Shakespeare’s Italian Settings and Plays

Murray J. Levith
Professor of English
Skidmore College, New York

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A THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

Neither George Gascoigne’s Supposes, a definite source for The Taming of the Shrew, nor The Taming of A Shrew, a possible source or version of Shakespeare’s play, is set in Padua.31 Supposes is located in Ferrara, near Padua and similarly in the Venetian orbit. A Shrew’s setting is Athens, associated with Aristotle and Plato, and the site of ancient learning. With Padua, it is as if Shakespeare combined the suggestions of the two plays’ settings, one Italian and the other identified with education, to derive his own locale for The Taming of the Shrew.

Licio and Petruchio are servant characters in Supposes. The name Petruchio also may have been reinforced as a good Italian name for Shakespeare’s character by a person at court. Petruchio Ubaldini. This soldier came to England during the reign of Henry VIII, married an Englishwoman and possibly served Queen Elizabeth as a diplomat. During a long life, he was a visible Italian moving in important English circles.32 Moryson describes another Petruchio, this one in ‘the most Factious City of Pistoia’, whose story involves a Bianca:

> the sonne of the Chancelor and the sonne of Signor Petruchio, . . . when contending together the sonne of the Chancelor gave a blow on the eare to the other, the Chancelor sent his sonne to Petruchio to crave pardon on his knees, who cruely cutt of his right hand, wher-uppon all the City was divided into a long lasting faction, and because the Chancelors wife was named Bianca that faction took the name Bianchi that is the white, and the other took the name Neri that is the Black.33

Besides the coincidence of names with The Taming of the Shrew, what is interesting is the hand-severing detail reminiscent of Titus Andronicus, the family feud which recalls Romeo and Juliet, and the symbolic colours of the factions, like the red and white roses in the Henry VI plays. All of these works by Shakespeare were written, of course, within five or six years of one another.

Venice and not Padua was the economic centre of the Signory (as portrayed, for example, in The Merchant of Venice and Volpone), so it is perhaps surprising at first to find that Petruchio comes to ‘wive it wealthy in Padua’ (I, ii, 75). However, with this Paduan setting Shakespeare directs his audience to the important central theme of

The Taming of the Shrew – education, the social learning, and the social learning are not those of the school or university is contrasted to its detriment against the prevalent educational experience.34

There are a number of supposed and real ties. Lucentio and Hortensio are engaged to be ‘schooles’. Disguised as Camillo, Lucentio is presented by scholar, that hath been long studying at Rheims, cunning in Greek, Latin, and other languages. A strategy to woo Bianca, he ‘teaches’ her ‘the Art Disguised as Licio. Hortensio is supposedly a teacher of music and the mathematics’ (II, i, 56). He has a term as a pupil, and enters at one point ‘with his hat under his arm’.

Petruchio ‘will be master of what is mine own’, a conventional Renaissance fashion views Kate’s chattels’, beneath him in the order of things, and his wife. Indeed, it is his responsibility to tame her. Petruchio nothing in common with Roger Ascham’s spare and articulate in The Scholemaster. Petruchio has servants roughly (IV, i, 1485 D.), and Grumio’s company Curtis and the others at the country house (IV, 1) and the master’s methods. Petruchio modifies himself by brainwashing.35 His educational theory is: She [will] eat no meat to-day, nor none. Last night she slept not, nor to-night she shal. 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 bed. This way the coverlet, another way the sheets, Ay, and amid this hurly I intend That all is done in reverend care of her, And in conclusion, she shall watch all night. And if she chance to nod I’ll rail and brawl, And with the clamor keep her still awake. This is a way to kill a wife with kindness, And thus I’ll curb her mad and headstrong
The Taming of the Shrew – education, the social lessons taught and learned in a purposefully selected university city. Ironically, as Brian Morris observes, The play makes clear that the true paths to learning are not those of the school or university. Formal education is contrasted to its detriment against the practical academy of experience.34

There are a number of supposed and real teachers in the play. Lucentio and Hortensio are engaged to be ‘schoolmasters’ for the two sisters. Disguised as Cambio, Lucentio is presented as a ‘young scholar, that hath been long studying at Rheims, [who is] . . . cunning in Greek, Latin, and other languages’ (II,i,79–81). As a strategy to woo Bianca, he ‘teaches’ her ‘the Art to Love’ (IV,ii,8). Disguised as Litio, Hortensio is supposedly a teacher ‘Cunning in music and the mathematics’ (II,i,56). He has a terrible time with Kate as a pupil, and enters at one point ‘with his head broke’ by a lute.

Petruchio ‘will be master of what is mine own’ (III,ii,229), and in conventional Renaissance fashion views Kate as ‘my goods, my chattels’, beneath him in the order of things, and thus subservient. Indeed, it is his responsibility to tame her. Petruchio’s pedagogy has nothing in common with Roger Ascham’s spare the rod method as articulated in The Scholemaster. Petruchio handles even his own servants roughly (IV,i,148 S.D.), and Grumio’s comic instructions to Curtis and the others at the country house (IV,i) are a parody of the master’s methods. Petruchio modifies Kate’s behaviour by brainwashing.35 His educational theory is applicable to all underlings, servants, falcons, his wife:

She [will] eat no meat to-day, nor none shall eat;
Last night she slept not, nor to-night 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 reverend care of her,
And in conclusion, she shall watch all night,
And if she chance to nod I’ll rail and brawl,
And with the clamor keep her still awake.
This is a way to kill a wife with kindness,
And thus I’ll curb her mad and headstrong humor.

(IV,i,197–209)
Petruochio also teaches Kate by example — if she will be perverse, he will be more so to demonstrate how miserable perversity is. When Kate strikes Petruochio, he tells her he will 'cuff' her back if she strikes him again (II,ii,220). He comes late to their wedding and in bizarre apparel, forces his bride to depart with him before the wedding supper, insures her awful trip to his country house and, when there, will not let her have her way in anything. Even reverence for religion falls before Petruochio's taming plan: at the wedding Petruochio is quoted as swearing loudly, 'Ay, by gogswounds, . . . That all amaz'd the priest let fall the book, / And as he stoop'd again to take it up, / This mad-brain'd bridegroom took him / Such a cuff / That down fell priest and book, and book and priest' (III,ii,160–4).

Petruochio similarly does not honour conventional social decorum when it serves to make a point with his wife: Kate must kiss him in public on the street (V,i,143–50). By the end, however, Petruochio's thorough 'taming-school' (IV,ii,54) has taught Kate how to entreat (IV,iii,7), and that one is responsible for one's own moods and actions (IV,i,174).

According to Steeven Guazzo's Civile Conversation, a popular courtesy book (translated in 1581 and 1586), 'it is a monstrous and naughtye thing, to see a Gyrle use suche liberty and boldenesse in her Gesture, lookes, and talke, as is proper to men: therefore lette maydes learrne in all their behaviour to express that modesty, which is so seemely for their estate'. Because Kate learns her lesson well, she can become the teacher for her sister Bianca and the 'wealthy widow' near the end of the play. Kate's graceful lecture on wisely duty forwards the traditional notion that women are subservient to men in God's perfect scheme of things. The disobedience to their husbands displayed by Bianca and the widow shows that they need the reformed Kate's instruction.

Besides Kate, there are a number of other learners in The Taming of the Shrew. Observing Cambio's success with Bianca, Hortensio determines that 'Kindness in women, not their beauteous looks, / Shall win my love' (IV,ii,41–2). He will marry the 'wealthy widow', and enroll in Petruochio's 'taming-school' (IV,ii,50–4) in order to learn how 'To tame a shrew and charm her chattering tongue' (IV,ii,58). Hortensio's encounter with the reformed Kate causes him to exclaim that if his wife 'be froward, / Then [Petruochio] hast . . . taught Hortensio to be untoward' (IV,v,78–9). The cure for lovesickness in Euphues is the pursuit of learning ('Love gives place to labour, labour and thou shalt never love'), things around. He has come to Padua to seek 'happiness', 'To suck the sweets of sweet philosophy: however, he has fallen in love and is diverted; education is abandoned. Yet father Vincentio, like most fathers) his son and servant 'spend all' (V,i,69–70), learns that Lucentio's informal education is practical and successful. He approves of his son's tutor, Minola, too, has been duped by his child Bianca's results. The Pedant is a literal student in Padua.

Petruochio's learning experience is the most rewarding. Traditionally wealth as well as birth were important and Petruochio comes abroad wishing to add to the wealth of his dead father. Shakespeare is correct in assuming that a large dowry might be the reward for marrying a woman. Morison writes that 'in the Provinces of Padua [which would include Padua], . . . they were well used, and the virgins . . . to him that would give most for them, or rather, for the nearest, raved dowries for the most favored'. Thus Petruochio is concerned at first with the dowry not her person. He has 'thrust' himself 'happily to wive and thrive' (II,ii,55–6), and he is enough to be Petruochio's wife / (As wealth is but dance) (I,ii,67–8). He is in a hurry too: 'mend haste, / And every day I cannot come to woo' (II,ii,39). A bluster from Petruochio can easily obscure another why he has set out from Verona: 'home [is] / Where grows' (I,ii,58); he has, therefore, 'come abroad' (I,ii,58). Beyond his posturing for Kate, Petruochio's soft edges to his character which ask refinement and pride. To Gremio he brags:

Have I not in my time heard lions roar? / Have I not heard the sea, puff'd up with rage like an angry boar chafed with swine? / Have I not heard great ordinance in the firmament, and heaven's artillery thunder in the skies? / Have I not in a pitched battle heard loud 'larums, neighing steeds, and trumpets thundering, and do you tell me of a woman's tongue?' / Tush, tush, fear boys with bugs.
to labour, labour and thou shalt never love'), but Lucentio turns things around. He has come to Padua to study 'Virtue' and 'happiness'. To suck the sweets of sweet philosophy' (I.i,18, 19, 28), however, he has fallen in love and is diverted. His more formal education is abandoned. Yet father Vincentio, after fearing (like most fathers) his son and servant 'spend all at the university' (V.i,69-70), learns that Lucentio's informal education has been practical and successful. He approves of his son's wife. Baptista Minola, too, has been duped by his child Bianca but with happy results. The Pedant is a literal student in Padua, and is also duped.

Petruchio's learning experience is the most subtle in the play. Traditionally wealth as well as birth were important for social place, and Petruchio comes abroad wishing to add to the riches left him by his dead father. Shakespeare is correct in assuming that in Italy a large dowry might be the reward for marrying a less desirable woman. Moryson writes that 'in the Provinces of the State of Venice [which would include Padua] ... they were wont to marry their virgins ... to him that would give most for them, and by the money given for the fairest, rayes dowry for them that were ill favored'. Thus Petruchio is concerned at first with the shrew's dowry not her person. He has 'thrust' himself 'into this maze, / Happily to wife and thrive' (I.ii,55-6), and he wants 'One rich enough to be Petruchio's wife / (As wealth is burthen of my wooing dance)' (I.ii,67-8). He is in a hurry too: 'my business asketh haste, / And every day I cannot come to woo' (II.i,114-15). But this bluster from Petruchio can easily obscure another explicit reason why he has set out from Verona: 'home is / Where small experience grows' (I.ii,58); he has, therefore, 'come abroad to see the world' (I.ii,58). Beyond his posturing for Kate, Petruchio has noticeable rough edges to his character which ask refinement. He is overly proud. To Gremio he brags:

Have I not in my time heard lions roar?
Have I not heard the sea, puff'd up with winds,
Rage like an angry boar chafed with sweat?
Have I not heard great ordnance in the field,
And heaven's artillery thunder in the skies?
Have I not in a pitched battle heard
Loud 'larums, neighing steeds, and trumpets' clang?
And do you tell me of a woman's tongue, . . .
Tush, tush. fear boys with bugs. (I.ii,200-10)
He is so quarrelsome with his servant Grumio that his friend Hortensio must ask 'patience' of him (I,i,45). He seems overly self-confident, as when Baptista Minola asks how his wooing is progressing and he responds: 'It were impossible I should speed amiss' (II,i,283). Clearly much of Petruchio's character in relation to Kate is only an act to change her behaviour. Yet his statement toward the end of the play, '...the mind that makes the body rich' (IV,iii,172), suggests some self-realization on Petruchio's part as well as a lesson for Kate. Petruchio has come to Padua 'to wive it wealthily' (I,i,75), but has learned that 'wealthily' means more than material riches. Petruchio has found real love and a perfect wife in the reformed Kate. The irony is that he receives more than a usual dowry for his efforts. He gets extra money from Gremio and Hortensio for wooing Kate in the first place, receives a supplemental dowry from Baptista Minola for Kate's 'new' and changed self, and still more payoff after winning the wager at the end of the play.

The Taming of the Shrew contains many words and phrases associated with pedagogy. There are schoolmasters and tutors and pedants who instruct, teach, give lessons to studious pupils or scholars from books or not. 'O this learning, what a thing it is!' (I,i,159), exclaims Gremio (gulled by Lucentio's schoolmaster disguise). Lessons are often delivered to characters and audience in proverbial phrases: 'No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en' (I,i,39); 'nothing comes amiss, so money comes withal' (I,i,81–2); 'where two raging fires meet together, / They do consume the thing that feeds their fury' (II,i,132–3); 'To me she's married, not unto my clothes' (III,ii,117); 'Better once than never, for never too late' (V,i,150); 'Tis a good hearing when children are toward. / But a harsh hearing when women are forward' (V,ii,182–3). John Florio's well-known contemporary manuals for learning the Italian language (First Frutus and Second Frutes, 1578, 1591) abound with proverbs; indeed, they are one of the dominant features of Florio's writing style. John Eliot's satiric Orthoeopia Gallica (1593) mocks Florio specifically in this area. Perhaps, therefore, Shakespeare connected Italian pedagogy with proverbial lessons.

Travel is educational, and, since Shakespeare's play is centrally about learning, we might expect to find a number of travellers in it. As noted earlier, 'home' is limiting; it is the place, in Petruchio's words, 'Where small experience grows'. In the Induction, the Lord hears trumpets at his house and speculates that the sound signals the party of 'some noble gentleman ... / (Travelling some journey)' (Ind. i,75–6). In the play proper, Lucentio, born up in Florence, now journeys to Padua. His father, from Pisa to Padua to seek him out. Most travel is significant, is the Pedant. Originally from Padua, his destinations include Rome and Tripoli (IV,ii,75–81) and money by exchange/From Florence' (IV,ii,89–90). There are also other realistic touches in the play. Renaissance tourists were always fearful of unknown law (see V,i,81–2) and abuse of foreign common (see V,i,108). Of course, travellers would make jokes as well (see IV,v,71–3).

There are a number of accurate items of Italian found in the play. Right at the start, Lucentio 'nursery of arts' (I,i,2). Morison writes that the stock phrase, 'an excellent place to learne and practice Musicke', is accurate. Hortensio is thus credible as a musician. Venice is correctly identified as the place for fashioning oneself into Venice/To buy apparel 'gainst ...' (I,i,314–15). Obviously there is broad satire on Shakespeare when Petruchio shows up for the wardrobe with a hat and an old jerkin; a pair of old breeches three boots that have been candle-cases, one buckled shoe (II,iii,43–6). We recall that Jaques in As You Like It, wearing suits of 'strange suits' (IV,i,34). Gremio promises for Bianca's hand is a 'Valencia' (II,i,354).

According to Petruchio, Kate's initial cursed policy' (II,i,292); after the marriage the new husband is a so-called reign 'politically' (IV,i,188). This disapprovingly, as craftiness was considered to be a trait of a man of Italian character steeped in government. Bits from the Italian language, too, are attempts to authenticate Italian flavour of the play (see I,i,25,198; II,i,24–7, 30–7). These words and phrases are sometimes improved versions of familiar and copybook Italian; he betrays no real knowledge of the Italian language, referred to as a 'pantaloone' (I,i,47 S.D.); Italian is the origin of his characteristic type in the Commedia dell'arte.

Shakespeare has been accused of getting wrong facts about Italy in The Taming of the Shrew. First an
In the play proper, Lucentio, born in Pisa and brought up in Florence, now journeys to Padua. His father Vincenzio travels from Pisa to Padua to seek him out. Most travelled of all though, significantly, is the Pedant. Originally from Mantua, his destinations include Rome and Tripoli (IV,i,75–6); he has ‘bills for money by exchange’ From Florence’ (IV,i,89–90). (Shakespeare writes knowingly here of Florence’s reputation as a banking centre.39) There are also other realistic touches relating to travel in the play. Renaissance tourists were always fearful of breaking some unknown law (see V,i,81–2) and abuse of foreigners by natives was common (see V,i,108). Of course, travellers were likely butts for jokes as well (see IV,v,71–3).

There are a number of accurate items of Italian local colour to be found in the play. Right at the start, Lucentio describes Padua as ‘nursery of arts’ (I,i,2). Moryson writes that the University is, for instance, ‘an excellent place to learne and practise the Art of Musick’.40 Hortensio is thus credible as a music teacher in Padua. Venice is correctly identified as the place for fashion. Petruchio ‘will unto Venice / To buy apparel ‘gainst ... [his] wedding-day’ (II,i,314–15). Obviously there is broad satire intended by Shakespeare when Petruchio shows up for the wedding ‘in a new hat and an old jerkin; a pair of old breeches thrifted turn’d; a pair of boots that have been candle-cases, one buckled, another lac’d’ (III,ii,43–6). We recall that Jaques in As You Like It, who has also been in Venice, wears ‘strange suits’ (IV,i,34). Among much else Gremio promises for Bianca’s hand is a ‘Vaens of Venice gold’ (II,i,354).

According to Petruchio, Kate’s initial cursedness is merely ‘for policy’ (II,i,292); after the marriage the new husband begins his so-called reign ‘politicly’ (IV,i,188). This diction has Italian connotations, as craftiness was considered to be typical of the Italian character steeped in government. Bits and snatches of the Italian language, too, are attempts to authenticate and enrich the Italian flavour of the play (see I,i,25,198; I,ii,24–6,278,280;IV,ii,63). These words and phrases are sometimes imprecisely rendered versions of familiar and copybook Italian; hence, Shakespeare betrays no real knowledge of the Italian language. Gremio is twice referred to as a ‘pantaloone’ (I,i,47 S.D., III,i,37), suggesting the origin of his character type in the Commedia dell’arte.

Shakespeare has been accused of getting wrong a number of his facts about Italy in The Taming of the Shrew. First and foremost, Padua
is not a city in the Lombard region as it is usually defined. Neither is it a seaport, as many have pointed out. Lucentio's 'come ashore' (I.i,42), or Hortensio's question to Petruchio: 'what happy gale/Blows you to Padua here from old Verona?' (I.i,48–9) might suggest that Shakespeare thought it was. But the friends may be using figurative not literal language, and one need not read the exchange as necessarily referring to a boat trip on water. Petruchio employs another nautical metaphor when speaking of the Kate he has yet to meet: 'I will board her though she chide as loud/As thunder when the clouds in autumn crack' (I.ii,95–6). And he reports that he has 'heard the sea puff'd up with winds' (I.ii,201). Though from inland Verona, clearly Petruchio has had some seafaring experience, perhaps as a soldier (see I.ii,203–6). Another supposed error by Shakespeare is the identification of Tranio's father as 'a sailmaker in Bergamo' (V.i,77–8). A landlocked city, Bergamo, it is argued, would not have sailmakers. On the other hand, J. W. Draper speculates that 'perhaps its present fame for the manufacture of textiles goes back to the sixteenth century, and may explain Shakespeare's reference'. The family 'Bentivolio' (I.i,13) was actually Bolognese not Pisan as in the play.

The playwright may be describing ossa bucco when Grumio refers to a 'neat's foot' meal for Kate, and 'fat tripè finely broiled' also sounds like an Italian dish (IV.iii,17,20). However, 'a piece of beef and mustard' (IV.iii,23) is surely English. Petruchio's 'country house', so called by Pope and later editors, is decidedly rustic English in character. The servants are named Curtis, Joseph, Philip, Adam, Rafe, and so on. 'Long-lane' (IV.iii,185) is an English street designation, the 'Pegasus' an English not Genoese-sounding inn (IV.iv,5). The sleeve of Kate's would-be dress is 'carv'd like an apple-tart' (IV.iii,89), an English sweet. And snatches of various English ballads are sung in the play.

In The Taming of the Shrew, Petruchio is first a kind of special knight come to free the beautiful princess Bianca from the shrewish witch Kate who is keeping the younger sister from her destiny. But unlike the traditional prince in the story, Petruchio gets the witch and not the princess as his reward – he 'Achieve[s] the elder, set[s] the younger free' (I.ii,266). Kate, though, is of course more a sleeping beauty than a witch. Enchanted by her own shrewish posturing, she must kiss Petruchio – 'Kiss me Kate' – and awaken to her 'true self', an obedient and gentle one.

Kate's awakening in the play proper is played against Christopher Sly's drunken slumbering in the Induction or about the nature of dramatic illusion as well as about wisely duty. Christopher Sly believes he what he takes to be the reality around him supports audience believes in the 'truth' of plays like The 'a kind of history' (Ind. ii,141), because it will disbelief and so becomes involved in the present Italy seems real. Shakespeare's play is replete dupings, poses, etc., and such drama inevitable questions in the thoughtful spectator. The Incarnation of the familiar Renaissance English play characteristic asks an audience's indulgence. Instead of the usual chorus, however, directing a 'the vasty fields of France', Shakespeare comic audience imagining by way of Christopher Sly. By the 'real' Lord parallels the audience's seduction (also, possibly, the seduction of the English) by the setting from the Induction (Stratford and Burton proper (Padua and Verona) is very deliberate. From the familiar to the remote, the commonplace real to the fictional.

Both audience and Christopher Sly are present a grand joke that this play about wisely duty is done. Sly from intimacy with his supposed 'wife', and kept from whatever 'home duty' by watching the Italy – that upside-down world to Shakespeare comes to 'believe' the moon is the sun because Pet. Shakespeare's audience as well comes to believe this play as it gives itself up to the 'counterfeit suit' playwright and the actors. The audience knows not 'real' but, like Christopher Sly at the beginning be duped by surroundings, settings, costumes – fiction. More alert than Sly if we stay awake for are nonetheless like him as audience. The story attractive, believable, real for the moment. But may be illusion. Thus, the biggest lesson in The turn out to be for Shakespeare's audience.
Sly's drunken slumbering in the Induction in order to make a point about the nature of dramatic illusion as well as the obvious one about wisely duty. Christopher Sly believes he is a lord because what he takes to be the reality around him supports this notion. An audience believes in the 'truth' of plays like *The Taming of the Shrew*, 'a kind of history' (Ind. ii, i41), because it willingly suspends its disbelief and so becomes involved in the presented fiction. Even the Italy seems real. Shakespeare's play is replete with disguises, dapsings, poses, etc., and such 'drama' inevitably raises reflexive questions in the thoughtful spectator. The Induction serves as a variation of the familiar Renaissance English play prologue which characteristically asks an audience's indulgence and imagination. Instead of the usual chorus, however, directing an audience to, say, 'the vasty fields of France', Shakespeare comically dramatizes an audience imagining by way of Christopher Sly. The seduction of Sly by the 'real' Lord parallels the audience's seduction by the dramatist (also, possibly, the seduction of the English by Italy). The change in setting from the Induction (Stratford and Burton Heath) to the play proper (Padua and Verona) is very deliberate. The movement is from the familiar to the remote, the commonplace to the foreign, the real to the fictional.

Both audience and Christopher Sly are presented with a play. It is a grand joke that this play about wisely duty is designed to prevent Sly from intimacy with his supposed 'wife', and the audience is also kept from whatever 'home duty' by watching the play. The setting is Italy – that upside-down world to Shakespeare's English. If Kate comes to 'believe' the moon is the sun because Petruchio tells her so, Shakespeare's audience as well comes to believe in the fiction of the play as it gives itself up to the 'counterfeit supposes' (V,i,i17) of the playwright and the actors. The audience knows that what is seen is not 'real' but, like Christopher Sly at the beginning, it allows itself to be duped by surroundings, settings, costumes – it is drawn into the fiction. More alert than Sly if we stay awake for the entire play, we are nonetheless like him as audience. The story may be that Italy is attractive, believable, real for the moment. But Italy's appeal also may be illusion. Thus, the biggest lesson in *The Taming of the Shrew* turns out to be for Shakespeare's audience.