had miscarried, and partly with vexation that I should be so eager for this man to come, rather than rejoice that I might escape being married to him.

While I was distracted by such thoughts there arose a great noise outside the house, and presently there was a pounding at my door and my father called that Petruchio had arrived and was storming because I was not there to meet him. There was not the pleasure in my father's voice one might have expected after the strain of waiting, and when I had cleared my eyes of weeping, smoothed my attire and gone

to meet Petruchio, I saw the reason why. He had come, but how? Not like a bridegroom, but wearing a hat slashed about the brim and feathered like an angry cock; an old jerkin; a pair of old breeches thrice turned; boots grossly greased, one buckled and one laced; and a rusty old sword; and in his hand he held a heavy whip. Just as I came in, some one was urging the loan of proper apparel upon him, whereat he answered in a loud, rude voice, "'Tis time we were at church. Kate marries me and not my clothes!" Then he seized my hand with such a hold I could not have wrenched myself loose had I striven to—and so we went to church.

Nor was he less arrogant when we came back. Knowing that we were to ride to Venice I doffed my bridal attire for my riding habit, a fetching garb. But no sooner did I appear in this than he turned to the assembled company, called out that we could not remain for the wedding feast, since we must set out straightway for his home in Venice, and bade them be of the same cheer without us.

To this I first demurred, then, when he persisted, broke out angrily:

"The door is open, sir. If you would go, there lies your way." Then to the guests, "Gentlemen, forward to the bridal dinner! I see a woman may be made a fool, if she has not the spirit to resist."

At that Petruchio, twisting my meaning as he had at our first meeting, planted himself between me and the guests, brandished his whip and, pretending that they sought forcibly to detain me against my will, cried out:

"I will be master of my own. Here

stands my wife; touch her whoever dare. Fear not, sweet Kate. There's none so brave in Padua shall stop our way or keep you from me. I would defend you against a million!" His voice resounded through the hall like a deep-belled instrument tuned to the snapping of his dreadful whip, and, though he seemed to upbraid the company, his eyes flashed full on me, so that, when he seized me and bore me off, I dared not struggle for fear he'd bring the lash down on my back. The last I heard from the company was a loud laugh and some one call, "Kate, the shrew? Why, she's a lamb to him."

And the mad journey to Venice! The stumbling horse he set me on and, when it came down on its knees and I fell in a miry place, the rage in which he threw himself upon the groom and beat him for giving me such a nag, till I, picking myself up, made my way to them and prayed him to spare the poor man! There seemed no moment but I heard his ranting voice berating this or that and everything till I began to wonder if my vile temper had so affected others as his did me.

Having been borne away from my father's house without a taste of the wedding feast and nothing to eat on the rough journey, I was right hungry when we reached Venice and glad enough to sit down at table. My husband, too, seemed in good humor. For when he had bidden his "rascals," as he called his servants, go fetch in supper, he lay back in his chair and sang,

It was the friar of orders gray,
As he forth walked on his way—

but got no further, when supper was brought in. Then began another scene. Crying out that the meat was burned,

the cook a rascal, the supper spoiled, the servants joltheads to have taken it off the dresser, he ordered it carried away. I, being half-famished, protested mildly that it would do if he were but content. Upon this he argued, mockingly basing his action on his love for me, that as I was weary from the journey, meat and all else unless properly cooked would make me ill; and sent me hungry to bed, but would not let me sleep for his loud voice scolding every one about the house. Day after day it was almost the same. The house was bedlam, and when at table I had taken barely enough to keep body and soul together or showed I liked a certain dish, he would, under the plea of affection, order it away, for fear I who was nearly starved should overeat. Against all this I, who had ruled at home by my own violence, dared not stand up. For when his eyes flashed, they burned with a splendid fire, and there was about him something masterful that made me dread his anger—a man I could respect and even love, instead of fear, were he but kind and gentle.

Word came from Padua that Bianca was to be married. He announced that we would go to the wedding and bade me order a new hat and gown for the occasion. But when I tried on the hat he said it looked as if it had been modeled on a baking dish, called it a "custard cup," a "velvet pie," tore it from my head and trod it under foot. I had to sit by and watch the pretty thing trampled out of all shape. When the tailor brought the dress, he exclaimed that the sleeves were like cannon, threw it at the man, chased him from the house with his own yard-stick. The

result was that I had to start for Padua in my old hat and gown that were not just in fashion. But so accustomed was I now to obey him in all things, for fear he would vent his savage temper upon me, that I did not dare show my disappointment.

On the way to Padua, it being high noon, he said, "how brightly the moon shines." I ventured to suggest that it was the sun. "It is the moon," he insisted, "or if it is not the moon, we turn our horses and ride back to Venice."

"Then it is the moon," I said wearily, "or a star, or a rushlight, or anything, so you will it"—such being my state of mind and so fearful he would carry out his threat, that, had he said it was a taper, I would have agreed to it.

At the feast, after the wedding ceremony, he was in great spirits and I noted, not without pride in him, that none spoke so well or wittily as he and argued with such easy mastery, so that he was listened to attentively and with much deference. When Bianca and myself and another woman lately wedded who was at the feast had left the table and were seated by the parlor fire, a messenger came from Bianca's husband saying he would like her to return to the dining-room. She, not wishing to go back alone, sent word that she was busy and could not come. A little later the other woman's husband sent for her. She replied that he must be in jest and remained. But when my husband sent a messenger bidding me to attend, I went at once, and asked what his will might be.

"Go and fetch the others hither," was his order, and when I had persuaded them to come, we learned that their husbands having twitted Petruccio about his shrewish wife, he had said that I would come at his request more quickly than they.

"And now Kate," he said, "I charge you tell these wives what duty they owe their husbands."

Then, not because I feared him, but because he sat among the other men so much handsomer and lordlier than they that I was moved to admiration of him, I said to my sister and her friend, who both looked glum enough at the event:

"Unknit those unkind brows, since a woman moved by temper is like a fountain troubled and bereft of beauty. Your husband is your life, your keeper, who for your maintenance braves danger both by land and sea and craves no other tribute at your hands than love, fair looks and true obedience—too little payment for so great a debt."

"There speaks the wife!" he cried. "Come on, and kiss me, Kate! Then home to all that life and love can give!"

In his eyes there was a look so deep, so tender, that in it I divined the meaning of all his strange and violent actions since we had wed. For had they not been the means of showing me the ills that come of high temper and angry speech, and of bringing me to my own true self? And now, happily, I no longer am "Kate, the Shrew," but Kate tamed, although not tame, since my lord Petruccio would not have me so.