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Published annually. Subscription price $ 49.95 (hardcover). To order please contact the Order Fulfillment, The Edwin Mellen Press; P.O. Box 450; Lewiston, NY 14092-0450; (716) 754-2788; FAX: (716) 754-4056.

SHAKESPEARE AND ITALY

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A Publication of the Shakespeare Yearbook
Volume 10

The Edwin Mellen Press
Lewiston®Queenston®Lampeter

1999
CROSSDRESSING, NEW COMEDY, AND THE ITALIANATE UNITY OF THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

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The three-part structure of The Taming of the Shrew — Induction, main plot and subplot — has been considered organically united by the themes of disguise and mistaken identity central to the subplot, which derives from George Gascoigne's adaptation (Supposes, 1566) of the prose and verse editions of Ariosto's I Supposti (1509, 1532).1 Whereas the Italian origin is easily identifiable in the Tranio-Bianca-Lucentio plot, the other two parts of the play would not seem to offer sufficient elements to suggest precise Italian sources; hence the development, in the past, of a critical tradition which considered the Shrew and The Merry Wives of Windsor to be Shakespeare's two most English comedies. Brian Morris, for example, views the Sly scenes in the light of the dramatist's life and does not recognize in the taming-plot any concrete form of narrative or thematic influence outside the background of national cultural practice: "The real sources of The Shrew rise in Shakespeare's experience of Warwickshire, of the town houses of mercantile London, of the taverns and streets, and of all sorts and conditions of women, their expectations, frustrations, conquests and surrenders."2

Beyond the numerous but vague derivations mentioned by Morris himself from English and European cultural traditions, both popular and erudite (folktales, ballads and medieval plays), it is possible to find in the Shrew some thematic developments of classical intrigue comedy and interesting re-elaborations, some Italian in origin, of New Comedic conventions. Robert Miola has convincingly demonstrated the intertextual linkage which, starting from Greek and Latin New Comedy, leads to Ariosto's nova comedia via the plays of Menander, Plautus and Terence.3 The use of disguise, the callidus servus, the duping of the old by the young, the sudden return of the absent father, and the lock-out scene are among the principal theathergrams taken up and transformed by the dramatist through a
series of parallel actions. Although the links between the Induction and the main body of the play remain tenuous in some respects, both stylistic-metaphoric coherence, amply attested by various studies, and the origins of both major plot lines in the classical tradition unify the three parts of the play. A stimulating article by Richard Hosley sees in the Shrew "a synthesis of many sources and traditions," belonging to different genres and cultures. In my view the Italian matrix of the Bianca-Lucentio plot affects the form and conventions of the entire play, relying on the theatergrams and types of classical New Comedy and of *commedia erudita*, which reached Gascoigne through Ariosto's indebtedness to Plautus and Terence.

If the coexistence of both New Comedic and Italian elements appears evident in the two complementary narrative forms forming the main stories, it is not so in the Induction where the thematic and stylistic affinities with the play proper and the relationships with classical and Italian theater are less explicit and even problematic because of the disputed connection with the anonymous *The Taming of A Shrew* (1594). In an endeavor to trace a common Italian inspiration, this essay will explore the double nature of the Induction as a Frame, i.e. a dialogic anticipation of the motifs of the play in the form of a metatheatrical structure of the English kind, and as a Prologue, i.e. an independent diegetic segment having the character of an autonomous spectacle, based on Italian Renaissance types and models. Taking the Sly plot as the central focus of discussion, it will also claim that gender and crossdressing motifs provide significant cues for the Italianate unity of the Shrew as a whole.

1. Frame and Prologue.

From Rowe's first critical edition of 1709 onwards, the Induction has been separated from the rest of the play and divided into two scenes of 136 and 142 lines respectively. The first scene consists of three brief sequences which give rise to the following succession of events: an altercation with the hostess and Sly sleeping (Ind.I.1-13); the Lord's return from hunting and the organization of the jest (Ind.I.14-74); the arrival of players and request for performance (Ind.I.75-136). The opening quarrel between the drunken tinker and the hostess ironically anticipates the central clash between man and woman, the taming motif, and Petruchio's strategy of acting the role of the *alazon*. Like Petruchio, Sly appears as a braggart, deriving from the various *milites gloriosi* of classical comedy: he boasts his descent from a noble and ancient lineage ("The Slys are no rogues. Look in the / Chronicles", Ind.I.3-4); he mixes up Richard the Lionheart and William the Conqueror, implying that he is acquainted with soldiership; he twice misquotes *The Spanish Tragedy* ("paucas pallabris"; "Go by, Saint Jeronimy"; Ind.I.5,7), trying to show off learning which he does not possess.

This *alazonia* and the clumsy soldierly attitude prepare Petruchio's cockiness when he uses a series of war metaphors to boast of his capacity to handle Katherine's rebellious character ("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?" 1.2.202-5). The opening provides an initial framing effect in line 5 ("let the world slide. Sessa!")), echoing the closing lines of the Induction ("And let the world slip, we shall ne'er be younger" Ind.II.142). This kind of game-framing appears in the repeating images and phrases that continue within the play itself. Sly's utterance, "go to thy / cold bed and warm thee" (Ind.I.7-8), based on the game of contrasts, anticipates the words of the second hunter who finds him asleep: "Were he not warm'd with ale, / This were a bed but cold to sleep so soundly" (Ind.I.30-1). The association between warmth and beds takes on a growing importance in the course of the main plot, tying up with the erotic implications of Petruchio's intention to kindle passion in Katherine by means of punning and verbal clashes:

*Pet.* Am I not wise?
*Kath.* Yes, keep you warm.
*Pet.* Marry, so I mean, sweet Katherine, in thy bed. (2.1.259-60)

This kind of metonymic relation between warmth and beds reappears, after the marriage, at the start of Act 4, in the episode in which Grumio and Curtis light a fire in Petruchio's country house (4.1.4-5ff.), punning on the contrast between warmth and cold. Here the relation acquires erotic significance as it is associated with the idea of consummating marriage, an idea that Petruchio represses in
Katherina (by means of the taming process enacted through sexual abstinence and by depriving her of food and sleep). The mutton, "burnt and dried away" (4.1.157), and not given to the woman, is explained by Petruchio with reference to the theory of ill-sorted humors, causing the bilious and choleric behavior of the two lovers (4.1.158-63). In the same way, depriving Katherina of sleep and sex is part of Petruchio's tactics to oust Kate by adopting her own pose as a scolding wife. Thus, if Bianca can say, referring to her sister, that "being mad herself, she's madly mated," in Gremio's words, "Petruchio is Kated" (3.2.242-3).

Sly's words, uttered before falling asleep, suggest the framing function of the Induction. When the hostess threatens to send for the "thirdborough", Sly calls her "boy" (Ind.I.12). This gender-confusion heralds the appearance of the "boy" in the following sequence (Ind.I.17) and the task given to the page of impersonating Sly's wife, thus anticipating the theme of crossdressing at the heart of the comedy.8 The return of the Lord and his train signals the end of the initial realism and introduces the aristocratic world of the second section. The transition is marked by a change of stylistic register. Ironically, while Sly is waiting for the "thirdborough" ("Let him come, and kindly" Ind.I.12-13), he falls asleep and begins dreaming. We thus move into the mannered atmosphere and cultured language that marks the start of the new sequence and the joke played on him by the Lord. Not surprisingly, Sly's fictitious entrance into the opulent aristocracy of the new world is enacted during his sleep and with the disguise and deception techniques of theatrical pretense. To the Lord, Sly appears to be a "monstrous beast", "a swine" (Ind.I.32), a counterfeit of man on whom the effects of the art of simulation will act like a "flatt'ring dream or worthless fancy" (Ind.I.42).

A skillful connection is thus made between dream and scenic illusion: both weaken the boundaries between truth and fiction, appearance and reality, operating on mental confusion.9 The Lord's order to carry Sly "gently" (Ind.I.44) to the best room in his mansion and to dress him as a rich gentleman – as well as echoing Sly's adverb in line 13 and looking forward to lines 64 and 70 – makes explicit reference to the seduction of the senses, which must be skilfully stimulated for the success of the plan. Sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste are all involved in this scene and at the start of the next, to evoke those illusory sensations which will produce in Sly the effect of estrangement, of loss of identity:

Carry him gently to my fairest chamber,  
And hang it round with all my wanton pictures,  
Balm his foul head in warm distilled waters,  
And burn sweet wood to make the lodging sweet.  
Procure me music ready when he wakes,  
To make a dulcet and a heavenly sound. (Ind.I.44-9)

By depriving her of food and sex in Act 4, Petruchio uses a similar strategy, based on the bafflement of the senses, in the taming of Katherina. The strategies link the Lord's behavior to Petruchio's, especially in the former's display of theatricality by which he accomplishes the whole plan, distributing the parts, giving advice, even dealing with scenery and stage props.

Let one attend him with a silver basin  
Full of rose-water and bestrew'd with flowers,  
Another bear the ewer, the third a diaper,  
And say 'Will' t please your lordship cool your hands?'  
Some one be ready with a costly suit,  
And ask him what apparel he will wear.  
Another tell him of his hounds and horse,  
And that his lady mourns at his disease. (Ind.I.53-60)

As David Daniell has maintained, in his long speech the Lord shows that he is "obsessed with the notion of acting, particularly with the careful creation of an illusion of a rich world for Sly to come to life in".10 The answer of the first hunter, "I warrant you we will play our part" (Ind.I.67), heralds the news of the players' arrival with which the episode concludes, and ties the realization of the beffia to the actual performance. In this way the hunter's playacting appears to be constructed as a metonymic expression of the theatrical spectacle per se and is, at the same time, the frame of that announced by the professional troupe, becoming, in Cesare Segre's words, the principal container of a secondary scene en abyme, "staged within the first".11 If we consider that the initial paradigm, which concludes with Sly's dream, acts as a mini-prologue to the beffia at the expense of the sleeping beggar, we are faced with multiple framing pieces, in that the two complementary scenes of the Induction also constitute the prologue to the comedy proper
considered as a play-within-the-play. The entrance of the players produces a double mirror effect in the reference to the actor's first experience in which "he play'd a farmer's eldest son" and "woo'd the gentlewoman so well" (Ind.I.82-3); it ironically subverts the situation that Sly has to face in his new role as a lover and reflects the more general events of the main plot, centring on Petruchio's strong characterization ("Antonio's son, / A man well known throughout all Italy", 2.1.68-9), and on the teasing of Katherine. The sequence is followed by the Lord's request to use the troupe's artistic ability ("cunning", Ind.I.90) for the fulfilment of the deception. The recommendations to the actors about the "modesties" and "merry passion" (Ind.I.92-5) of the dramatic profession confirm the Lord's role as the producer of this metatheatrical sequence. Significantly, it is the same invitation to natural acting as that given to the hunters.12

The criss-cross game of references and the particularly coherent structure support the hypothesis of considering the Induction an independent narrative part, revolving around a character of a strong clownish nature who acts as the compère-presenter of the main action, parodying or underlying its motifs and developments. Telling examples of this kind of dramatic inset may be found in Peele's The Old Wives' Tale (1584), Jonson's Every Man Out of His Humour (1600), Webster's Induction to Marston's The Malcontent (1604), or Beaumont's The Knight of the Burning Pestle (1607), in which we have different cases of autonomous narratives preceding the actual plays. For Thelma Greenfield, who distinguishes among occasional, critical and frame inductions, Plautus's and Terence's prologues share many characteristics of the inductive pieces, especially in relation to pretense and theatricality, and in such stock elements as "the wanton who sits on the stage, the noisy ictor, the officious usher, the sleeper, slaves, nurses with crying babies, and talkative housewives", all recurring features of both Italian and Elizabethan drama.13 Hence, another source of inspiration for this clownish part-playing, on which various dramatic solutions were modeled, is the rich typology of the Italian Renaissance prologue, of Plautine and Terentian derivation but with frequent grafting from the proems of the Decameron, having an introductory, polemic, or mixed character.14

Angelo Poliziano is one of the first Cinquecento theoreticians to attempt a definition and a classification of the classical prologue which, besides explaining the argument, can present "some other things to the audience, for the benefit of the author, or of the play itself or of the actor":

Prologo' è parola greca, in latino prima dictio, cioè esposizione antecedente alla vera composizione del dramma. Quattro ne sono i tipi: raccomandatorio, in cui si caldeggi la storia o l'autore; relativo, in cui si esprimono insulti verso un avversario o ringraziamenti al pubblico; argomentativo, con l'esposizione dell'argomento del dramma; misto, con la presenza simultanea di tutti i precedenti.15

(Prologue is a Greek word, in Latin prima dictio, that is an exposition antecedent to the actual composition of the play. There are four types: recommendatory, in which it extolled the importance of the story or author; relative, which contains insults against an enemy or thanks to the audience; argumentative, with the exposition of the argument; mixed, with the simultaneous presence of all the former.)

G. B. Giraldi Cinthio makes a strong case for the essential autonomy of the prologue in his Intorno al comporre delle commedie e delle tragedie (1543):

... non si può dire tal prologo parte della favola; perché non ha legamento alcuno coll'azione che nella favola si tratta, né a quel modo si recita che si recitano l'altre parti; peròché colui che fa il prologo il fa in persona del poeta, il quale non si può né si dee introdurre nell'azione. Laonde, non imitando il prologo l'azione, riman chississimo che'gli della favola non è parte, ma è una giusta posta d'av Romani per disporre gli ani degli spettatori alla attenzione, o per conciliare insieme benevolenza al poeta; il che mostra il voltar del parlare che fa colui del prologo agli spettatori, la qual cosa non si può fare negli atti della favola, se non con riprensione.16

(It is not possible to consider the prologue a part of the fabula; because it has no link whatsoever with the action treated in the fabula, and is not acted in the same manner as the other parts either; in that the prologue-speaker acts as the poet himself, who cannot and must not intrude in the action. Hence, because the prologue does not imitate the action, it is plainly not part of the fabula, but an addition made by the Romans to draw the attention of the spectators' minds, or to favor their appreciation of the poet; this shows the particular address to the audience by the prologue-speaker, which is impossible in the acts of the fabula without disapproval.)
As Clifford Leech has pointed out, the terms prologue and induction are used almost interchangeably in the Elizabethan age: the prologue spoken by Rumour in 2Henry IV is headed "Induction" in the Folio and, though different in form, "it is not the practice to have the prologue spoken in the person of a character in the play". The virtue of the prologue was to give an immediate account of the play's argument, although this inevitably reduced the spell of realism. This limitation may explain Leech's final remark that "the almost total absence of the device in the earliest seventeenth-century tragedy" reflected current fashions (p. 164) and the preference in Shakespearean tragedy for the beginning in medias res. Despite the obvious cultural differences between Italian and Elizabethan dramatists, among the most interesting cases of Italian dialogic prologue is that in Alessandro Piccolomini's L'Amor costante (1536), in which a Spaniard comments on the organization of the performance, talks with the prologue-speaker and is involved in the mise-en-scène, "perché aviam de bisogno d'uno che facci meglio un capitano" (because we need someone who plays a captain's role better); those in Aretino's Cortigiana (1533), acted by a "Foresterie" and a "Gentiluomo", who debate the "pomposo apparato" (pompous staging) and the authorship of the play; and that in Ipocrita (1542), spoken by two prostatic malcontents, who by means of oblique anaphoric language and paradoxical statements criticise society on all levels. Another significant play, La strega (c. 1570) by Anton Francesco Grazzini, opens with an interesting dialogue between two interlocutors, Prologo and Argomento, discussing theoretical matters on the nature of comedy and the actual play. This introductory part has an induction-like structure "similar to those later used by Ben Jonson, Shakespeare, and other Elizabethan playwrights".

Among the monological prologues, it is worth mentioning the prologue written by Bibbiena for the staging of an unknown comedy traditionally associated with his Calandria (1513). The speech parodies the vices of Florentine society through the narration of a dream during which, using Angelica's ring (as in Boiardo's Orlando inamorato), the speaker acquires invisibility, since "chi lo portava in bocca non poteva esser veduto da persona" (whoever wore it in his mouth could not be seen by anyone). Bibbiena's prologue seems particularly important to the Shrew in the common device of a sleeping character whose dream brings forward the production of a play. One should finally recall, because of the strong subversive challenge it presents to all accepted conventions, the lengthy prologue included in Giordano Bruno's Candelao (1582), divided into caudate sonnet, dedication, argument, anti-prologue and pro-prologue, which enjoyed great popularity in England after the years the Italian philosopher spent in London and Oxford.

In contrast with these various forms, the Induction written by Shakespeare is characterized by a greater theatrical completeness, which gives rise to a microdrama whose internal division imitates the tripartite structure of the Shrew: prologue (Sly-hostess quarrel), main plot (arrival of the Lord and his train), subplot (Sly's metamorphosis and performance of the jest), supporting the hypothesis of a preliminary narrative piece which works as an ironical metaphor of the play proper. The Italian quality of the Induction, centring on the bolla of an illusory reality on a sleeping rustic, has a peculiar Boccaccian derivation. In Decameron (III,8) two crafty monks carry the lulled Ferondo to the underground of their convent to make him believe, when he recovers, that he is in Purgatory to expiate his jealousy. The comic spirit of the bolla is much the same. Thus, with the continual emphasis on theatrical pretense, the Sly framework provides access to the Italianate world of supposes, paralleling its motifs, types and situations.

2. Crossgender and Crossdressing disguise.

The order given to the page to don a female disguise and to act the role of Sly's wife completes the organization of the jest, placing on the same level the enactment of the bolla and the production by the professional troupe:

... Bid him shed tears, as being overjoy'd  
To see her noble lord restor'd to health,  
Who for this seven years hath esteemed him  
No better than a poor and loathsome beggar. (Ind.1.118-21)
The transsexual impersonation of the page Bartholomew is the only example in the Shakespeare canon of male sexual disguise, except for the comic metamorphosis into "the witch of Brainford" which Falstaff is forced to undergo in order to escape from Master Ford's jealousy, and the expedient of the two "boys" disguised as women in the wedding ceremonies announced at the end of The Merry Wives of Windsor. If male sexual disguise, as an escape from an irate husband or to replace the bride is very rare in Elizabethan theater, it represents a constitutive variant in New Comedic conventions. This theatergram develops in a long intertextual chain of uses and re-uses stretching from classical comedy (Plautus's Casina and Terence's Eunuchus) to the commedia erudita; it plays an important role in the beffa on Nicomaco in Machiavelli's Clizia (1525) and its variations in Lodovico Dolce's Il ragazzo (c. 1540) and Giovan Battista Gelli's L'errore (1555), as well as providing the most original twist in Aretino's Marescalco (1527), in which the discovery of a boy instead of his bride fully satisfies the stambecco's misogynistic and homosexual tastes.

The common plot element of crossgender disguise says much about the genetic affinity between the two Shakespearean works, traditionally considered the most English in the canon; yet, on the other hand, precisely the application of this particular theatergram hints at a much more significant blending of elements of classical and Italian derivation than hitherto recognized. Moreover, Sly and Falstaff have in common the characteristic traits of alazoneia: braggadocio, a passion for drinking, idling and gold, repressed lust, and even the use of the contrast warm/cold and the same tendency to playact. Like Falstaff, disguised as "Herne the hunter", Sly, dressed as a nobleman, is compeled to forgo the sexual satisfaction which he was jokingly promised only to be subjected to collective mockery. The typology of the characters also harks back to the stock figures of classical and Italian New Comedy. If Sly embodies the alazon with the conventional vices of the boastful soldier, inspired by Plautus's Miles Gloriosus, the Lord is entrusted with the role of the eiron, in this case setting the action going. Petruchio, with his histrionic strategy, takes on the roles of both the alazon and eiron for the teasing of Katherina, invariably showing the boastful pose of a braggart and the ironic mockery of a jester, parodying his wife's shrewish attitude. Whereas the subplot, taken from Ariosto, represents, sometimes in multiple fashion, all the main characters of classical New Comedy and commedia erudita: the faithful servant Tranio (callidus servus), the enamoured master Lucentio (adulescens amans), and no fewer than five types of elderly or middle-aged men – the pater familias Baptista, the Pedant of Mantua and the Pedant Gremio, the rejected suitor, Hortensio, acting as senex amans, and the senex iratus Vincentio in difficulty with the cunning Biondello (dolosus servus) – all discomfited in various ways by younger adversaries.

The joke on Sly, organized by the Lord, gives rise, in the commedia improvvisa, to the duet between Zanni and the Magnifico, whose relations, as Guido Davico Bonino has pointed out, "echo the eternal conflict between oppressed and oppressor, but also, the more specific one, between town and country." A social and cultural conflict of this nature can also be read in the induction between the sleeping beggar, called "monstrous beast" and "foul and loathsome" image of death (Ind.I.32-3), and the aristocrat: in the cultured nobleman's jest we may find a display of class power at the expense of Sly's misfortunes. Aretino's Marescalco provides an analogue to the induction, in that it offers a similar aristocratic entertainment, played on a lower-class figure, in the duke's farcical marriage of the misogynistic stambecco to a transvestite boy. Since Aretino draws on Casina and Eunuchus, from which Ariosto's I Suppositi also derives, we may say that the Sly plot, as well as the rest of the play, inventively refashions New Comedic models from a contaminatio of classical and Italian deep sources.

The scenario of the commedia dell'arte is likewise recognizable in the presence of numerous stereotyped phrases in Italian and in Lucentio's expression "old pantaloon" (which is the natural development of Magnifico) referring to Hortensio (3.1.36). In well managing and re-combining all this in a tripartite configuration, Shakespeare's handling, as Leo Salinger has put it, "is not mere imitation of New Comedy or Italian plots, but the application of Italian methods to new purposes". Yet, if the beggar represents the chosen victim, the second
Induction scene also shows, as suggested by Keir Elam, that Sly, notwithstanding he "is forced willy nilly into the role of actor" [...] is quite ready to renounce his familiar but paltry universe of discourse in favour of the more alluring one sketched out by the Lord and his helpers.²⁹ In other words, the question of Sly's awareness of the beffia on him is left ambiguously open; indeed, some significant utterances of Sly's would seem to conceal a sharp irony concerning the unexpected advantages deriving from his new condition.

To consider the second scene, it is necessary to clarify the construction of femininity that the Lord advises the page to impersonate:

Such duty to the drunkard let him do,
With soft low tongue and lowly courtesy,
And say 'What is't your honour will command,
Wherein your lady and your humble wife
May show her duty and make known her love? (Ind.1.i.111-15)

These lines extol a model of a wife who is obedient, gentle and subdued, whose "soft low tongue and lowly courtesy" make her an example of virtue and devotion. The ironic contrast with Katherine's "scolding tongue" is evident, but it is also worth noting that this ideal feminine figure will also be the portrait that inspires Katherine's final speech. The analogy between the two situations is confirmed on the linguistic plane. Petruccio's request to Katherine ("tell these headstrong women / What duty they do owe their lords and husbands") ⁵.2.131-2) is anticipated in the Lord's instructions to the page (lines 113-15), and Kate's speech echoes the absolute love uttered by Sly's fictitious wife in the second scene. The correspondences of characters and situations between the Induction and the main plot also provide instructive links with the Ariostan intertext from which the Gascoigne subplot derives. Since Miola's illuminating analysis has dealt extensively with Shakespeare's New Comedic variations of Supposes and its deep sources, I will sketch out only a few other elements more specifically connected by common ancestry with commedia erudita.

In the interplay of parallel actions, the couples Sly-page and Petruccio-Katherine correspond to the couples Lucentio-Bianca and Hortensio-widow, all related by a series of contacts and contrasts to Petruchio's taming school (4.2.53-8). Disguised as Cambio and Litio, teachers of Latin and music respectively, Lucentio and Hortensio act as a foil for the taming offered by Petruchio, although ironically his shrewish partner will impart to them and their wives the final lesson in the wager scene. If the "new-born" Sly and his "obedient wife" parody the taming motif, they also anticipate the rhetoric and content of the discourse on marriage in this concluding scene, which sees all the couples involved, in some way or another, in Katherina's matrimonial lecture. The metatheatrical role of the Lord as promoter, schemer and producer of the beffia, mirroring Petruccio's variable playacting, corresponds to the figure of Tranio as architectus doli, impersonating the devisor or intriguer of the action who exchanges clothes with his master and invents the Pedant's role-playing as Lucentio's father. The locked-in beggar, physically and mentally entrapped in the Lord's opulent mansion and in his "supposed" noble attire, provides an ironic reversal of the New Comedic lockout scene, drawn from the Ariosto-Gascoigne play. In the Shrew, Vincentio is left out and accused by Tranio of madness like Antipholis of Ephesus in The Comedy of Errors and his Plautine precursors in Menaechmi and Amphitruo. Unlike Ariosto's Dulippo, Shakespeare's Tranio does not find a long lost father, but he does escape punishment, and his faithful service is gratefully acknowledged by his master:

What Tranio did, myself enforc'd him to;
Then pardon him, sweet father, for my sake. (5.1.118-19)

The theatergram of the callidus servus as a trickster and the New Comedic door-knocking and crossdressing are central to commedia erudita. From Fessio in Bibbiena's Calandria to Ligurio in Machiavelli's Mandragola, from Querciula in Piccolomini's Alessandro to Panurgo in Della Porta's La fanteasa, a variety of ingenious servi and cooperative partners are capable of adding a new twist or finding an immediate solution to a difficult situation. In Cecchi's L'assioulo in particular, as well as in Piccolomini's Alessandro and Della Porta's La fanteasa, all drawing on Latin New Comedy via Boccaccio's Decameron (VIII,7) and Ariosto's
Supposes, the theatergram of the faithful servant is associated with skilful variations of the door-locking theme. In L'assuolo (1550), a young student, with the collaboration of a friend and a cunning servant, obtains sexual satisfaction from a lawyer's wife, Oretta, while her jealous husband is left not only cuckolded, but locked all night in a cold courtyard, imitating the call of the horned owl (a hilarious metonymy of his own state) which he thought was to be his password to an illicit sexual encounter.

An extraordinary contaminatio of classical and contemporary sources (Supposes, Calandria and G'Ingannati) constitutes the three plots of L'Alessandro (1543), all coherently united by the crafty trickery of a servant and the recurring presence of lock-in/lock-out motifs. In the first, an adulescens amans enters with a rope-ladder the bedroom of his beloved and is locked in by her irate father. In the second plot, a senex amans, disguised as a locksmith to gain access to a captain's wife, is miserably locked in a closet and later locked out of his own house by his dolosus servus (as in the Pedant-Vincentio-Biondello exchange). In the third plot, inspired by Eunuchus, Lucrezia, crossdressed as Fortunio to escape persecution, falls desperately in love with another girl, Lampridia, who looks like her long-lost lover, Aloisio. With the complicity of a chambermaid, who lets Fortunio into Lampridia's dark bedroom, while she is sleeping, Lucrezia finds out that Lampridia is a man. The cousin of the supposed maid locks them in, discovering at the end that his stepsister is actually a boy, the lost Aloisio, and the presumed rapist is Lucrezia; the couple have been in love with each other since childhood.

In Della Porta's La fantesca (1592), Essandro crossdresses as a maid, named Fioretta, to persuade his beloved Cleria to love Fioretta's twin brother. In this transsexual attire he is foolishly courted by the girl's father, Gerasto, who has promised Cleria to a Pedant's son. To avoid the marriage, Essandro and his servant Panurgo, after various lock-in and lock-out episodes and with the trickery of Panurgo's and the parasite Morfio's comic disguises (impersonating first Gerasto and his daughter and, later, the Pedant and his son) disrupt the engagement, till the young lovers are happily reunited in a multiple recognition scene of false identities and long-lost relatives. This same functional game of correspondences in the three parts of the Shrew – based on the beffa, criss-cross disguises and make-believe – emerges in the succession of events of the second Induction scene to which now we may turn.

3. The beffa repaid: Sly and Kate as ironic victims.

The concluding scene of the Induction is divided, like the previous one, into three brief sequences. In the first (Ind.II.1-99) the servants offer drink, food and costly garments to Sly who insists on his true identity; later, won over by the servants' allurements and by the expectation of a lovely wife, the tinker is content to take on his new role as an aristocrat. The second sequence (Ind.II.100-28) develops the meeting between the pseudo-master and the false wife and the thwarted desire to consummate the marriage. The third sequence (Ind.II.129-42) announces the arrival of the players and their production of The Taming of the Shrew. The strategy of the entire scene is to offer an interpretative key to the "pleasant comedy" (line 130) about to be performed, anticipating its main themes. The offer of drinks and food by the two servants introduces one of the constant motifs of the play: variously signalled by rich iterative imagery in the language of many characters and dealt with, specifically, in no fewer than three episodes of the main plot: in the wedding feast which Petruchio refuses to attend; in the already mentioned country house scene, in which he compels Katherine to fast; and in the final reunion, which celebrates the couples Lucentio-Bianca and Hortensio-widow. Only on this occasion does Petruchio accept the invitation to dine ("Nothing but sit and sit, and eat and eat!" 5.2.12), that is, only when the conquest of Kate has occurred and he can demonstrate it.

This links him to Sly's rebellious behavior at the opening of this second scene, when the beggar rejects the privileges of his new identity, and leads to the parallel motif of clothes, skilfully used by Petruchio in his taming of Katherine:

I am Christophero Sly, call not me 'honour' nor 'lordship'. I ne'er drank sack in my life. And if you give me any conserves, give me conserves of beef. Ne'er ask me what raiment I'll wear, for I have no more doublets
Sly's words prefigure Petruchio's analogous attitude when he rejects the role of gentleman, imposed upon him by the circumstances, and goes to the wedding ceremony in the motley robes of a fool or jester with "a new hat and an old / jerkin; a pair of old breeches thrice turned; a pair of / boots that have been candle-cases, one buckled, / another laced; an old rusty sword ta'en out of the / town armoury, with a broken hilt, and shapeless; / with two broken points; his horse hipped—with an / old mothly saddle and stirrups of no kindred" 3.2.41-7). To Baptista and Tranio, who beg him to change his attire before marrying Katherina, he significantly replies: "To me she's married, not unto my clothes" (3.2.115). The invention of the value of the dignity of clothes, whose moral Petruchio's disguise plays upon, is realized by the subtle Tranio ("He hath some meaning in his mad attire" 3.2.122).

Thus the didactic theme of clothing as a distinction from deceitful appearance is associated with that of "supposes", taken up by Petruchio in the episode with the tailor and the haberdasher, where he abandons his apparent intention to buy a cap and gown, which Katherina particularly likes. To the woman's "This doth fit the time, / And gentlewomen wear such caps as these", Petruchio replies: "When you are gentle, you shall have one too" (3.3.69-71). Petruchio's teasing is even more manifest in his words at the end of the same scene:

Well, come, my Kate, we will unto your father's
Even in these honest mean habiliments.
Our purses shall be proud, our garments poor,
For 'tis the mind that makes the body rich,
And as the sun breaks through the darkest clouds,
So honour peereth in the meanest habit. (3.2.166-71)

Petruchio's strategy is to create a behavioral code that surpasses the limitations of appearance and the boundaries of language and adopts non-verbal communication founded on a communion of feelings and on silent love vows. The strategy becomes clear in the comic exchange on sunlight or moonlight, at the end of which Kate agrees to use the same linguistic code as Petruchio ("What you will have it nam'd, even that it is, / And so it shall be so for Katherine" 4.5.21-2). From this point onwards there is in the couple a tacit agreement on non-verbal communication made up of glances, participation and jocularity which finds immediate confirmation in the meeting with old Vincentio, at first jokingly taken for a virgin (4.5.27-48).

Adapting the clothes metaphor, which recalls the leitmotifs of disguise and mistaken identities, Petruchio reaches a perfect understanding with Katherina in the wager scene, when he demonstrates not only the complete taming of his bride but also and above all his successful realization of a harmonious relationship of reciprocal trust. Hence Katherina's significant gesture of taking off and stamping on her cap, in obedience to Petruchio's request ("that cap of yours becomes you not. / Off with that bauble, throw it under foot" 5.2.122-3), acquires an important symbolic connotation: it goes beyond too easy a submissive attitude, and attains a more intimate and profound marriage of true minds made up of playfulness and complicity. In complying with Petruchio's request, Katherina's gesture displays genuine devotion and love but it also contains a warning amidst the mutual overacting. In her own peculiar way she lets her husband know that she can play the role of the devoted wife as she was able to play the shrew: the option is Petruchio's. The uniqueness of their union is highlighted by the distance from the other couples, who do not employ the same language. The widow defines the deed as "a silly pass" (line 125) and Katherina's sister Bianca considers it "a foolish duty" (line 126). Petruchio's couplet reveals the exclusive relationship which now links them:

Cone, Kate, we'll to bed.
We three are married, but you two are sped. (5.2.185-6)

The sensitivity which Katherina has acquired colors the final speech with undertones of irony and pretense, serving to suggest an unconventional relationship founded on language-games and the awareness that each has of the other's needs and desires.30 The maturity attained is comically anticipated in the conclusion of the Induction, where in Sly's behavior we may find a progressive
perception of the joke being played on him, which induces him to accept his new status as a nobleman. Sly's hesitations are soon overcome by the Lord's cunning strategy of alluding to "strange lunacy" and "lowly dreams" (Ind.II.30, 33) and of stimulating interest in the new status by appealing to the senses. What the Lord attempts to do is to invert the reality/dream relation in the tinker's mind, making him a spectator, as well as a victim, of the theatrical jest:

Wilt thou have music? Hark, Apollo plays,
And twenty caged nightingales do sing.
Or wilt thou sleep? We'll have thee to a couch
Softer and sweeter than the lustful bed.
On purpose trimm'd up for Semiramis. (Ind.II.36-40)

The same effect is sought in the servants' descriptions of pictures on erotic subjects intended to arouse Sly by means of sexual fantasies (lines 50-4 and 58-61), and to prepare him for the final revelation that his young wife is eagerly awaiting him:

Thou art a lord, and nothing but a lord.
Thou hast a lady far more beautiful
Than any woman in this waning age. (Ind.II.62-4)

Interestingly, the motif of sensory stimulation returns in Sly's acceptance of his aristocratic condition. Yet if the Lord's purpose has been achieved and illusion replaces reality, Sly's sudden abandonment of his true identity in favor of an alien world that flatters him with its enticing mirages reveals an ambiguous choice, halfway between cunning and incredulity, underscored by a brusque shift from prose to verse, which gives his new role a comic flavor.\textsuperscript{31}

Am I a lord, and have I such a lady?
Or do I dream? Or have I dream'd till now?
I do not sleep. I see, I hear, I speak.
I smell sweet savours and I feel soft things.
Upon my life, I am a lord indeed,
And not a tinker nor Christopher Sly.
Well, bring our lady hither to our sight,
And once again a pot o' th' smallest ale. (Ind.II.69-76)

In the tinker's words there is the same comic bewilderment as that which precedes Katherina's perceiving of Petruchio's strategy at the moment of the beneficial "sermon of continency" (4.1.170), during which, as the servant Curtis reports, his master adopts the same roughness as the woman in order to force her to take stock of the absurd peevishness of her nature and to consider "which way to stand, to look, to speak, [...] as one new risen from a dream" (4.1.172-73). The second servant makes further reference to the dream, reminding Sly of his illness:

These fifteen years you have been in a dream,
Or when you wak'd, so wak'd as if you slept. (Ind.II.80-81)

His witty answer, "These fifteen years! By my fay, a goodly nap" (line 82), marks the beginning of the tinker's ironic participation in the theatrical game which concerns him and in which he can act the part of the noble master.

The hypothesis of Sly's awareness of having been manipulated has a threefold justification: 1) his sudden acceptance of the new identity comes immediately after his being aroused by means of erotic fantasies about "a lady far more beautiful / Than any woman in this waning age" (Ind.II.63-4); 2) the parallel situation between the taming of Sly and Katherina is suggestive of a common ironical compliance with their respective teasing-tests; 3) in the farcical nature of the Induction and, in the general emphasis on pretense, Sly's self-mocking participation in the trick fits coherently into the theatricality of the play. For although there is no record of this in the performance history as far as I know, the fact that Sly and Petruchio have been sometimes performed by the same actor not only makes the hypothesis possible but it offers a twist of great comic effect. Significantly, in Michael Bogdanov's 1978 production, where this doubling represents the longed-for revenge of Sly upon unruley women, "Petruchio's wedding clothes were those he had worn as Sly, a sharp contrast to the proper gray flannel suits of the other guests."\textsuperscript{32}

The ensuing sequence introduces the second segment of the farce, which shows the entrance of the page Bartholomew disguised in such a way as to "usurp the grace, / Voice, gait, and action of a gentlewoman" (Ind.I.129-30). After the short initial exchange, which continues the motif of sensory stimulation (Ind.II.101-2), Sly asks about his wife, and the crossdressed page steps forward
with an overt sexual offer ("Where is my wife? / ... Here, noble lord, what is thy will with her?", 103-4). The beggar's first reaction is the request to be called husband, to which the false bride retorts with a chiasmus, conveying a further form of erotic submission: "My husband and my lord, my lord and husband; / I am your wife in all obedience", 107-8). These lines look ahead to the words with which Katherina, in her final speech, in accordance with Elizabethan precepts, extols the union of matrimony and absolute obedience to the husband: "Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, / Thy head, thy sovereign" (5.2.147-8). The affinity with the page's words reveals the subtle similarity between the two characters and is an invitation to consider Bartholomew a "foil" to Katherina. Both are called on by their lords to act the part of the loving and devoted spouse and they enter into their roles with growing enthusiasm and participation. This reading of the final speech is consistent with the game-like character of the entire Induction and with the behavior of Katherina who, once she has understood Petruchio's playacting strategy, not only accepts it willingly (as in the joke against old Vincentio) but also joyfully enriches it with other comic twists. Her ironic part-playing as the victim of Petruchio's jests thematically links her astute performance with that of Sly, whose onomatropic implication is now clear, and both of them with Italian comedic conventions.

In classical New Comedy, the maturation of the protagonist and the recognition of his social identity mark the transition from pисти to gnosis, which in the Shrew, through the theme of "supposes", becomes the passage from illusion to reality, from a society ruled by senex to one dominated by adulescentes. In portraying the strong characterization of Katherina, Shakespeare creatively rearranges female roles from a wide variety of dominating or shrewish but triumphant and assertive matronae, ranging from Aristophanes's heroine in Lysistrata to Plautus's Artemona and Cleonstra in Asinaria and Casina respectively, from Terence's Sestra in Hecyra to Machiavellis's Sofronia in Clizia, and passing through a number of other variants and imitations in such works as Giovana Maria Cecchi's La moglie (c. 1545), Girolamo Parabosco's Il marinato (1550), Benedetto Varchi's La suocera (1569) and Luigi Grotto's Alteria (1587), including the novelle versions of nagging and aggressive wives by Boccaccio, Bandello and other prose writers in Italy, France, and England. As Alexander Leggatt stresses, Katherina's submission to her husband is not "something to be admitted with shame, or rationalized, but celebrated – particularly in the presence of women who have just failed the test she has so triumphantly passed."34

The eroticism of the Sly-Bartholomew exchange returns in the subsequent lines, when Sly's recollection of his long illness is interpreted by the page in terms of sexual abstinence:

Sly. Madam wife, they say that I have dream'd
And slept above some fifteen year or more.

Page. Ay, and the time seems thirty unto me,
Being all this time abandon'd from your bed. (Ind.II.113-16)

To Sly's immediate invitation, "undress you and come now to bed" (line 118), Bartholomew recommends a little patience in order to ensure a perfect recovery, "For your physicians have expressly charg'd, / In peril to incur your former malady, / That I should yet absent me from your bed. / I hope this reason stands for my excuse" (lines 122-5). The deicitic "this" indicates a bawdy allusion, brilliantly echoed in Sly's answer: "Ay, it stands so that I may hardly tarry so long" (line 126). The erotic word-game on erection ("stands") may carry a double meaning, depending on whether the transvestite boy is pointing to himself or to Sly, implying either homosexual or heterosexual enticement. If he is referring to himself (in line with the ludicrous, Plautus-like character of the entire scene) the exchange plays on homoerotic tensions, explicitly aroused by the page's invitation. In that we have a further association with Aretino's Marescalco and, via its deep source, with Terence's Eunuchus.35

Although Sly's homosexual drive may not be overtly suggested within the text, his sexual call to the transvestite boy poses the two characters' response to the biffa in a common intertextual perspective. In either case, not only does this mock marital episode herald the theme of consummating a marriage, which plays an important strategic function in the taming-plot, but it foreshadows the frequent use of sexual puns in the Petruchio-Katherina exchanges, which give rise to lively
verbal clashes in terms of a battle of the sexes. Language-games are part of the therapy put forward by Petruchio to cure his mate, using the same weapon of wit as Kate does in her irreducible poses. The success and the real quality of the play lie in this verbal strife, since, as Ruth Nevo has pointed out, "Nothing is more stimulating to the imagination than the tension of sexual conflict and sexual anticipation. Verbal smashing and stripping, verbal teasing and provoking and seducing are as exciting to the witnessing audience as to the characters enacting these moves."36

In the last sequence a messenger announces the performance of a "pleasant comedy" in Sly's honor to help him recover from his melancholy and, as he says, to "frame your mind to mirth and merriment, / Which bars a thousand harms and lengthens life" (Ind.II.135-6). The therapeutic value of the theater is a long-established convention with many significant examples from Hamlet to The Duchess of Malfi. While tragedy plays on the ambiguity between feigned and real madness, intrigue comedy, as is the case in the Shrew, focuses upon the comic equivocation of the false staging of madness.37 The trick played on Sly, therefore, privileges the idea of theater as pretense, linking coherently with the false wife's playacting and the general deception in which Sly himself plays the leading role. "Just as Christopher Sly the beggar" – Juliet Dusinberre has observed – "is transformed into a lord for the duration of the play, with a player-boy as the lady his wife – in all obedience – so Kate and Petruchio adopt the most hyperbolic postures open to man and wife in their relation to each other, as the premise for real life."38 Thus we are led to perceive a perfect metatheatrical relation – between Sly's story and the "history" (Ind.II.140) in the comedy, between the tinker's delusion, perpetrated by the Lord, and Kate's taming, accomplished by Petruchio – which leads to an interesting juxtaposition of mistaken identities and disguises involving Sly in the double role of actor and spectator:

Well, we'll see't. Come, madam wife, sit by my side  
And let the world slip, we shall ne'er be younger. (Ind.II.141-2)

After these closing lines, Sly and the page will make only one more brief appearance, between the first two scenes of Act I. At this point the false Lord and the sham wife comment on the play they are watching and remain present as an onstage audience throughout the performance, reminding us, through the framing effect, of the distinction between fiction and real life.39 As the fool's exit in King Lear signals the King's progressive recognition of his tragic delusion, so Sly's lapsed role marks the beginning, in the comedy as well as in the theater, of "the subtilities of these our Supposes", in Gascoigne's definition, as "nothing else but a mystaking or imagination of one thing for an other."40 The degree of ironic awareness that the Protean zanni – "by birth a pedlar, by education a cardmaker, by transmutation a bear-herd, and now by present profession a tinker" (Ind.II.18-21) – expresses in playing the part of the deceived protagonist can be appreciated only if we too watch the staging of The Taming of the Shrew in the announced terms of play-within. In acknowledging the linguistic and thematic affinities between the Induction's plot and the other parts and characters of the play, we recognize a device that derives specifically and directly from Italianate comedic conventions, contributing to the unity of the whole.

Notes

1 See C. C. Seronsy, "Supposes as the Unifying Theme in The Taming of the Shrew", Shakespeare Quarterly, XIV (1963), pp. 15-30; Leo Salinger, Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1974), pp. 222-5. Some passages in Gascoigne's translation show that he used both editions (see the opening, for instance, and the dialogue between Cleander and Pasiphilo in I.i).  


5 Ariosto's prologue acknowledges indebtedness to Eumachus and Captivi. Miola's Shakespeare and Classical Comedy brilliantly discusses the pervasive presence of Mostellaria in the play.
6 Miola, "Shakespeare [...] unites the three actions by portraying them as variations of the New Comedie intrigue: each features the classical device of courtship by disguise, proxy, or impersonation, each illustrates variously the New Comedie tendency of fiction to become true in surprising ways" (p. 79).

7 On the topic of the relationship of the Shakespearean text to the anonymous play, see Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, "No Shrew, A Shrew, and The Shrew: Internal Revision in The Taming of the Shrew", in Shakespeare: Text, Language, Criticism. Essays in Honour of Marvin S. Spervec, ed. B. Fabian and K. Tetzlief von Rosador (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1987), pp. 351-70. For the purpose of the present essay, it is precisely the fact that the Sly plot disappears from the Shakespeare text which makes the double nature of the Induction possible.

8 Cf. Michael Shapiro, "Framing the Taming: Metatheatrical Awareness of Female Impersonation in The Taming of the Shrew", The Yearbook of English Studies, 23 (1993), pp. 143-66, who in Sly's gender-confusion views an attempt at "accentuating the general practice of crossgender casting if not the presence of the same female impersonator who had played the role of the gentleman" (p. 151). In a recent essay oriented towards audience response criticism - The Taming of the Shrew: Women, Acting, and Power, Studies in the Literary Imagination, XXVI: 1 (Spring, 1993) - Juliet Dusinberre sees in Sly's error a metatheatrical reference to the boy actor, suggesting "the presence in the play itself of actors, not just impersonators of characters" (p. 67).

9 The emphasis on the theme of dreaming has led some scholars to interpret The Shrew as Sly's dream. For this suggestive approach see S. Jayne "The Dreaming of The Shrew", Shakespeare Quarterly, XVII (Winter, 1966), pp. 41-56.


12 The mirror effect, suggested by the entrance of the players, is close to that produced by the acting of the Dido-play in Hamlet and the recommendations to the actors links the passage to the analogous "modest speech" (Hamlet, 3.2.16-24).


17 Clifford Leech, "Shakespeare's Prologues and Epilogues", in Studies in Honor of T. W. Baldwin, ed. Don Cameron Allen (Urbana: Illinois UP, 1958), p. 152. It may be worth considering that, although he provides no intertextual link with classical and Italian prologues, Leech reads the device "as being a direct address to the audience, preceding the play, normally spoken by a single actor who is usually but not necessarily alone on the stage" (p. 151-2).

18 The seven Shakespeare plays with prologues (Romeo and Juliet, 2 Henry IV, Henry V, Troilus and Cressida, Pericles, Henry VIII and The Two Noble Kinsmen, the latter in collaboration with Fletcher) mainly present a classical construction of a mixed type, obeying diverse dramaturgical needs, ranging from exposition of the subject-matter to spatial-temporal specification, from the necessity of providing a narrative link with the antecedent or the previous play to the metatheatrical function of audience involvement.


24 The Merry Wives of Windsor, ed. H. J. Oliver (London: Methuen, 1980), 4.2.89; 5.5.183-205.


28 Salting, Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy, p. 225.


30 Cf. Ruth Nevo, Comic Transformations in Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 49-50: "Petruchio has enlisted Kate's will and wit on his side, not broken them, and it is the function of the final festive test to confirm and exhibit this. [..] The man she has married has humour and high spirits, intuition, patience, self-control and masterly intelligence; and there is more than merely a homily for Elizabethan wives in her famous speech." See also J. Dennis Huntson, Shakespeare's Comedies of Play (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 90-3. A rather different interpretation is given by Shirley Nelson Garner in "The Taming of the Shrew: Inside or Outside of the Joke", in Bad Shakespeare: Revaluations of the Shakespeare Canon, ed. Maurice Charney (London and Toronto: Associated UP, 1988): "Taming is responsive to men's psychological needs, desires, and fantasies at the expense of women. It plays to an audience who shares its patriarchal assumptions: men and also women who internalize patriarchal values. As someone who does not share those values, I find much of the play humorless. Rather than making me laugh, it makes me sad and angry" (p. 117).
SHAKESPEARE'S ARIOSTAN SKEPTICISM

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In Cosmopolis Stephen Toulmin explores what he terms in that book's subtitle "the hidden agenda of modernity". He seeks to restore the neglected context of religious warfare and nascent absolutism in which Cartesian rationalism emerged as the prevalent method of intellectual inquiry. He claims that an alternative skepticism, represented most decisively by Montaigne, amounts to a road not taken whose viability warrants fresh consideration on the brink of the coming millennium. Montaigne's sense of the limits of human reason contrasts with Descartes' radical doubt in its willingness to rest content with practical ad hoc solutions to particular problems. It is rhetorical rather than theoretical in applying reason to specific contexts rather than striving for comprehensive systems of universal validity. Montaigne never gives us his number, as the Beatles might put it. He only gives us his situation. The purity of mathematics yields to the particularity of certain occasions, whose demands we must meet on their own irreducible terms.

Such an approach smacks of the peculiarly American philosophy of pragmatism. Thus, it is not surprising to find that, in introducing his Shakespearean Pragmatism, Lars Engle affirms the drift of Toulmin's argument at the expense of Stauly Cavell's claim in Disowning Knowledge to discern presentiments of Cartesian doubt in six plays of Shakespeare. For a variety of reasons these alternatives require further elaboration than Engle gives them as he proceeds to the main business of his monograph. First of all, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as Engle himself might readily allow, given his assertion that one of pragmatism's "central intellectual moves is the conversion of binary oppositions into continua". Second, they fail to consider the important role genre may play in determining the kinds of doubt and their consequences in