The Taming of the Shrew begins with two “Induction” scenes about one Christopher Sly. Sly is a tinker of Warwickshire whom a lord, returning from a hunt, finds in a gutter sleeping off his drunkenness. The lord decides to play a trick on the slumbering tinker, so he orders his servants to take Sly into his house, put him in his bed, and treat Sly as the lord. When he wakes, Sly is understandably confused; he protests that he is not a lord, but finally is convinced. Upon hearing about his wife, Sly asks, “Am I a lord, and have I such a lady? Or do I dream? Or have I dreamed till now?” (Induction, 7.66-67). A young boy page dresses up to play the part of Sly’s wife, players are called in, and a play begins. The play Sly watches from his bed is what we know as The Taming of the Shrew. In short, The Taming of the Shrew is a play within a play.

Sly appears again only at the end of the first act to put in his evaluation of the play: “‘Tis a very excellent piece of work, madam lady; would ’twere done!” (1.1.251-252). Some productions have left Sly on stage through the whole play, and in a parallel play, The Taming of a Shrew, which may be an earlier version of Shakespeare’s play, Sly appears again at the end, when he wakes up in a gutter and decides to go home to tame his wife. In the play as we have it, however, Sly disappears after the first scene.

The Induction scene is a remarkable piece of dramatic writing in itself, and shows Shakespeare’s astonishing ability
to set out believable scenes and characters, like a sketch artist, with a few strokes of the pen. Sly bursts onto stage in the midst of an argument with the Hostess of his favorite tavern about repayment for the glasses he has broken (Induction, 1.1-10). Sly’s moral character is immediately revealed by his refusal to make restitution for the damage he has caused, and his intellectual capacity is as quickly manifested by his misquotations of history and literature. He says “Richard Conqueror” when he means “William the Conqueror,” not only mistaking William’s first name but apparently taking “Conqueror” as a surname. He swears by “Saint Jeronimy,” confusing St. Jerome the Church Father with Hieronymus, a character from Kyd’s Spanish Tragedy. It is only ten brief lines, but it is enough for Shakespeare to give a vivid characterization and let us know more about Sly than we probably wanted to know.

Though the Induction scenes are skillfully written and paced, at first glance they seem to have little to do with The Taming of the Shrew itself. Shakespeare, however, rarely if ever includes such scenes without purpose. First, the Induction scenes set the tone of the entire play. When the play explodes before us with a shatter of glass and a raucous argument, we know immediately what kind of play we are watching. We know it is not going to be a tear-jerker or a quiet, meditative play. It is going to be fun, and rather boisterous fun at that. As the Induction proceeds, Shakespeare skillfully fills in the setting: Huntsman appear, comparing notes on their hunting dogs. Their leisurely discussion, full of technical hunting terms, stands in sharp contrast to Sly’s oaths and contentiousness, and gives us a sense of a real country setting.

Moreover, these scenes introduce some of the important themes that are developed in the course of the play. The Induction scenes are concerned with mistaken and confused identity. Sly is not who people say he is. He has not been dreaming; he has been tricked into believing he is someone other than Christopher Sly, “old Sly’s son of Burton-heath,
by birth a pedlar, by education a cardmaker, by transmutation a bear-herd, and now by present profession a tinker” (Induction, 2.16-19). He takes on a new identity because he relies on the servants’ testimony, because he trusts the names they give him and the way they describe the world. The notion that one’s character and personality can be shaped by submission to the word of another will, we see, be central to the relationship of Petruchio and Katherine. But the Induction scene shows that the influence of a new name may be no more than skin deep. We know that eventually Sly’s dream will come to an end, the lord will kick him out the door, and he will find himself back in the gutter. The servants will stop calling him “master” and “lord” and again call him “monstrous beast,” “swine,” “foul and loathsome,” a “drunken man” (Induction, 1.31-33). Names can identify; but people can also assume false names, titles, and identities. Calling a Christopher Sly a lord does not make him one.

A name or title is like an article of clothing, and like a name clothing is a double-sided image. On the one hand, there is a truth in the saying, “The clothes make the man.” We recognize doctors and nurses, judges and policemen by their uniforms. But we know, on the other hand, that uniforms can be counterfeited. We have all heard stories about people who sneak into hospitals and impersonate doctors, sometimes even performing surgery for years before their fraud is uncovered. People put on the uniforms of clergymen, policemen, or judges without really holding those positions; they put on the clothing that identifies, without really having the identity. Clothing does not identify who they really are; clothing becomes a mask and a disguise to hide their real identity from others. Sometimes the clothes do not make the man.

Clothing’s potential as a disguise is highlighted in The Taming of the Shrew. Sly is dressed in “sweet clothes,” has rings on his fingers, and is surrounded by the “garments” of noble life—a soft bed, paintings, attending servants, music and drama. In Sly’s case, the clothing is designed to hide Sly’s
true identity from himself. In this way, the Induction scenes fit perfectly into a play dominated by clothing imagery, where disguises abound and where nearly every character puts on someone else's clothes at some point in the play. As we read this play, we should keep in mind that disguises can be more subtle as well. Putting on an act can be as much a disguise as putting on a false beard and sunglasses.

The theme of identity, and the related imagery of clothing, are closely intertwined in the play with issues of change and transformation. Transformations of name, identity, position—changes of "clothing"—fill the play to overflowing: Lucentio and Tranio trade places, and then Lucentio takes on another name; Hortensio disguises himself to gain access to Bianca; Tranio convinces an anonymous traveler to impersonate Lucentio's father Vincentio. Nearly the only relationship that does not involve disguise and deception is that between Petruchio and Katherina. Petruchio arrives at his wedding wearing mad attire, and later offers Katherina a new gown, but neither uses clothing as a disguise. Ironically, it is this relationship, from which superficial transformations and masks are absent, that produces the most lasting and profound transformation of all. In the end, Baptista, whose relationship with Katherina has been, to put it mildly, cool, says, with accuracy and admiration: "For she is changed, as she had never been" (5.2.115).

Transformation comes through education, and two models of education are suggested by the play, embodied in Lucentio and Tranio on the one hand and Petruchio on the other. Both views of education have a practical goal; Lucentio wants to study philosophy so as to acquire virtue, and Petruchio's training of Katherina has the practical goal of taming her wildness. Their methods, however, are very different. In the opening scene, Tranio tells Lucentio that learning best takes place in an atmosphere of leisure and ease:

The mathematics and the metaphysics,
Fall to them as you find your stomach serves you.
No profit grows where is no pleasure ta’en.
In brief, sir, study what you meet effect. (1.1.37-40)

Lucentio agrees. Petruchio, by contrast, operates on the assumption that education in virtue, true practical transformation, requires imposition of strict boundaries, rigorous discipline, and a kind of coercion. Petruchio believes that a successful teacher demands that his pupils fall to their studies even when their stomachs do not affect it, even when they do not want to study. A successful teacher requires his students to accept his answers as the right answers, to accept his labels and names for the world. For Petruchio, as Gunnar Sorelius has put it, acquiring true wisdom requires a “discipline of pain as well as ease.” This notion of education is taken to a comic and even farcical extreme in the play but the educational method behind it is quite serious.

It does not go too far to suggest that, making allowances for the comic setting, Petruchio’s training of Katherine is similar to Christ’s training and discipline of His unruly Bride, the Church (see, for example, Ezek. 16; 23; Rev. 2-3). If a comparison of Petruchio and Christ seems far-fetched, it is well to recall that the Jesus of the gospels is not all “sweet Jesus, meek and mild.” He also is the One who sharply denounces the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Mt. 23) and drives merchants from the temple with a whip (Jn. 2:13-21). As is said of Aslan in the Narnia Chronicles, Jesus is good but He is “not tame.” Sorelius points out that Petruchio takes on divine attributes and powers in the play. He is able to command time, the sun and moon, and to turn an old man into a fresh young maid with nothing more than a word. For Katherine at least, Petruchio’s word is reality, and molds reality in its image.

J. Dennis Huston has helpfully pointed to parallels between The Taming of the Shrew and fairy tales. Petruchio is a fairy tale hero, who rescues the other characters, and the action of the play has a dreamlike quality that one finds in folk stories. Instead of killing the monster and marrying the princess,
Huston points out, Petruchio must marry the monster and turn her into a princess. This is not a tale of beauty and the beast; it is a tale where beauty is the beast. In this context, we can understand the significance of the pervasive animal imagery of the play. Katherine is the “shrew” of the title. A shrew is a small, mole-like rodent that has long been considered mean and ferocious. Kate is also called a “fiend of hell” (1.1.88) and a “devil’s dam” (1.1.104), and Petruchio compares his taming of Kate to training a falcon for hunting (4.1.175-183). Kate’s progress is from bestial savagery and ferocity to tame and gentle womanhood. Petruchio represents the power of civilization and religion, which employs authority and even force to shape a depraved humanity. Petruchio, like Christ, is preparing a savage child of hell to become Queen at his right hand.

Important as Petruchio’s education and discipline is to Katherine’s “conversion,” it is not enough in itself. Sorelius’s insightful essay on this play bears the sub-title, “Metamorphosis as Divine Gift.” Petruchio’s efforts play their part, but in the final scene, the characters recognize they have witnessed a miracle. Lucentio sits open-mouthed, and cannot use the word “wonder” (which in Shakespeare’s day had the same meaning as “miracle”) often enough: “Here is a wonder, if you talk of wonder” (5.2.106), and he pronounces the final words of the play: “‘Tis a wonder, by your leave, she will be tamed so” (5.2.189). The Taming of the Shrew does not present a picture of redemption by education alone, for it ends with a recognition that, without the intervention of God’s grace and power, even the most consistent discipline and training has no deeper or more lasting effect than dressing a tinker in a lord’s bedclothes.
Lesson One: Act 1

Act I contains two parallel scenes:

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The act opens with the arrival of the two major male characters in Padua. Both announce their reasons for coming to Padua in opening speeches. Each makes plans to court one of the two main women characters. Baptista's refusal to allow Bianca to marry before Katherina brings the two characters and their plans together. Petruchio answers the prayers of Bianca's suitors, for by courting Katherina, he cuts through the Gordian knot that prevents Bianca from marrying. These scenes set up an immediate parallel and connection between Lucentio and Petruchio, between Bianca and Katherina, and between the two courtships, and thus we are invited to compare their intentions, their methods, their results. The whole play is structured by the progress of these contrasting courtships.

Lucentio arrives in Padua as a student. Initially Padua is above all the "nursery of the arts" a place to "institute a course of learning and ingenious studies." His interests are especially in the branch of philosophy that "treats of happiness by virtue specially to be achieved" (1.1.8-9, 18-20). He makes a point of saying that he comes with authorization from his father. The authority of fathers is an important issue in the play, though not one that we will take time to develop. Lucentio announces that he comes to Padua to fulfill the hopes that all have for Vincentio's son (1.1.14-16); Petruchio's move to Padua is occasioned by the death of his father (1.2.49-55); the crux of the problem in the play is Baptista's exercise of paternal authority, since he refuses to marry Bianca before Katherina is married; later, Tranio will find an old man to play Lucentio's father, Vincentio; at the
beginning of Act 5, the real Vincentio appears and the confused relations of fathers and sons must be unraveled. In addition to the contest between the sexes the play also depicts a contest between generations.

For Tranio, Padua holds attractions that cannot be called philosophic. He makes a passing gesture of respect for his master's scholarly pursuits, but then he gets to his real message:

Only, good master, while we do admire
This virtue and this moral discipline,
Let's be no stoics, nor no stocks, I pray,
Or so devote to Aristotle's checks
As Ovid be an outcast quite abjured.
(1.1.29-33)

Aristotle, the Greek philosopher who represents serious study, philosophy, logic, and moderation in all things, should be balanced with Ovid, the great Roman poet of love. All philosophy and no play, Tranio says, makes Lucentio a dull boy. As we saw above, Tranio is also suggesting a view of education that minimizes discomfort and authority in favor of ease and free choice.

That reference to Ovid has additional importance. Ovid was not only the author of the Art of Love but also a compiler of myths. One of his works, Metamorphosis, is a collection of myths that all have in common some kind of transformation—from animal to man, from man to animal, from man into plant, etc. Lucentio will shortly be transformed into Tranio and Tranio into Lucentio, and all around them the characters will trade their identities. At the heart of the play is the transformation of a shrew into a woman. In such surroundings, Ovid is indeed worth Lucentio's attention.

Moments after Tranio has given his advice, Baptista, Katherine, and Bianca appear, trailing a little cloud of Bianca's admirers. The moment Lucentio sees Bianca and hears her speak, arts, philosophy, virtue, logic are out the window. Goodbye, Aristotle; Hello, Ovid! Lucentio and Tranio trade
places. Tranio, who had been urging the study of Ovid, becomes realistic and logical, calling Lucentio's attention to the storm and din raised by Katherine and explaining the obstacles that lie between Lucentio and Bianca (1.1.168-181). Tranio sets himself to determine how the obstacles can be overcome: Goodbye, Ovid; Hello, Aristotle. Fittingly, since Lucentio and Tranio have already exchanged viewpoints, their plan involves an exchange of clothing and identity (1.1.185-214). Lucentio will disguise himself as a teacher in order to get close to Bianca, while Tranio pretends to be Lucentio and woos Bianca.

When he first hears Bianca, Lucentio compares her to Minerva (1.1.84). This is a significant insight, one that Lucentio himself does not fully comprehend. On the one hand, the comparison fits in the context. Minerva or Athena was the goddess of all technical arts. Above all goddesses in ancient mythology she was believed to be equipped with practical intelligence and skill. Like Minerva, Bianca has just mentioned her devotion to books and music: "My books and instruments shall be my company, on them to look and practise by myself" (1.1.82-83). There is an additional level to the comparison, however. Minerva was not only the goddess of technical arts but also a goddess of war. (Athena is called Pallas Athene throughout Homer because she had killed Pallas in her youth.) While Lucentio believes he has found a goddess of skill and beauty, his words hint that he may also have found a woman devoted to conflict. The silent, mild, sober Bianca may prove more a Minerva than her shrewish sister.

Later in the play, it will be said of Petruchio that "he hath some meaning in his mad attire." If Katherine clothes herself in madness and shrewishness, her attire is not without meaning either. Her first words are directed to her father: "I pray you, sir, is it your will to make a stale of me among these mates?" (1.1.57-58). There is a multi-leveled pun in this question. First, Katherine is referring to the game of chess with her play on the word "stalemate." A stalemate is a final
position in which the king can no longer move without being placed in check though he is not in check. There is no real winner in a game that ends in stalemate; the game simply ends because the king is trapped and cannot make another move. Katherina asks whether her father has deliberately put her in a similar position.

What has trapped Katherina is her father’s policy with respect to his daughters. He obviously favors Bianca and wants her to be happy. At the same time, he refuses to permit Bianca’s marriage until Katherina is married. Katherina believes that in her father’s eyes, and surely in Bianca’s, she is little more than an obstacle to her sister’s happiness. No one is interested in Katherina for herself, not even her father, who seeks husbands for Katherina less for her sake than for Bianca’s. Katherina’s sense of being “stalemated” by her father and sister offers a partial explanation of her shrewish behavior. Some have suggested that her conduct is something like a “self-fulfilling prophecy.” Unloved by her father, she concludes she is unlovable, so she behaves in a way that ensures no one will love her. The more she makes herself unlovable, the more she proves she is unlovable. Others have suggested that Katherina is fearful of intimacy: To prevent anyone from getting near, she makes herself into someone that no one wants to be near. More simply, her behavior is a way of avenging herself on Bianca. By making sure no one wants to marry her, Katherina is also making sure that Bianca will not get married.

“Stale” has some other important connotations as well. In Shakespeare’s day, a “stale” was a laughing stock, someone who was the object of mockery and joking. Katherina has to endure abuse from her sister’s suitors, who talk about her as if she were not there, as well as from the whole city of Padua, where no doubt she is well known as the shrewish sister of sweet Bianca and the daughter who stands in the way of her sister’s marriage. Finally, a “stale” is a prostitute. Katherina is saying that Baptista is willing to accept any husband, no matter how unsuitable, to take Katherina off his hands. He is
willing to sell her to the highest bidder, which reduces her to a whore. It may be possible to understand and even sympathize with Katherine, but her conduct is inexcusable. She lives up completely to her reputation. Though she may be old enough to marry, she still acts like a child, with her violent tantrums, her envy of her sister, her self-centeredness. Bianca, on the other hand, clearly knows she is her father’s favorite and makes the most of the situation. She is a little “goody-two-shoes,” the Pharisical daughter who always says the right thing and does the right thing not because she really is good but because she wants everyone to think she’s good. Her first words are as revealing as Katherine’s (1.1.80-83). When Launcelot hears her speak, he thinks he is listening to Minerva. We hear her say, essentially, “I’ll do whatever you say, daddy dear. And now may I please go do my homework? Please?”—and we know that she is simultaneously building herself up in daddy’s eyes and making sure daddy knows how different she is from mean, old Katherine. Her words are so sweetly manipulative they make you vomit.

Gremio has said that it would be better to look for a devil rather than a man to marry Katherine (1.1.120-123). Enter Petruchio, who seems to fit the bill. Petruchio, like Katherine and Sly, bursts onto the scene like a storm cloud, almost immediately beginning to beat his servant Grumio for not knocking on Hortensio’s door. Grumio testifies that this master is mad (1.2.18), and he may even be a bit drunk. Like Launcelot, Petruchio comes to Padua seeking happiness, but the happiness he seeks is not that which is achieved by virtue. For Petruchio, happiness means finding a wealthy wife (1.2.74-75). As he tells his old friend Hortensio, he is not choosy:

if thou know
One rich enough to be Petruchio’s wife—
As wealth is burden of my wooing dance—
Be she as foul as was Florentius’ love,
As old as Sibyl, and as curt and shrewd
As Socrates’ Xanthippe, or a worse,
She moves me not—or not removes at least
Affection's edge in me, were she as rough
As are the swelling Adriatic seas. (1.2.64-73)

With his few half-hearted attempts to dissuade Petruchio, Hortensio may in fact intend to encourage him. Petruchio is a man who enjoys a challenge, and Hortensio's descriptions of Katherina's sharpness only whet his appetite for the courtship. He insists on seeing Katherina immediately. This of course suits Hortensio, who now has hope that Bianca will be freed for marriage. The parallel with the first scene is completed when Hortensio disguises himself as a musician and asks Petruchio to present him to Baptista.

Whatever else we might say about Petruchio, our first impression is one of unpredictability, even danger. No doubt, even his best friends and servants never know what is going to come next. We don't yet know whether he is good but we are quite sure that this tamer is himself untamed. Perhaps this is precisely what is required if a shrew and fiend of hell is to be subdued to teachableness.
Lesson Two: Act 2

Act 2 contains one long scene, divided into four sub-scenes:

**Main Characters**
- Katherine and Bianca
- Petruchio and Baptista
- Petruchio and Katherine
- Baptista, Gremio, Tranio

**Main Action**
- Katherine has Bianca’s hands tied
- Bargaining for Katherine
- Petruchio “courts” Katherine
- Bargaining for Bianca

The act opens with a fight between Baptista’s daughters. Katherine has tied Bianca’s hands, which pointedly symbolizes their relationship. Katherine feels stalemated but she has also effectively stalemated Bianca. Bianca cannot marry without Kate marrying, and since Katherine is so shrewish she has figuratively tied Bianca’s hands. She has indeed made Bianca a “bondmaid and a slave” (2.1.2). The opening scene also symbolizes the situation because Katherine is directing her attack against Bianca. Though in most scenes Katherine is attacking someone else, in a real sense all of her anger is against Bianca and her father. This becomes clear in the bitter words she speaks to Baptista when he comes to break up their fight:

now I see
She is your treasure, she must have a husband,
I must dance bare-foot on her wedding day,
And for your love to her lead apes in hell.


Talk not to me, I will go sit and weep,
Till I can find occasion of revenge. (2.1.31-36)

The images are allusions to proverbial wisdom about unmarried women: An unmarried older sister danced barefoot at her younger sister’s wedding; old maids do not, like married women, lead children to heaven but apes into hell. It is significant that the act ends with the suitors’ making arrangements with Baptista for Bianca’s marriage. During the course of the act, Katherine’s marriage is arranged, and therefore Bianca’s hands are untied. Petruchio the tamer is indirectly Bianca’s liberator. The fairy tale hero delivers everyone who has lived in bondage to the monster.

Poor Baptista. He has brought much of his grief upon himself, but one cannot help feeling some pity for him. He has no sooner broken up a fight between his daughters when suddenly his house is full of uninvited and mostly unfamiliar guests. Of the suitors that crowd through his door, only Gremio and Petruchio are not disguised, and Baptista has never before seen Petruchio. Petruchio, moreover, does not waste time with formalities; he is, as Gremio says, “marvellous forward” (2.1.72) and gets right to the point, before he has even introduced himself: “Pray have you not a daughter called Katherine, fair and virtuous” (2.1.41-42). He is, at this point, most interested in the financial arrangements, asking Baptista directly about the dowry. Baptista is also a practical man, and his requirement that Petruchio must obtain Katherine’s love (2.1.128) is an afterthought.

Petruchio’s courtship of Katherine bears out his own description: “I am rough and woo not like a babe” (2.1.136). Wasting no more time with Katherine than he did with her father, the tamer leaps immediately into his program:

*Petruchio:* Good morrow, Kate—for that’s your name, I hear.
*Katherine:* Well have you heard, but something hard of hearing: They call me Katherine that do talk of me.
*Petruchio:* You lie, in faith, for you are called plain Kate,
And bonny Kate, and sometimes Kate the curst,
But Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom,
Kate of Kate Hall, my super-dainty Kate,
For dainties are all Kates, and therefore, Kate,
Take this of me, Kate of my consolation:
Hearing thy mildness praised in every town,
Thy virtues spoke of, and thy beauty sounded,
Yet not so deeply as to thee belongs,
Myself am moved to woo thee for my wife. (2.1.181-193)

Several things are going on here. First, Petruchio insists on re-naming Katherine as Kate. Naming is an assertion of authority. Parents name their children, not vice versa, and it is a reflection of the Christian notion of male headship that wives take the names of their husbands. In the Bible, God named Adam, but Adam named the animals and his bride (Gen. 2). God names man, but man does not name God; God must reveal His name (Exod. 3:13-14). By giving her a new name, Petruchio is asserting his authority over Kate, something that no doubt surprises a young woman who is used to bullying others. Petruchio know that coaxing will not work with an unruly person; if you want to get anywhere, you have to seize control.

A name is also an identity. This also is very clear in the Bible, where people’s names tell something about their place in God’s plans: Melchizedek: “King of righteousness”; Abraham: “Exalted Father”; Jesus: “Savior.” Re-naming Katherine as “Kate” is Petruchio’s invitation to Kate to take on a new identity, his call to Katherine to put on new “clothes.” This invitation lies behind much of what Petruchio says in this scene. Up to this point in the play, Kate has consistently been referred to as a devil, a fiend from hell, a beast. Petruchio, however, plans to describe her in terms precisely the opposite of what she really is:

Say that she rail, why then I’ll tell her plain
She sings as sweetly as a nightingale.
Say that she frown, I’ll say she looks as clear
As morning roses newly washed with dew.
Say she be mute and will not speak a word,
Then I'll commend her volubility
And say she uttereth piercing eloquence.
If she do bid me back, I'll give her thanks,
As though she bid me stay by her a week.
If she deny to weal, I'll crave the day
When I shall ask the bands, and when be married.
(2.1.169-84)

Speaking directly to Kate, he says:

I find you passing gentle,
'Twas told me you were rough, and coy, and sullen,
And now I find report a very liar,
For thou art pleasant, gamesome, passing courteous,
But slow in speech, yet sweet as spring-time flowers;
Thou canst not frown, thou canst not look askance,
Nor bite the lip, as angry wenches will,
Nor hast thou pleasure to be cross in talk;
But thou with mildness entertain'st thy wooers,
With gentle conference, soft and affable. (2.1.241-250)

It has been suggested that Petruchio is trying to confuse and disorient her, and this is true enough. Petruchio is naturally an unpredictable personality, one who keeps everyone off balance all the time. But this is more than just a matter of confusing Katherina and giving Petruchio the upper hand in a battle of wills and wit. Nor is it merely that Petruchio's compliments are, as Harold Goddard puts it, "manna" to a woman starved for love.

Petruchio's re-naming and his reversal of all the normal descriptions of Kate is an essential part of his educational program. Part of Petruchio's purpose is to put up to Kate an image of what kind of woman she can and ought to be. He paints a Kate with his words that is, at this point, only imaginary. Petruchio is playing a game of make-believe, and he invites Kate to take part. By reversing Kate's every expectation—by commenting on her gentleness not her violence, by praising her beauty, by demanding to marry her when no other man dare—Petruchio is trying to convince Kate of her
worth. To stop here, however, would be to stop short. For the world he speaks is not, strictly speaking, in his "imagination." Something is "imaginary" when it exists only in the mind. The world Petruchio creates is not "imaginary" but "verbal," made of words, and something that exists in words is very different from something that exists only in the mind.

It is true that Petruchio recognizes Katherine's shrewishness is a matter of "policy" (2.1.292), that is, he sees that she is deliberately acting a part in order to avenge herself on her father and sister. It is not quite true, however, to say that Petruchio looks past Katherine's rough and shrewish exterior, discovers that the "real" Kate underneath is gentle and mild, and pulls the real Kate to the surface. Petruchio is not like a miner who digs up treasure that already exists under the surface of the ground. It is rather the case that by acting the part of the shrew, Katherine has actually become a shrew. The power to become a new person does not lie sleeping inside her, waiting to be awakened by a kiss from Prince Charming; that power comes from outside. It comes as an invitation to accept a new reality; it comes from the word. By offering a new reality with his words, Petruchio offers Katherine hope that she and her circumstances can be changed, hope that she can escape becoming a stale among these mates.

Illustrated here is a profound point about the power of language. It is clear that God's word has power to create: God made the world by His Word (Gen. 1; Jn. 1). But it is also true that human words have a creative power. We do not create out of nothing, as God did; but our words can shape and mold the world. On a small scale, we can see in our own lives how the words of parents, pastors, or teachers have deeply influenced our lives. This is why I said that there is a difference between something existing in "imagination" and something existing in "words." You have all heard the childish saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Forget it. It's not true. The Bible, especially the Proverbs, make it clear that words do things to
other people: they can give life (Prov 10:11) and heal (10:21), or destroy (11:9) and tear down (11:11). Thoughts and imaginations lead to actions that affect other people. But thoughts and imaginations are not in themselves actions that directly affect other people or the world around us. Words are.

We can see this distinction in our everyday lives. Suppose you want to start a school newspaper. You imagine what kinds of articles you would publish, how much it would cost, what the name should be. You can go on imagining and imagining for years and nothing will happen. But put your ideas on paper in words, or talk to your friends about it, and things happen. What you have imagined goes out into the world, out in the open, in public. Your proposal may not lead to a real newspaper, words are not magic formulas. You may not be able to find other people who are interested, and your friends may even laugh at the idea. Putting your idea out in words is far riskier than merely thinking about it. That’s because putting an imagined project into words affects the world in ways that imagination alone does not. Or, to take another example, think of the difference between thinking about being in love with someone and actually saying, “I love you.” Different, isn’t it?

We can especially see the power of human words in the influence that certain books have had on the course of history. It is no exaggeration to say that St. Augustine created the medieval Christian world by writing his masterpiece, The City of God. The Reformers, through their preaching and writing, as well as through their other activities, changed the face of Europe during the sixteenth century. Both Augustine and the Reformers said “This is the way things ought to be,” and eventually their preaching and writing “created” a new church and a new world. Think, for a negative example, of how radically the world was affected by Charles Darwin’s Origin of Species or Karl Marx’s Communist Manifesto. We find in Scripture and history the same principle at work: there is a reality, whether for good or ill, that exists only in
word, and then the word remakes the world. First God justifies—pronounces righteous—the ungodly; then the ungodly are sanctified—made righteous. In the beginning, always, is the word; then the word becomes flesh and dwells among us.

Petruchio paints a word-picture of Kate as she might be, and he invites her to live up to it. He creates a world by his words and invites her to make it her real world. At this point, it is words. That is something; but it could remain words. Katherina could reject the new identity and the new world that Petruchio offers her. She could decide to remain the shrew, the fiend of hell. For every City of God or Communist Manifesto that decisively shapes history, there are a thousand books gathering dust in the basements of university libraries that have had virtually no effect on the world. Creatures cannot remake the world merely by speaking or writing words. What exists in words becomes flesh and remakes the world only when people accept the invitation to live in the reality that the words describe. Luther’s sermons and tracts changed the face of Europe because thousands of spiritually starved people believed the biblical gospel of justification by grace through faith, rejected the myriad idolatries of late medieval Christianity, and began to live according to the truth. They accepted Luther’s word-world as the real world, and the real world was changed accordingly. In the play, the issue is whether Kate will submit to the way Petruchio names the world, whether she will submit to his words, whether she will submit to becoming “Kate.” Only when she has accepted the world that Petruchio describes, only when she lives in that world, only when she embraces the hope he offers, will she be turned “from a wild Kate to a Kate conformable as other household Kates” (2.1.276-277).

Kate’s first and for a long time her only reaction is to resist Petruchio’s world, holding hope at a distance. She rejects his invitation to enter a new reality by combating him with wit. Their first conversation proceeds by puns. Throughout, Petruchio is consistent with his initial policy: He continues to assert his authority by giving new meanings to
Kate’s words and he continually returns to his alternative world. He continues to use his words to remake the world. Kate tries to insult Petruchio, but Petruchio turns all of Kate’s insults into images of marriage.

Their courtship begins with a series of puns on “move.” Petruchio says he is “moved” to woo Kate. Kate picks up on “move” and says that she knew he was “movable,” meaning fickle and easily changeable. Petruchio asks what a movable is, and Kate answers that a “stool” is movable. Here, she is using “movable” in a legal sense; “movable” property like chairs and tables contrasts to “immovable” property like land and buildings. Petruchio picks up on “stool” and says, in effect, “If I’m a stool, come sit on me,” turning Kate’s scorning words into an image of sex and marriage. Kate answers that asses were made to bear; by this she means that asses are made to be sat upon, and the implication, of course, is that if Petruchio wants to be sat upon, he is an ass. Petruchio picks up on “bear,” which Kate had used in the sense of “bear a burden” and changes it to “bear children.” Women, not asses, are made to bear. Again, he has turned her insult into an image of marriage. Similarly, when Kate compares him to a cock, he says, be my hen.

In the play, unlike the movie version with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, the courtship proceeds purely by words. This is a verbal not a physical wrestling match. Only once does Katharina strike physically, when Petruchio makes one particularly vulgar pun (2.1.219-221). Petruchio threatens to hit her back if she strikes him again. This exchange sets limits to the battle of courtship they are engaged in. Petruchio the tamer uses authority and a kind of force but it is not the force of physical strength. Their conflict is not about physical strength; it is a conflict about whose word will gain supremacy.

In the midst of the puns and the insults and the wildness of their courtship, we are left with the distinct impression that Petruchio and Kate are attracted to one another. On reflection, the reasons are not hard to find. Petruchio expressed
a willingness to marry the first wealthy woman he could find in Padua, even if she had not a tooth in her head. From that starting point, he certainly must feel very lucky indeed to end up with a chance to court and marry Katherina, whose beauty no one has denied. And, from his viewpoint, her violence and sharp wit are no obstacle, for he considers himself and is as "peremptory as she proud-minded" (2.1.130), a strong man who wants a strong woman. Katherina protests, but how can she not find Petruchio refreshing? After all, she has been surrounded by Gremio's and Hortensio's for who knows how long! Finally, she must be thinking, a man who does not run and hide when I sharpen my tongue and make a thrust, a man who does not back down when I rant and rave. For she is a strong woman who has nothing but contempt for a man weaker than she.

Throughout the taming process, this mutual attraction must be kept in mind. We will misunderstand Kate completely if we do not see that she is falling in love with Petruchio. We will misunderstand Petruchio completely if we do not see a progression in his feelings toward Katherina: from seeing her as a means to wealth, to seeing her as a challenge to his masculine powers, to seeing her through eyes of admiration and love.