9. Petruchio says, “Kiss me, Kate” three times in the play (2.1.326; 5.1.131–140; 5.2.180). Do you think Kate kisses Petruchio at 2.1.326? Why or why not? What is similar about the three times Petruchio asks her to kiss him?


Lesson Three: Acts 3–4

These acts have a structure similar to that of acts 1 and 2. In general, scenes again alternate between the two courtships:

Lucentio and Hortensio court Bianca, 3.1
   Petruochio’s wedding to Katherina, 3.2
   Petruochio’s taming (food and sleep), 4.1
Tranio, Hortensio, and Bianca, 4.2
   Petruochio’s taming (food and clothing), 4.3
Tranio presents false Vincentio to Baptista, 4.4.
   Katherina tamed, 4.5

3.2 is the wedding scene. As we see in our discussions of Much Ado About Nothing and Henry V, weddings are important settings in Shakespeare and other literature. We come to the wedding scene in The Taming of the Shrew with certain expectations about what will happen. We expect the husband and wife to exchange vows, and we expect an atmosphere of joy and festivity, but also of seriousness and decorum. Petruchio, however, almost never conforms to expectation. He makes a farce of the whole wedding by coming late and by being dressed in wild clothing (3.2.42–61), something like a jester. During the wedding, he swears loudly and knocks the priest over. At the end of the ceremony, he kisses Kate so loudly that the church echoes with the sound (3.2.156–182). Then he leaves before the reception is over,
acting as if the wedding guests were trying to kidnap Kate (3.2.237–241).

Tranio says, “He hath some meaning in his mad attire” (3.2.123). What does Petruchio mean? Possibly, he is trying to confuse Kate, to keep her bewildered and off-balance in order to make her easier to handle. Perhaps, too, Petruchio wants to force a public confrontation with Kate. When she refuses to leave with him before the wedding party is done, Petruchio has an opportunity to state publicly that she belongs to him, lumping her together with his other property:

I will be master of what is mine own.
She is my goods, my chattels, she is my house,
My household stuff, my field, my barn,
My horse, my ox, my ass, my any thing,
And here she stands, touch her whoever dare!
(3.2.231–235).

We saw in the courtship scene that Petruchio’s method is to create a world of words, verbally to remake Katherina into Kate, and to invite Kate to accept this new identity. Here we see another level of his program. With his wild clothing and behavior, Petruchio is holding up a mirror to Kate. From the beginning, the other characters have commented on the similarity between Petruchio and his bride, usually to say that Petruchio is as wild and rough as Katherina. At the wedding and in the following scenes, Petruchio is the one who acts the shrew, and his purpose is to manifest to Kate how she behaves toward others. With Petruchio held up before her as a mirror, Kate comes to know herself as she never has and to see how destructive she has been. Seeing the truth is a first step toward repentance. Petruchio’s attire, moreover, fits with the rest of the wedding, which is really a parody of a wedding. Not only does Petruchio act outrageously during the ceremony, but when he finally gets home with his new bride, they fast on their wedding night and abstain from marital relations. A mock wedding is followed by a mock wedding night. Petruchio behaves madly on his wedding day
as an object lesson demonstrating Kate's unpreparedness for civilized marriage.

Petruchio explicitly states another "meaning in his mad attire." When Baptista expresses surprise that Petruchio would be married in such clothing, Petruchio responds:

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 (3.2.116–119).

We have already seen how a change of clothing can signify a change of position and identity. Here, however, Petruchio distinguishes between himself and his clothes, and points out that it is far more difficult to change one's character than to change one's clothes. This insight undergirds Petruchio's entire plan to transform Kate. He knows that an external change of status does not automatically produce a change of character. As we see below, even words, basic as they are, cannot of themselves turn the beast into beauty. Real transformation demands sterner stuff.

Bianca's education proceeds in a much more superficial way. We know from act 1 that she is devoted to books and music; like Lucentio, her education is a discipline of ease and leisure not of pain. This becomes even clearer in 3.1. Lucentio and Hortensio are fighting with each other about what Bianca will study next, but she rejects both their proposals:

Why, gentlemen, you do me double wrong
To strive for that which resteth in my choice.
I am no breeching scholar in the schools,
I'll not be tied to hours nor 'pointed times.
But learn my lessons as I please myself (3.1.16–20).

Bianca embraces completely Tranio's advice, falling to her studies as her stomach serves her (1.1.38). From her words in 3.1, it is clear that she is at least as headstrong as Katheryn,
and it is significant that even much later Bianca still does not even know that there is such a thing as a “taming school” (4.2.55). Since Petruchio has whisked Katerina off before the wedding reception has ended, Baptista instructs Lucentio (Tranio) to “supply the bridegroom’s place” and tells Bianca to “take her sister’s room” (3.2.251-252). On the surface, Baptista is trying to ensure that his guests will enjoy a wedding feast, as he had promised. Beneath the surface, however, there is a hint that Bianca will not only move into Kate’s place at the table but that she will begin to act like Kate. In the final scene, it is revealed that Bianca has truly “taken her sister’s room.”

Once he arrives at his own home, Petruchio pursues a further element of his design to tame Kate. The courtship scene highlighted the power and the importance that words must have in any educational program. Words, however, do not work alone. As the Proverbs consistently show, the word works hand-in-glove with the rod: the rod and reproof give wisdom (Prov. 29:15). Teachers and education officials the world over have rediscovered this ancient truth in recent years. They have realized that it is impossible to impart knowledge, to remake the world through words, if there is no discipline. A disorderly, disrespectful, completely unstructured classroom is a classroom where no real education can take place. Bianca’s training proceeds as she pleases; she decides what she studies and when; she is never required to do anything against her will. Petruchio has a different plan for Kate. She will undergo a discipline of pain, one that Petruchio hopes will produce a wife who accepts his authority and lives by his word. Here again, it is helpful to compare Petruchio’s training of Kate to Christ’s edification of the Church. The Reformers and their disciples came to the conclusion that the Church was not only marked by true teaching, by the Word, but also by the exercise of discipline, by the rod.

Petruchio’s “discipline of pain” has two elements. Peter, one of Petruchio’s household servants, recognizes that “he kills her in her own humor” (4.1.168), that is, he tames the
shrew by out-shrewing her. Petruchio "kills her in her own humor" by attacking everyone around him—except Kate. When Kate's horse stumbles on the way home from the wedding and throws Kate into the mud, Petruchio gets mad at Grumio. When they are served their first meal at home, Petruchio complains that it is burned and throws it around the room. His tantrums perhaps frighten Kate; how would you like to sit down to eat with someone who may overturn the table at any moment? Besides, as we mentioned above, his behavior offers Kate a glimpse of her own conduct by playing her role in a greatly exaggerated way. Whatever Petruchio's intentions, one of the results is that Kate begins to defend the servants from Petruchio (4.1.141, 156–157). Petruchio has maneuvered Kate so that, instead of being an attacker, she becomes a defender of those who are unjustly attacked. She feels the pain of being the object of attack.

Petruchio also disciplines by requiring her to abstain from meat and sleep:

Thus have I politicly begun my reign,
And 'tis my hope to end successfully.
My falcon now is sharp and passing empty,
And till she stoop she must not be full-gorged,
For then she never looks upon her lure.
Another way I have to man my haggard,
To make her come and know her keeper's call:
That is, to watch her, as we watch these kites
That bate and beat and will not be obedient.
She ate no meat today, nor none shall eat.
Last night she slept not, nor tonight she shall not.
As with the meat, some undeserved fault
I'll find about the making of the bed,
And here I'll fling the pillow, there the bolster,
This way the coverlet, another way the sheets.
Ay, and amid this hurly I intend
That all is done in reverent care of her.
And, in conclusion, she shall watch all night,
And if she chance to nod I'll rail and bawl,
And with the clamour keep her still awake.
This is a way to kill a wife with kindness (4.1.175–197).

Petruchio borrows imagery from falconry. During Shakespeare’s day, falcons were trained to hunt, and falconry was a favorite sport of kings and nobles. To tame a falcon and make it responsive to the master’s voice, you deprive it of sleep and food. Petruchio wants to make Kate “stoop.” This is also a term from falconry; a falcon “stoops” when it dives at a lure. Petruchio wants his “falcon” to “stoop” in another sense: he wants her to become submissive and obedient to him. He wants her to “know her keeper’s call,” to accept and live by his word. There is also a hint that Petruchio is training Kate to “hunt,” a hint perhaps picked up in the final scene of the play.

There is probably some biblical imagery in the fact that Kate is not allowed to come to the table until she is willing to bow her knee to her husband. In the Church, food is a means of discipline. Church members who sin gravely and refuse to repent should not be allowed to come to the Lord’s table. If they turn, if they are transformed and again accept the word of the Lord, they are received to the table again. Petruchio imposes the same discipline on Kate. On the wedding night, he does not allow her to eat, on the pretext that the food is unfit. By denying her food, Petruchio teaches Kate to “entreat”; for the first time in her life, she does not demand but asks. She begs Grumio for some food: “I, who never knew how to entreat, nor never needed that I should entreat, am starved for meat, . . . I prithee go and get me some repast” (4.3.7–9, 15). When Petruchio brings her some food, she complains that it is “cold as can be,” and Petruchio begins to take it back:

Petruchio: Here, love, thou seest how diligent I am,
To dress thy meat myself, and bring it thee.
I am sure, sweet Kate, this kindness merits thanks.
What, not a word? Nay, then, thou lovest it not,
And all my pains is sorted to no proof.
Here, take away this dish.

_Katherine:_ I pray you let it stand.

_Petruchio:_ The poorest service is repaid with thanks,
And so shall mine before you touch the meat.

_Katherine:_ I thank you, sir (4.3.39–47).

Petruchio’s falcon is beginning to stoop. Instead of demanding and ranting and getting her way, she is learning to respond to her husband’s word, to pray for his gifts, and to give thanks when she receives.

Petruchio educates by the discipline of food and sleep, and at the end of 4.3, clothing becomes the focus of his political reign. Petruchio shows Kate a new gown but complains to the tailor about every detail and finally sends it back. He shows her what she shall have but then forces her to wait until he is ready to give it to her. Again, part of Petruchio’s point is to give Kate an object lesson: she will receive the clothing of a gentle woman only when she has become gentle (4.3.70–71). He is also reinforcing his insight that a change of clothes is not the same as a change of character. It would be easy for Petruchio to achieve a kind of peace and stability by giving Kate whatever would please her. This may cover over her shrewishness by filling her with a kind of satisfaction. But giving her the clothing of a gentlewoman would not make her gentle. Petruchio is looking for a deep and real conversion; only then will he clothe his new wife in new clothes. Petruchio knows that a shrew dressed in a fancy gown is still a shrew. This is the point of his lecture on the value of clothing:

‘tis the mind that makes the body rich;
And as the sun breaks through the darkest clouds,
So honour peereth in the meanest habit.

_What, is the jay more precious than the lark_  
_Because his feathers are more beautiful?_  
_Or is the adder better than the eel_  
_Because his painted skin contents the eye?_  
_O no, good Kate; neither art thou the worse_  
_For this poor furniture and mean array (4.3.169–177)._
Until she has passed through her training period, she is not yet ready for garments of glory and beauty. Until she stoop, she will not be full-gorged.

“Killing her with kindness” seems an odd way to describe Petruchio’s treatment of Katherina. “Killing” sounds right, but “kindness”? This phrase, however, highlights two fundamental elements of the taming. First, Petruchio, as we have seen, will not be satisfied with a superficial transformation, with a change of clothing. He knows that if wild Katherina is to become a household Kate, the old Katherina must die to make room for a new creature. Depriving Katherina of food and sleep leads her through a kind of death and toward a renewing resurrection. The entire episode in Petruchio’s home is like a descent into hell; Kate is forcibly separated from her family, forced to travel through freezing weather, deprived of comforts and basic necessities. As in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, the passage through hell is a necessary part of the journey toward Paradise. Second, however cruel Petruchio’s antics, it is still true that he loves his bride. It would hardly be loving for Petruchio to permit Kate to continue in her original destructive and self-destructive course, a course that has isolated her from her father and sister and from the whole community of Padua. Making allowance, as we always must, for the comic, fairy tale, tone of the play, Petruchio’s method is well described as “tough love,” as “severe mercy.”

Petruchio’s discipline of pain, his discipline by food, sleep, and clothing, finally bears fruit in 4.5. On their way to visit Kate’s family, Petruchio refuses to go on until she agrees with the way he describes the world, until she consents to be guided by his word rather than by her senses and her own reason. Finally, Kate stoops and accepts Petruchio’s mad description of the world:

*Petruchio:* Come on, a God’s name, once more toward our father’s. Good Lord, how bright and goodly shines the moon!  
*Katherina:* The moon? The sun; it is not moonlight now.
Petruchio: I say it is the moon that shines so bright.
Katherina: I know it is the sun that shines so bright.
Petruchio: Now by my mother's son, and that's myself,
It shall be moon, or star, or what I list,
Or e'er I journey to your father's house....
Katherina: Forward, I pray, since we have come so far,
And be it moon, or sun, or what you please;
And if you please to call it a rush-candle
Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me.
Petruchio: I say it is the moon.
Katherina: I know it is the moon.
Petruchio: Nay, then you lie. It is the blessed sun.
Katherina: Then, God be blessed, it is the blessed sun,
But sun it is not, when you say it is not,
And the moon changes even as your mind:
What you will have it named, even that it is,
And so it shall be so for Katherine (4.5.1-22).

Kate's statement that the moon changes as Petruchio's mind refers to the belief that the moon was responsible for madness (the Latin luna, "moon," is the root of the English words "lunacy" and "lunatic"). This reference gives her words a light-hearted, even ironic tone, but what has happened is profound and serious: Kate repeats Petruchio's names for the world; she consents to live in the reality he describes. Because Kate has stooped, Petruchio's word-world has become flesh; it has become real for the two of them. Because she has stooped, she is on her way to being changed from mad Katherine to super-dainty Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom (2.1.186-187).

The debate about sun and moon takes on an added significance when we see it in the light of what happens at the end of 4.3. There, Petruchio tells Kate to prepare for a trip to her father's house. Kate contests Petruchio's claim that it is "seven o'clock," saying instead that it is "almost two." Petruchio insists that "it shall be what o'clock I say it is" (4.3.192) and calls off the trip. Hortensio, who has come to visit Petruchio exclaims, "Why, so this gallant will command the sun" (4.3.193). In scene 5, Kate confesses that, so far as
she is concerned, Petruchio is lord of the sun, the moon, of all time.

Petruchio has accomplished a great deal by getting Kate to agree privately to name the world as he does. But he is not satisfied until she has been tested publicly, until she is willing to put Kate on public display. When they meet Vincentio, Petruchio calls the old man a "gentle mistress" and "lovely maid" (4.5.27, 33). Kate no longer merely passively accepts Petruchio's word but actively contributes to the world he creates. She goes beyond Petruchio's description and starts playing Petruchio's game with her own ingenuity and wit; Vincentio is not merely a young woman but a "budding virgin, fair, and fresh, and sweet," a young woman who will make happy the man she marries (4.5.37–41). Kate's submission does not stifle her creativity. Instead, it is precisely by stooping, precisely by accepting Petruchio's word-world, that she is freed to enter into a partnership with Petruchio in the creation of a new world. Petruchio has not only remade the world for Kate but has turned Kate into a creative rather than a destructive force. Again, there is a profound Christian truth here; when we have accepted the Lord's Word as truth, our creative powers are freed and we become co-builders with Christ of a new creation.

The sun imagery reappears in the scene with Vincentio. When Petruchio corrects her by saying that Vincentio is an old man, Katherina apologizes, explaining that the sun got in her eyes and made everything look young and green. Like Benedick and Beatrice in Much Ado, she has learned to look at the world through new eyes, through eyes given her by another, through eyes dazzled by the one who commands the sun. And with the sun in her eyes, all the world looks green, fresh, new.

**Review Questions.**

1. How does Petruchio dress for his wedding? Why?
   How does he act during the wedding?

2. Describe Bianca's education. Why is it significant that
(4.2.11–43). How is Hortensio being duped?
8. How does Tranio persuade the “Pedant” to impersonate Lucentio? (4.2.72–121).
9. How does Katherine treat Grumio when he refuses to give her meat? (4.3.31–35). What does this say about the progress of her training?
10. What does Hortensio do after he has given up courting Bianca? What does he say he has learned from Petruchio? (4.5.77–79). Has he learned his lessons at the taming school?

**Lesson Four: Act 5**

5.1 is an unmasking/recognition scene. The climax of the romantic subplot involving Lucentio and Bianca has been set up by a series of disguises. Lucentio, disguised as Cambio, has been courting Bianca while pretending to teach her Latin. Tranio, disguised as Lucentio, has been bargaining with Baptista for Bianca’s hand in marriage. He has found an anonymous Pedant who impersonates Lucentio’s father, Vincentio, and gives Baptista assurances that he has wealth enough for a suitable dowry.

The occasion for removing the disguises is the arrival of the real Vincentio in Padua; Vincentio is the one who can remove all the masks at a stroke. He knows who Tranio and Lucentio really are, and he certainly knows that the Pedant is not Vincentio. It is worth noting that the unmasking, the assigning of proper identities, is the task of a father. Vincentio confronts the Pedant who is impersonating him, discovers Tranio in Lucentio’s clothes (and fears that Tranio has killed his son), and then Lucentio appears, now married to Bianca, to tell what has occurred. When the confusion has subsided, it seems that everything has come out for the best. Vincentio is none the worse for his bewilderment, and Lucentio has married the girl of his dreams. Everyone returns to his true identity and is ready to live happily ever after. As Lucentio says, love is the power that has caused the various transformations:
Love wrought these miracles. Bianca’s love
Made me exchange my state with Tranio,
While he did bear my countenance in the town,
And happily I have arrived at the last
Unto the wished haven of my bliss (5.1.112–116).

Lucentio’s words apply in a much more profound sense to Kate and Petruchio than to himself and Bianca. Lucentio may have traded places with Tranio for love of Bianca, and Tranio may have agreed to the plan for love of Lucentio. As Petruchio pointed out at the wedding, however, changing clothes is much easier than changing one’s self. As Petruchio has been demonstrating, love, so long as it is not mere feeling but the true and hardy love that is closely allied with discipline, has power to produce a change of the heart.

With Petruchio having won over Katherina, and Lucentio securing the hand of Bianca, and all the characters reassuming their proper clothes and identities, the play could end with scene 1. If Shakespeare had merely been writing farce or a romantic comedy, scene 2 would be unnecessary. As it is, 5.2 is the climax of the play, for Shakespeare has further unmaskings to perform. The characters are wearing their proper clothes, but some are still disguised, and it is time for their true colors to be revealed. Shakespeare has to this point followed the course of two courtships, and in contrasting the courtships has brought out contrasts between various methods of education. Now it’s time to see the results. Now it’s exam time.

The occasion for the final test is the wedding feast of Lucentio and Bianca. Hortensio’s new wife, called only “Widow,” says to Petruchio, “He that is giddy thinks the world turns round” (5.2.20). When Kate demands an explanation, the Widow replies: “Your husband, being troubled with a shrew, measures my husband’s sorrow by his woe” (5.2.28–29), an ironic comment since there is every reason to believe that the Widow is already making Hortensio’s life miserable. Kate and the Widow exchange bitter remarks, with
(2.33) reminds us that he trained Kate like a falcon; he’s prepared her to be a huntress.) When the women retreat, Petruchio proposes a bet with Lucentio and Hortensio; each of the three husbands will summon his wife, and the winner will be the one whose wife responds. Not only is Katherine the only one to appear, but on Petruchio’s instructions, she fetches the others (shades of that falcon again) and lectures them on their duties toward their husbands (5.2.136–179). Bianca, at last, is unveiled as the stubborn young woman she has always been. Meanwhile, Kate, by both her words and her actions, demonstrates that the shrew has been tamed and that her marriage is a strong and happy one.

Some students of the play have suggested that Katherine does not mean what she says in her speech, but this is really not credible. First, her speech is filled with biblical allusions. It does need to be said that the Bible has a high view of woman’s place in God’s plan. Scripture reports on and celebrates many heroic women: Sarah, Deborah, Ruth, Esther, Mary. The New Testament insists that women are co-heirs with men of the gift of salvation (1 Pet. 3:7) and that in Christ men and women have the same standing before God (Gal. 3:27–28). Moreover, Christian men are not to be tyrants over their wives but take the self-sacrificing Christ as their model (Eph. 5:22–33). Having said that, Katherine’s speech reflects a genuinely biblical truth in its emphasis on the man’s headship over the woman: the husband is “lord” (5.2.146; 1 Pet. 3:6) and “head” (5.2.147; 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23), who “cares for” the wife (5.2.147; Eph. 5:28–30), to whom a wife owes “true obedience” (5.2.153; Eph. 5:24). It is simply not believable that Shakespeare would mock such widely accepted Christian views of marriage or treat them sarcastically.

The whole action of the play, finally, leads up to a scene in which Kate’s new character can shine forth. Shakespeare has been developing a contrast between the soft and ineffective educational methods at work in Bianca’s training and the severe but effective methods of Petruchio. The last scene un-
masks Bianca as a shrew in dove’s clothing. It is only fitting that the same scene should reverse the public image of Kate as well, revealing the new creation that has emerged under Petruchio’s tutelage. That Kate responds to the “command,” the word, of her husband also fits one of the major themes we have seen develop in the play.

J. Dennis Huston has given several reasons why Kate’s appearance and speech provide a fitting climax to the play, and also defends the view of marriage that Kate’s speech portrays:

First, . . . at last the hero—here in the persons of Petruchio and Kate together—has succeeded in freeing the princess from the monster; and she appears in full regal splendor, striking all with wonder and embodying, in both her person and her behavior, the promise of new order in the kingdom. . . . Second, . . . this scene brings Kate the emotional satisfaction of effecting desires long felt but little acknowledged—to become the center of approving communal attention, to win the unqualified praise of her father, to see her sister misbehave and suffer public reprimand, and to gain a husband’s admiring love. Third, and most important, it presents a revised version of Kate’s original wedding celebration. . . . Kate is actively included in the feasting which celebrates social harmony, and here, too, her husband . . . turns all attention temporarily away from himself and toward her, revealing her as true bride rather than as a suffering victim. For in speaking of the duty that a wife owes her husband, Kate speaks also of the duty a husband owes his wife; she describes the mutual responsibility and trust necessary in any successful marriage.

Huston’s last point is important. Kate does not describe marriage as a one-way street, in which the man tyrannizes his wife. In Kate’s view, there is an order in marriage; the man is lord, head, and sovereign. But Kate also understands marriage as a partnership, in which the husband
cares for thee,
And for thy maintenance; commits his body
To painful labour both by sea and land,
To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,
Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe
(5.2.147–151).

Kate’s view of marriage involves male headship, but it also reflects the theme of mutual submission (Eph. 5:21).

Petruchio knows that he is the “winner” (5.2.186–187), as much as Lucentio and Hortensio realize they have lost (5.2.181). But Petruchio’s victory is not his alone. Both Petruchio and Kate have won. Petruchio has sculpted a wife through word and rod that is the envy of the whole assembly; Kate is still a woman of great energy and wit, but she no longer employs that energy and wit in tantrums and rages but in praising, serving, supporting, and defending her husband. He has not broken her spirit but directed it to a more appropriate end. For her part, Katherine has learned the value of self-control and caring about her husband. In submission to her husband’s word she finds her truest freedom. His love has killed the old Katherine, and his word has created a new Kate. When she kneels before Petruchio to place her hand under his foot, he raises her up to kiss her (5.2.180). By willingly, lovingly submitting to her husband, Kate finds herself lifted up to see him face to face. In her submission, she is exalted. Stooping, she is finally full-gorged.

Review Questions.

1. Explain the various disguises that set up the action in 5.1.

2. Whose arrival in Padua reveals the true identity of the various disguised characters? Why is he the best one to identify everyone?

3. Why doesn’t the play end after 5.1? What is the purpose of 5.2? How is 5.2 similar to 5.1?

4. What does the Widow say to offend Katherina? Why are her words ironic?