

“A Shrew by Any Other Name: *Bridgerton*’s Regency Revisions of Shakespeare”

This paper explores the afterlives of Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* in contemporary popular romance by tracing the play’s narrative and ideological residues in Julia Quinn’s *The Viscount Who Loved Me* and its high-profile adaptation in Season 2 of Netflix’s *Bridgerton*. Although *Shrew* remains one of Shakespeare’s most controversial comedies, it continues to function as a generative intertext for modern romance narratives. This study argues that both Quinn’s novel and *Bridgerton* participate in an ongoing cultural negotiation with Shakespeare’s courtship paradigms, simultaneously drawing on the familiar pleasures of the enemies-to-lovers arc while reshaping the “taming” framework to accommodate contemporary notions of consent, emotional reciprocity, and female autonomy. Through close readings of Kate and Anthony’s dynamic across both texts, I identify several Shakespearean motifs that persist in these modern retellings: verbal sparring as a form of erotic testing, the trope of the “unruly” woman whose resistance structures desire, and the performative dimensions of courtship in socially stratified worlds. Yet, where *Shrew* ultimately resolves its tensions through Kate’s controversial submission speech, *Bridgerton* and Quinn’s novel reconfigure courtship as a process of mutual vulnerability and ethical self-transformation. Their adaptations foreground female interiority, shift power away from patriarchal discipline, and convert the rhetoric of taming in a narrative of emotional partnership. By situating *Bridgerton* and *The Viscount Who Loved Me* within a longer history of romantic rewritings of *The Taming of the Shrew*, this paper demonstrates how contemporary romance selectively inherits, revises, and resists Shakespeare’s influence. Ultimately, this paper highlights the genre’s capacity to reimagine canonical structures in ways that speak to shifting cultural values surrounding gender, desire, and relational ethics.

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SAA 2026 Seminar Abstract

Anger's their Meat: Diet and Emotional Regulation in *Taming of the Shrew*

Shrews (the animals) have an exceptionally high metabolism; failing to eat for even a few hours proves fatal. Shrews (the excoriated women) are also cast as desperate and persistent devourers—of men, of households, of peace. Early modern texts often scrutinize, monitor, and judge women's appetites for food, using this to gauge emotional excess. From St. Catherine of Siena and the maid "that hath not taken any food this 16 years, and is not yet neither hungry nor thirsty"<sup>i</sup> to Dromio's spherical suitor Nell and the many lively women chewing up the scenery in comic works,<sup>ii</sup> women's appetites are constructed as aberrant, and are used as a correlative of their emotional and sexual behavior. This essay looks at the way that Katerine's appetites are represented in *Taming of the Shrew*, particularly in the play's broken banquets. The play's use of food and condiments shows Shakespeare's early use of diet and appetite to characterize and perhaps attempt to regulate women's desires.

Gutierrez, Nancy. *"Shall she famish then?": Female Food Refusal in Early Modern England*. Ashgate, 2003.

Williamson, Matt. *Hunger, Appetite, and the Politics of the Renaissance Stage*. Cambridge UP, 2021

Wilson, Miranda. *Poison's Dark Works in Renaissance England*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2013.

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<sup>i</sup> Of a Maid Now Dwelling at the Town of Meurs in Dutchland; Shirburn Ballads pp. 55-59.

<sup>ii</sup> See, for example, Robert Armin, "What Ails that Damel?" in *Quips and Questions* (1601); Thomas Deloney, "How diverse of the Clothiers' Wives went to the Churching of Sutton's Wife" in *Thomas of Reading* (1612); Willim Fennor, *Cornu-copia* (1612); John Heath, "A Woman Over-Cloyed with Great Distress" in *Two Centuries of Epigrams* (1610); and *Pasquil's Jests* (1609).

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**The History of Absence:  
*The Taming of the Shrew*—or the Lack Thereof—in Wartime London**  
(SAA Seminar Paper Abstract)

My proposed seminar paper is part of my book manuscript *Shakespeares at War: Cultural Appropriations of Shakespeare in London and Berlin during World War II*, a comparative study of Shakespeare's cultural reception in these two cities during the war. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, despite—chiefly academic—grumbings against the barbarity of *The Shrew*, the play was frequently produced as a cheerful and rambunctious farce both in London and in Berlin. The war years, however, brought a significant difference. In Berlin, it was primarily the tone of the comedy that had changed. In London, the play disappeared from the theaters altogether: between August 1942 and November 1947, for more than five years, there was no professional production of *The Shrew* put on stage. In Berlin, on the other hand, *The Shrew* was the most often produced play during the war years. It is intriguing that this theatrical comedy of the war of the sexes seemed so relevant in the German wartime cultural and political context, whereas it was much less popular in London. Since I have already discussed elsewhere the wartime boom of *The Shrew* in Berlin,<sup>1</sup> this paper focuses on the reception of this play in wartime London: it discusses productions by Donald Wolfitt and Robert Atkins during the first years of the war.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example: “Whose ‘Triumph’? *The Taming of the Shrew* in Berlin During World War II.” In *Shakespeare and War*, eds. Ros King and Paul J. C. M. Franssen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 197-212.

**Cheers for Tears, Hisses for Kisses: Metatheater and Apprentice Competition  
in *The Taming of the Shrew***

Abstract

As Juliet Dusinberre, Richard Madelaine, Robert Stagg, and others have by now established, in *The Taming of the Shrew* Shakespeare repeatedly and systematically invites audiences to explore a metatheatrical “backstage,” in which apprentice boy actors compete for the most prestigious female role and the most advantageous relationships with the company’s adult male actors. In other words, this paper begins with the premise that many in the Chamberlain’s and King’s Men’s audiences would have understood they were watching *The Training of the Boy*—a fictionalized and sensationalized, thus all the more compelling account of theatrical apprenticeship—even as they watched *The Taming of the Shrew*. While Dusinberre’s early argument, that the Katherine actor ultimately wins not only his master’s love “but his own pride of place in the play,” remains convincing, the specific criteria by which an early modern audience is to judge that particular boy actor as meriting the starring female role (both in the *Shrew* and, one assumes, in future plays) have not thus far been so clearly defined. Why, exactly, does the boy playing Katherine deserve more of our applause than the other boys, perhaps even more applause than we grant the leading man playing Petruchio?

This paper argues that Shakespeare valorizes the actor’s ability to cry and to kiss with apparent conviction as two such criteria—the clearest signs of accomplished apprentice acting by which to rank the company’s boys. From the moment the whimsically imperious Lord of the Induction orders that his page Bartholomew be prepared to kiss the drunken Christopher Sly, and that he be given an onion to induce tears, both essential elements of feminine acting are in competitive metatheatrical play. The Katherine boy must earn his stardom by outcrying and outkissing his rivals.

**Jane Austen's Petruchio-like Shrew-Tamer, Mr. Darcy (depending on how you look at him)**

**by Arnie Perlstein © 2026**

**ABSTRACT**

Emma Smith has definitively argued that *The Taming of the Shrew*, particularly Katherina's famous speech, was Shakespeare at his intentionally ambiguous best, leaving the audience/reader to plausibly infer either sincere submission to Petruchio, or feminist subversion. At recent SAA conferences, I've outlined comprehensive, deliberate ambiguities in *Much Ado* and *Hamlet*, respectively, as the essential bases of the "shadow story" of each play, deliberately made anamorphic by Shakespeare — I see *Shrew* as Shakespeare's earliest anamorphic play, such that speeches like Katherina's can plausibly be read either *for* or *against* the grain, as key clues to alternative versions of the play.

I find support in the outside-the-box, implicit insights of an unlikely, imaginative reader two centuries ago, Jane Austen. For two decades, I've been decoding Austen's six completed novels, claiming that Austen, a novelist, like her primary role model, Shakespeare the playwright, deliberately withheld clues to her characters's motivations and offpage actions, to generate and sustain fractal ambiguity.

Austen best demonstrated her understanding of *Shrew's* anamorphism in her most famous and popular novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, recreating his feminist/misogynist oscillating ambiguity by writing it as both a seductively satisfying wish fulfilment fantasy (which most Austen scholars and readers alike see), in which a powerless woman transforms a powerful frog into a selfless prince merely by her unexpected, strong rejection of his advances; but also a dark cautionary tale (which I'm the first to fully flesh out), in which a brash but manipulable young woman has her valid autonomy and resistance to the advances of a powerful, resourceful man (who narcissistically cannot accept female rejection) reduced to rubble by his sinister stage management of her reality. I believe that Katherina's famous speech in *Shrew* was the epicenter of Austen's inspiration for this Darcy, Regency Era duke of dark corners.

**Title:** “when men and women are alone”: The Performance of Manhood in *Taming of the Shrew*

**Author:** Kelsey Ridge

**Abstract:** *Taming of the Shrew* could readily be described as one of Shakespeare’s “gender” plays. Some have argued that the play’s gender politics makes it unplayable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Others have argued that the politics mostly render the play a tragedy. These arguments generally center on how the play handles women and femininity. However, the male characters have gender too, and the play has a performance and politics of masculinity. Masculinity is also performed to cultural standards and policed according to standards of success or failure. While patriarchy makes performances of masculinity invisible, like how white supremacy makes whiteness invisible, the performance of masculinity needs examining. This paper will apply masculinities studies (a child of the feminist movement and gender studies) to read Petruchio and his interactions with Katherine and the men around him. Emphasis will be placed on how the behavior differs depending on the audience, whether he is alone (with the audience), Katherine, or other men. This analysis will build on work by R. W. Connell and Michael Kimmel.

James Rizzi, Ph.D.  
SAA 2026 Abstract  
Seminar: “The Many Lives of *The Shrew*”  
5 December 2025

“Take him up, and manage well the jest”:  
A Case for Christopher Sly

The two induction scenes that open Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew* establish its comic genre. The drunken tinker Christopher Sly is unwittingly thrust into a Saturnalian reversal, complete with crossdressing across gender and social lines. As a framed story, the play within a play—where all substantial action occurs—may seem frivolous, or at least its moral conclusions retain the plausible deniability Puck offers in *Midsummer*: “think but this and all is mended / That you [like Sly] have but slumbered here.” Although modern productions often omit the induction, Sly has gained renewed attention in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, championed by critics such as Lynn Enterline and Gail Kern Paster, and even appearing as the subject of Dominick Argento’s 1962 short comic opera *Christopher Sly*.

This revival of interest has also drawn attention to the 1594 quarto *The Taming of A Shrew*. While its wooing plots differ significantly from *The Shrew*, both center on the attempt to subdue and wed a strong-willed “Kate.” Crucially, Sly does not disappear but remains onstage throughout *A Shrew*, offering metatheatrical commentary. Emma Smith highlights the epilogue, however, as evidence of his importance: the Lord’s men return Sly to his original spot, and upon waking he declares, “I know now how to tame a shrew!” and vows to return home to “tame” his wife. His uncritical acceptance of the play’s misogynistic moralizing lampoons contemporary sermons and pamphlets that earnestly promoted similar views. Likewise, the spectacle of a drunkard fool claiming to have learned truth from comedy creates a moment of critical caution for audiences as they, like Sly, prepare to return home.

This paper argues that uniting the quarto and Folio Sly traditions by retaining both induction and epilogue is a valuable experiment for future productions, including the planned 2026 staging of *Shrew* in Buffalo’s Delaware Park.

Marie Roche, PhD

Title: **Plato in the Alehouse: Shakespeare's Comic Inquiry into Language and the Question of Reality.**

Abstract:

This paper explores the ontological and epistemological questions posed by the induction of *The Taming of the Shrew*, focusing on the character of Christopher Sly. Drawing on the philosophical dialogues of Plato, especially *Cratylus* and *The Republic*, the essay argues that Sly is not merely a comic device or a narrative frame, but a philosophically resonant figure whose transformation (and reversion) dramatizes Shakespeare's interrogation of language, illusion, and being. Through a close reading of Sly's speech, the Lord's manipulations, and the nature of theatrical illusion itself, the paper reveals Shakespeare's engagement with classical questions: What is the nature of reality? Can language access truth? Is identity stable or in flux? The essay proposes that *The Taming of the Shrew* enacts the very philosophical tensions it stages—and leaves its audience as suspended in interpretive ambiguity as Sly himself.

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### Tejana *Shrew* Abstract

In fall 2025, Shakespeare Dallas produced a bilingual production of *Taming of the Shrew* (directed by Ryan Matthieu Smith) in their outdoor venue at Samuell-Grand Amphitheater in east Dallas. The play is set in 1880s San Antonio (or as the characters say "San Anton") rather than in fair Padua, and Petruchio's Verona becomes Presidio, a small remote Texas border town three hours north of the Mexican city of Chihuahua. Semantically, the company modernized Shakespeare's original language, employing Amy Freedman's contemporary adaptation of the original, intermittently translating or sometimes repeating words in Spanish, making Spanglish the lingua franca of the play. As many of the company's actors are from Mexico or have Mexican roots, such as Liz Magallanes (Katherine) who hails from Ciudad Juarez and Omar Padilla (Petruchio) who is a Mexican-born Dallas-based actor, the characters employ Latinex stereotypes, such as Machismo, Marianismo, and La Malinchismo, to modify the sexual dynamics of *Shrew*, thus providing a new lens for interrogating this play's problematic gender politics. Yet the lively acting style, which nods its head to the play's origins in the Commedia delle'arte and includes a great deal of antics, singing, and dancing (not to mention the cracking of a bull whip) has brought new audiences to this 425+ year old play, as the green filled with both Hispanic, Anglo, and Black multi-generational families, couples, and groups of friends. In conversation with recent LatinX/Shakespeare scholarship, this paper explores how the production's transformation of this Elizabethan play into a modern bilingual hybrid examines to 21st century sexual, cultural, and linguistic politics.

Jessica Tooker  
SAA 2026 Seminar: “The Many Lives of *The Shrew*”

Title: How to Tame a Shrew

Abstract:

Shakespeare’s early romantic comedy, *The Taming of the Shrew* conspicuously invites various narrative interpretations of its many intertexts. My essay argues that these latter texts, encompassing different eras, powerfully derive their effectivity from the primary “ur-text,” and that its savvy introduction of illuminative concepts—involving the dramatic performance of individual/gender/sexual identity in relationship with another (and others)—solidifies the play’s striking reputation within the corpus. Consequently, I analyze the foundational encounter between Katherina and Petruccio where the enterprising Veronese suitor—spurred by the offer of gold—cannily solicits Kate’s attention as a serious marital prospect. I suggest that Petruccio’s ultimate success with his chosen mate depends upon a series of intricate name games—in which she is cathartically encouraged to imaginatively define, and to communicate—what she would be, in an alternative set of circumstances, where she is no longer known as “a curst shrew,” “a devil,” “wonderful froward,” “stark mad,” etc. Analyzing the pair’s markedly empathetic responsiveness to each other, and perhaps especially their engagement with the loaded question of what to call Katherina—“Good morrow, Kate, for that’s your name, I hear.,” Petruccio gamely salutes his incipient bride—I contend that this complexly nuanced interaction, and healing dialogue about names, identificatory preferences, facts and opinions, and sex, transformatively develops the female protagonist’s character. Establishing shared empathetic trust between themselves—and Petruccio’s impromptu conceiving that Kate’s “curstness” is actually performative (as opposed to being semblative of reality)—they proudly demonstrate their dazzling love story: “The Taming of the Shrew.”

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SAA 2026 “Many Lives of the Shrew” Abstract

**“ ‘The taming school?’ (4.2.57): Katherina at the Seven Sisters, 1880-1918”**

At the American women’s colleges known as the “Seven Sisters” in the late nineteenth century, student-run Shakespeare societies were a major part of social and para-academic life. The societies’ choice of plays for their full-scale productions (usually one per year, often outdoors) heavily favored the comedies, especially *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice* -- and, surprisingly, *The Taming of the Shrew*. The attraction of playing Rosalind, Viola, or Portia, who are allowed independent agency at least in Acts 2-4 and who get to wear pants, is self-evident, but why did the same students repeatedly choose to participate in a play that enacts the reinscription of male control over an intellectual, patriarchy-resisting daughter? Were their interpretations “subversive” or compliant, and to whom were they speaking through their stagings -- fellow students, faculty, their families? Using archival photos, society records, and students’ diaries, I will examine four productions of *Taming of the Shrew* mounted by Wellesley’s Shakespeare Society and Vassar’s Philalethis Society between 1880 and 1918 and attempt to understand the motivations and performance choices of the students -- in the contexts of existing scholarship that has analyzed the cultural place of amateur Shakespeare in Gilded Age America and of the larger 19th- and 20th stage history of *Shrew*.