Dating the *Shrew*

by Stephanie Hopkins Hughes

The Taming of the Shrew was published for the first time in the First Folio of 1623. Commonly referred to as *The Shrew* to distinguish it from *A Shrew*, a play that on May 2,1594, was entered to Peter Short in the Stationers' Register as *The Tamynge of a Shrowe* and published anonymously that year in quarto. It's clearly the same play, though sufficiently different to be distinct from the 1623 version. The title page states: "A Pleasant Conceyted Historie, called The Taminge of a Shrowe . . . sundry times acted by the Right honorable the Earle of Pembroke his servants . . . 1594."

A single copy of this edition survives, followed by a reprint in 1596 and by two more in 1607. The first in 1607 was entered in the register to Nicholas Ling at the same time as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Love's Labours Lost*, indicating a clear connection with Shakespeare.

The relationship between *A Shrew* (1594) and *The Shrew* (1623) has been vigorously debated over the years. Ann Thompson, editor of the 1984 Cambridge edition, explains the choice of theories:

a) *A Shrew* is the original play, by an unknown writer, and the direct source of the Shakespeare play;

b) *The Shrew* is the original play, while *A Shrew* (a "bad quarto") is a memorial reconstruction of the Shakespeare play by an actor or some other person;

c) both *Shrews* derive from a lost original, Shakespeare's first version of the play.

Despite the close resemblance in structure, the language in *A Shrew* is far less Shakespearean, though not totally without lyrical touches. It has been claimed that the poetic moments sound more like Marlowe or Peele than like Shakespeare.

Performance dates

On June 11, 1594, a performance of "*the tamyng of A shrowe"* at the Newington Butts theatre is recorded in Philip Henslowe's diary. It is not immediately apparent whether it was performed by the Lord Admiral's Men, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, or a combination of the two companies when both were "in exile" there from June 3-13. Henslowe indicates the performance dates of seven plays but not the performers. However, when they returned to The Rose playhouse the following week, while the Admiral's Men continued to present three of the Newington plays, *A Shrew* was not one of them. So Rutter confidently assigns *A Shrew* to the Chamberlain's Men (along with the other three plays, which included Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet*). Thompson states: "it seems clear... that both Pembroke's men and the Lord Chamberlain's Men had *Shrew* plays in their respective repertoires by 1594."

The next recorded performance did not take place until November 26, 1633 (at Court).

Sources

Both *Shrew* plays comprise three plots woven together.

1) *The frame plot:* A lord discovers a drunken tinker passed out on the ground and, as a jest, has his retainers bring him indoors. When the tinker wakes up, they convince him that he is a great lord, who has just recovered from a spell of madness in which he believed himself to be a lowly tinker.

As Thompson points out, a similar story is found in many times and places, including the *Arabian Nights*. Closer in time to Shakespeare was Heuterus's *De Rebus Burgundicis* (1584) in which it is the Duke of Burgundy who plays the trick. In *A Shrew* the tinker, Slie, is intended to remain on stage throughout, while in *The Shrew*, once the play begins, no more is heard from Sly; he can remain onstage or vanish at the director's whim.

2) *The main plot:* A "merry, madcap lord" Petruchio comes to town to get himself a wealthy bride. He woos and weds the feisty Kate and by various means succeeds in "taming" her by preventing her from eating, sleeping, choosing her own clothes or having a say on anything. The techniques described are so similar to those used to train hawks that it suggests that the entire play is meant to be a metaphor for training a woman as though she were a "haggard hawk. (Only female hawks were used for hunting.) Finally, Kate realises that it is more important to this man that he have her public allegiance than that his own public image should remain spotless and so she capitulates to bring peace.

Unique among Shakespeare's works, this plot seems to have been derived, not from any previously published work, but from the Oral Tradition. Folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand amply demonstrates that it is based on an old tale common to all the nations of Europe and even some in Asia. In his detailed and scientific study, he shows how closely Shakespeare followed the Danish version in all but a few details. Shakespeare softened his from all the folk versions, where the abuse of the wife is invariably much worse.

3) *The sub-plot:* Young Lucentio exchanges identities with his servant and disguises himself as a music teacher so he can woo Kate's younger sister, Bianca, which causes a number of comic misunderstandings. The recognised source is *The Supposes*, an English translation of Ariosto's Italian play *I Suppositi* attributed to George Gascoigne, in which are combined both of Ariosto's two versions in both of which he retained all of Ariosto's characters and their Italian names. These, one in prose, the other in verse, were both based on *Amphitruo,* a Latin comedy by Plautus,. *The Supposes* was performed at Gray's Inn in 1566 as part of the winter holiday entertainment of 1566-'67, although the translation was not published until 1573 (and again in 1587).

While both *Shrew* plays take the characters, scenes, and plot devices of *The Supposes* as their sub-plot (the wooing of the younger sister), they are used less fully and to less effect in *A Shrew* than in *The Shrew*. In *A Shrew*, some of the characters and their plot elements are eliminated and two individuals are divided into pairs. The author of *A Shrew* gave Kate two sisters; Shakespeare gives her only one; while neither Ariosto nor his translator gave her any).

In both plays the female protagonist is named *Kate*; otherwise Shakespeare has a different set of names for most of the characters. Curiously, for his male progatonish he went to *Supposes* for the name *Petruchio*, a minor character its author had added to the Ariosto play.

Among other sources sometimes proposed are the works of Plautus (providing the names *Grumio* and *Tranio*), and writings on falconry by Gervase Markham such as *Country Contentments*.

Dating *Shrew*

The proposed dates for *The Shrew* range from 1589 to 1594. Chambers fixed on 1593-'94, followed by the Riverside and Signet editions. Halliday preferred 1594. Alexander puts the date of writing before 1593, Wells & Taylor propose 1590-93, and Cairncross places it around 1590. Thompson agrees with 1590 as the most likely. Morris (persuaded by Marco Mincoff's revision of Chambers's chronology), proposes 1589, suggesting that most scholars now favor an earlier date.

Orthodox views

Meres doesn't mention it in his *Wits Treasury* of 1598. Some commentators have identified it with the mysterious *Love's labours wonne* in his list of Shakespeare plays, but Baldwin shows that both *A Shrew* and *Love's labours wonne* were listed in a bookseller's manuscript catalogue of 1603.

Morris supports the view that *The Shrew* is the source of *A Shrew*, and that *A Shrew* existed before August 21, 1592, the day the actor Simon Jewell of Pembroke's company was buried. Since *A Shrew* has the stage direction "Enter Simon . . . ." and there is no character of that name in the play, he thinks this must be the name of the actor Simon Jewell. Since no better explanation has been put forward for the presence of this Simon, Morris claims a latest possible date of early 1592 for *The Shrew*.

Noting the previous detail plus verbal parallels between both *Shrew* plays and *A Knack to Know a Knave*, performed at the Rose on June 10, 1592, Thompson deduces that the anonymous play borrowed from both, indicating an earlier dating of both plays, with *The Shrew* the first performed. She notes *The Shrew*'s affinities with the earliest Shakespearean comedies, *The Comedy of Errors* and the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, particularly with the former.

According to Thompson, the evidence so far suggests that Shakespeare originally wrote his play, complete with all the Sly material, for a large company (possibly the Queen's Men) either in the season ended by the closing of the theatres in June 1592 or in the preceding season. During the turbulent years 1592-'94, two companies came to possess cut versions: of *The Shrew*, which remains close to the original, and of *A Shrew*, seen as a memorial reconstruction of the original. It's possible that *The Shrew* was among the first of Shakespeare's plays. dating as early as 1590. Alternatively, some commentators think that *The Shrew*, as it appears in the First Folio, is a substantially later version.

Only three contemporary references have been found to a "*Shrew"* play, the latest—and least relevant—dated 1609. In 1596 Harington's *Metamorphosis of Ajax* refers to the 1594 printed text of *A Shrew*: "the book of Taming a Shrew." The earliest is the most significant: a 1593 poem by Antony Chute, *Beawtie Dishonoured* or"Shores Wife," which includes the line "He calls his Kate, and she must come and kiss him." Morris and Thompson conclude that this must refer to *The Shrew*, in which Petruchio twice demands a kiss from Katherina (5.1 and 5.2). There are no kissing sequences in *A Shrew*.

Of *The Shrew*, Chambers comments: "its date has been placed in or before 1589 because certain lines of it appear to be parodied both in Greene's *Menaphon* of that year and in the prefatory epistle to *Menaphon* by Nashe."

Oxfordian views

Clark proposes 1579 and is supported by the senior Ogburns. Ogburn Jr. thinks that the 1579 play "might be" an early version of *The Shrew*. Hess et al opt for 1582 and "not later than 1593."

Clark holds that the Court Calendar record of a holiday play, produced at Richmond Palace by the Children of Paul's in January 1579, was an early version of *Taming of the Shrew*. However, the title, "A Morrall of the marryage of Mynde and Measure," gives no clue and Clark gives us no reasons why we should agree. She also suggests that it was written for the marriage of Oxford's sister, Mary Vere, to Lord Willoughby d'Eresby in 1577—on the doubtful basis that Mary had a hot temper!

Most Oxfordians agree that certain of Shakespeare's "comedies" were written originally as wedding entertainments, probably for families or individuals at Court with whom Oxford had a particular bond. As this play is about a marriage, and, like others, involves a denouement in which several couples are united towards the end, it would seem to have been written for such a wedding. Yet, although there is usually a little gentle teasing in wedding plays, the satire is far more extreme in *Shrew*: Katherine's hysterical anguish at her situation, Petruchio's refusal to conform to custom, to dress appropriately or attend the obligatory wedding breakfast, most of all his harsh treatment of his wife—modern opinion would call it abuse—go way beyond what we'd consider teasing. Moreover, all does not end happily for everyone: the embarrassment of the other newlyweds and Kate's surprising reversal in her submission speech make this no ordinary wedding play.

We believe the most likely origin for *Shrew* would have been the Stanley-Spencer wedding of 1579. At some date during that year (one source puts it late), twenty-year-old Ferdinando Stanley married the wealthy heiress Alice Spencer. At about the same time, Stanley, or Lord Strange as he was known for most of his adult life, became involved in the world of Court theatre. He began by sponsoring tumbling acts for the winter holiday entertainments of 1579-'80, and continued to support such "activities," plus a successful acting company, for most of the '80s and into the '90s. Himself a poet of no mean ability, he was praised by most of the leading poets of the day for his generous patronage of the arts. It was his acting company that brought Christopher Marlowe his early fame.

Stanley's bride, Alice Spencer, was the youngest of the seven children of Sir John Spencer of Althorp in Northamptonshire. Sir John made a fortune through raising sheep for the wool trade and marrying an heiress. By the 1570s he was in a position to buy his family into the peerage, marrying three of his daughters to noblemen in debt. In 1579, the youngest, Alice, topped her sisters by marrying Lord Strange, heir to the Derby earldom. Their prominence as patrons of the arts can be seen from the works dedicated to them by writers like Robert Greene, Edmund Spenser, and Thomas Nashe whose personification of them as "Phyllis, Charillis, and sweet Amaryllis" remains firmly fixed in English literary history.

By her fellows, however, Alice was not considered "sweet." Coward notes that her second husband, Lord Ellesmere, made frequent complaints about her "biting tongue." Throughout her long life she demonstrated intelligence and determination, most notably in her long legal battle with her brother-in-law (Oxford's son-in-law), the sixth Earl of Derby, over property left her in her husband's will, qualities in a woman that would inevitably label her "a shrew."

Lord Strange came to Court as a client of the Earl of Leicester, suggesting a motive for any satire by the Earl of Oxford. Since Oxford's allegience was to his father-in-law, Lord Burghley, Leicester's rival for power, as a potential rival to Oxford's power over the Court Stage, Stanley's marriage gave Oxford an opportunity to throw down a theatrical gauntlet. At the same time that he honors him with a play he demonstrates his skill with his "dudgeon dagger," the wooden sword of the old Vice comedian that controls the mighty by holding them up to ridicule—all in fun of course.

Lord Strange is the perfect model for Petruchio. Coward informs us that, at his death in 1594 at 36, Stanley left unpaid tailors' and shoemakers' bills of £6000 (about £3,000,00 in today's money), suggesting a source for the comic business with his tailor and haberdasher in Act IV Scene 3. His taste for expensive horses, noted by Sir John Harington, may have prompted the extremely funny description of Petruchio's broken-down nag. Stone records his enthusiasm for hawking, the possible source of the extended metaphor by which methods for taming a hawk can also be used to tame a wife. The feisty nature of Alice Spencer, and the fact that most courtiers were convinced that the heavily-indebted Stanley was marrying her for her dowry, make a perfect fit with Shakespeare's plot. (It's interesting that Ian Wilson, in his *Shakespeare: The Evidence*, suggests in passing that Shakespeare may have written *Shrew* for Lord Strange (170).)

The names in both versions are significant. In *A Shrew*, the Petruchio character is named *Ferando*, too similar to Ferdinando to be dismissed, while *Kate* is the name of Alice Spencer's mother, Katherine Kitson. One of Kate's sisters is named *Emilia*, a fairly unusual choice that suggests a connection with Emilia Bassano, the Italian Court musician who some commentators (Rowse, Lasocki, Hughes), believe was the Dark Lady of the *Sonnets*. During the period in question (1589-'92), Bassano was the mistress of Lord Henry Hunsdon, patron of Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Hunsdon's oldest son, Sir George Carey, was married to Elizabeth Spencer, Alice's older sister.

Apart from Kate, the names of most of the characters in *The Shrew* have been changed, though these too suggest a Stanley-Spencer connection. In the Induction scene, Sly is informed that he must call his wife "Madam," to which he replies "Alice madam or Joan madam?" In Act IV Scene 1, Petruchio calls for his cousin "Ferdinand . . . one, Kate, that you must kiss and be acquainted with."

In both plays, Sly's first name is *Christopher*, suggesting a connection between the character and Christopher Marlowe, leading playwright for Lord Strange's theater company, whose style is imitated several times in both versions. The word *strange* is used eleven times throughout the play. We suggest that the ornate touches that have confused scholars were written, not to *imitate* Marlowe, but to *burlesque* the style that he made popular. That these flourishes in *The Shrew* are confined to the two foppish suitors for the hand of Kate's sisters suggests that the target audience for the folio version, *The Shrew*, was the Jacobean public, whose taste for such satires is evident in many plays then.

Conclusion on dates

Although it's not the most popular theory, we are not alone in suggesting that Thompson's third scenario (above) is the most likely, namely that the two plays both stem from an original no longer extant, one that, in our view (and that of Clark and others), dates to 1579. We also agree with most commentators on the original dates of the two extant versions, late '80s to early '90s, due to: in the case of *A Shrew*, its language and style; in the case of *The Shrew*, the affinities it shares with *Comedy of Errors* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. However, the far more polished and Shakespearean nature of the Folio version suggests that while *A Shrew* soon fell by the wayside, *The Shrew* is the result of at least one and possibly more rewrites through the late 1590s and early 1600s.

Why so many versions? We have very little from the period of the original with which to compare both versions of *Shrew*, (possibly *The Play of Sir Thomas More*?) but we have enough to know that the language would have been considerably different from anything written a decade later. This was a period of quantum leaps in style. The most likely explanation is that from the no-longer-extant 1579 original, written for the Court, the version known as *A Shrew* was revised for public consumption, perhaps for the Queen's Men in its final days (1589-'90), that it was passed on to Pembroke's Men in 1592-93, and that during the upheavals of 1592-'94, the author either lost it, or

simply let it go, to a rival company. While the Lord Chamberlain's men was forming in early 1594, the author, now calling himself "Shakespeare," rewrote the play, improving it immensely (new bottles for new wine), at which point the Lord Chamberlain's Men entered it with the Stationers, either to prevent the rival company, probably the Lord Admiral's Men, from using it, or because they had come to an agreement on who got what actors and plays, and so to prevent its use by any other companies.

Having proved a hit, *The Shrew* was probably produced often enough over the years by the Lord Chamberlain's Men that when John Fletcher did a take-off on it in1604? as *The Woman's Prize or The Tamer Tamed* (Swan 121), he could be certain that the many references in it to *Shrew* would be understood by his audience. The quality of the language suggests that the version that we know from the First Folio was written during Shakespeare's mature period (possibly shortly before Fletcher wrote his spoof) at which point it became one of his masterpieces. Ever since then it has been enjoyed by audiences worldwide in numerous versions, some featuring music and dance, while its folklore plot has had a separate career of its own.

Oxfordian connections

In our opinion, the 1579 original was written by Oxford as a private *roast* or *chivaree* for the Strange-Spencer wedding that took place that year. Perhaps Eva Clark was prescient in suggesting that it was the mysteriously-titled "Morrall of the marryage of Mynde and Measure" performed January 1, 1579, at Richmond by the Children of Paul's (102).

For the version known as *A Shrew,* the likely date would be 1589-'92, the period when Ferdinando Stanley's company took over as London's leading acting company. Since Oxford was in no shape financially to offer any real competition at this time, a public production by the new company, Pembroke's Men, may have been his revenge, one that relied heavily on satirizing the style of Stanley's leading playwright, Christopher Marlowe. (Pembroke's Men were producing a number of his plays at tht time.) The connection of "Ferando" with Stanley and of "Sly" with his playwright, would add insult to the injury of performing for the public a play written as a private entertainment for Stanley's own wedding. However, the Marlowesque passages in *A Shrew* require an origin date of no later than 1590 to early 1593, since Oxford would hardly have been in the mood to satirize Marlowe after his brutal assassination in May 1593. Nor is it likely, following Lord Strange's murder in June 1594, that either version would have been performed for some years, possibly not until the company was taken under the royal wing by King James a decade later, by which time there had been many changes in personel and newer and younger public audiences would have no memory of its satirical origins.

The name changes in the Folio version could have been made at any time during the 30-year period that the Lord Chamberlain's Men were performing the play: approximately1597-1623. Since they left no records of the titles or dates of the plays they produced, and no version of *The Shrew* was published until 1623, it could have been at any time during this period. They could have been added for a production that took place after the death of the author, or even by the editors of the First Folio.

That this play was written originally as a roast meant to tease two socially powerful young people in the privacy of their family and community circle at the time of their marriage helps to explain what is often perceived by modern audiences as its disturbing misogyny. Although anger and revenge may have played a role in later versions, the first version of *The Taming of the Shrew* was probably no more than an immensely entertaining joke among friends.

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