

**EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH PACK**

**THE TAMING OF THE SHREW**

**SHERMAN THEATRE / THEATRE Y SHERMAN & TRON THEATRE COMPANY**

**A NEW PLAY BY JO CLIFFORD**

**BASED ON THE TAMING OF THE SHREW BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**



**DIRECTED BY MICHAEL FENTIMAN**

***THE TAMING OF THE SHREW WAS STAGED IN SHERMAN’S STUDIO DURING THE SPRING SEASON OF 2019.***

**The following pack provides some production background and context as well as providing you with provocations to further consider the production within the wider contemporary context.**

**There are both practical and academic questions within this – please be safe when completing the practical exercises.**

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## PRODUCTION CREATIVES

### Jo Clifford

Jo is a Writer, Performer, Poet & Teacher

She was born in North Staffordshire in 1951 and raised as a boy.

Aged 7 she was sent to boarding school; during this time (when she was aged 12) her mother suddenly died. She discovered her passion for theatre when she played women's roles in school plays; where it became clear to her, she was not male.

She met her partner, Sue Innes, at St Andrews University in 1971; their partnership lasted 33 years until Sue's premature death in 2005.

In the late eighties Jo wrote a series of major works for the Traverse, with central roles given to women and with gender balanced casts.

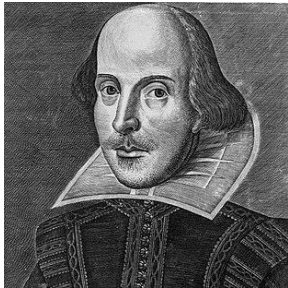
She is a leading translator from Spanish, French and Portuguese, as well as a radio dramatist, and adapter of novels for radio and the stage.

After Sue's death, she formalised her female identity and began to re-discover herself as actress and performer.

She has written about 80 plays for every dramatic medium.



### William Shakespeare



Shakespeare was baptised on 26 April 1564 (his is believed to have been born on 23 April) and died on 23 April 1616.

He is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's greatest dramatist.

His canon includes 39 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and a few other verses.

He married Anne Hathaway aged 18, with whom he had three children.

He had a successful career as an actor, writer, and part-owner of the acting company *The Lord Chamberlain's Men*, later known as *The King's Men*.

Aged 49 he retired to Stratford, where he died three years later.

His early plays were primarily comedies and histories, then mainly tragedies, among them *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*.

In the last phase of his life, he wrote tragicomedies (or romances)

### Michael Fentiman

Michael was born 1 June 1982 in Harlow, Essex, England.

He attended Bretton Hall for three years, where he trained to be an actor. He completed his training with a postgraduate course at Mountview Academy for one year, to be a director.

His directing credits to date include *Titus Andronicus* for the RSC, *The Importance of being Earnest* at the Vaudeville Theatre, *Raising Martha* and Joe Orton's *Loot* at the Park Theatre, London, *The Last Days of Anne Boleyn* (writer and director) at the Tower of London, and upcoming *Amélie the Musical* (UK national tour from April 2019).



### Overview

*The Taming of the Shrew* is believed to have been written between 1590 and 1592, but it was not printed until the First Folio edition (1623). An earlier play entitled *The Taming of A Shrew*, was published in 1594, but it is believed to be an imperfectly-remembered version of Shakespeare's original. The play begins with a framing device, establishing its meta-theatricality (something that is also found in Jo Clifford's adaptation). This moment (referred to as the induction) features a mischievous nobleman tricking a drunk named Christopher Sly into believing he is actually a nobleman himself. The remaining action of the play is then performed for Sly's diversion at the nobleman's request.

This main plot depicts the courtship of Petruchio and Katherina – the titular shrew. Initially, she is an unwilling participant in the relationship; however, Petruchio controls her (including keeping her from eating and drinking), until she becomes a desirable, compliant, and obedient bride, thereby “taming” her. The subplot centres on the competition between suitors for Katherina's more “ideal” younger sister, Bianca. The play's misogynistic content has become the subject of considerable controversy.

The archetype of a woman requiring taming existed within the popular consciousness of the time and Shakespeare was not the first writer to use of it. The story of a woman tamed is also found in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, and mystery plays of the period which commonly depicted Noah's wife in this way. Petruchio himself makes mention of Socrates' wife, Xanthippe, who fits this depiction of women.

*The Taming of the Shrew* has been adapted for stage, screen, opera, ballet, and musical theatre; including Cole Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate*, a 1967 film starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, and finally the 1999 American high school comedy film *10 Things I Hate About You*.

### *The Taming of the Shrew* in performance

*Shrew* is commonly regarded as the last Shakespeare play to be restored to the contemporary theatrical repertory. Following an absence of over two hundred years, the play returned to the British stage in 1844. Despite this absence it has grown to become one of Shakespeare's most frequently staged plays.

The earliest known performance (recorded by Philip Henslowe) was in June 1594, it was not until 1633 that the first monarch saw the play; Charles I is said to have "liked" it.

In the mid-1930s the American Theatre Guild staged a production, which began on Broadway, as well as touring across North America. This version of the show starred one of the world most famous theatrical couples – Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne. This was presented as a boisterous farce involving circus animals, dwarfs, acrobats and clowns, as well as involving the audience in the play. Lunt and Fontanne's backstage fights were rumoured to be just as ferocious as their on-stage performances. It is this environment which inspired Cole Porter's

1948 musical *Kiss Me, Kate*, about a fiery couple attempting to stage an adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew*. The musical opened on Broadway at the New Century Theatre in 1948, running for a total of 1,077 performances.

In the same year as Porter's musical opened Michael Benthall wanted to do an all-male version of the play at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre (now the RSC). Unfortunately the theatre's board were so appalled by the notion that they sacked the artistic director Barry Jackson for not dismissing the concept immediately – quite what Shakespeare's audience would have thought of this we can only speculate.

By contrast John Barton's 1960 production emphasised the meta-theatricality by using a revolving set; occasionally giving the audience glimpses of the backstage action including costume changes and actors checking scripts.

Michael Bogdanov presented the play as a twisted fantasy of Sly's brain. He began his 1978 staging with an altercation between Petruchio / Sly, who was pretending to be an audience member and an usherette (Katherina). Ultimately the man was restrained before being thrown into a bath. The play was then presented as his fevered dream. This production presented the taming as a distasteful display of male chauvinism, with the process presented as Sly's fantasy of male domination and power over the usherette who had restrained him.

The 1995 RSC production was directed (in a landmark decision) by Gale Edwards; she was the first woman to direct the play at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. Her version (similar to Bogdanov) centred the action on a dream of Sly / Petruchio. The action began with a woman in rags (Katherina) trying to get her drunk husband to come home. He refuses, and falls asleep outside the tavern, the taming story was then his dream. At the end of Katherina's speech began lovingly until she realised she was part of a wager and ended with Petruchio had become bowed with shame by her anger. Sly, is forever changed by what he has been through.

An all-female cast was led by Phyllida Lloyd in the 2003 production at Shakespeare's Globe. The production emphasised the physicality of both the comedy and the taming, with Petruchio shown as a commanding and domineering figure alongside a shrinking waif-like Katherina

By contrast the 2006 Propeller Company featured an all-male cast. This production emphasised the physical brutality of the taming, with a macho Petruchio often aggressively lashing out at Katherina, who began as a punk rebel, but who became less and less assertive as the play went on. Her final speech was delivered in a manner suggesting she was terrified of disagreeing with him.

**Points for reflection – take some time to consider and write down the following.**

- 1. As a director what elements of these previous productions interest you?**
- 2. What surprises you about the history of the play in performance?**
- 3. If you were asked to direct a production what choices would you make about:**
  - i. The Induction.**
  - ii. Gender Roles**

**Characters**

Shakespeare's Original (Played by 30 Men and Boys)	Jo Clifford's version (Played by 5 women and 2 men)
Katherina (Kate) Minola – the "shrew" of the title Bianca Minola – sister of Katherina; the <i>ingénue</i> Baptista Minola – father of Katherina and Bianca Petruchio – suitor of Katherina Gremio – elderly suitor of Bianca Lucentio – suitor of Bianca Hortensio – suitor of Bianca and friend to Petruchio Grumio – Petruchio's manservant Tranio – Lucentio's manservant Biondello – servant of Lucentio Vincentio – father of Lucentio Widow – wooed by Hortensio Pedant – pretends to be Vincentio Haberdasher Tailor Curtis – servant of Petruchio Nathaniel – servant of Petruchio Joseph – servant of Petruchio Peter – servant of Petruchio Nicholas – servant of Petruchio Philip – servant of Petruchio Officer <i>Characters appearing in the Induction:</i> Christopher Sly – a drunken tinker Hostess of an alehouse Lord – plays a prank on Sly Bartholomew – Lord's page boy Lord's Huntsman Players Servants Messenger	Baptista Vincentio Lucentio Tailor Tranio Biondello Curtis Gremio Grumio Pedant Petruchio Katherina Sly Muriel Bianca

### Content Controversy – Some starting points for discussion

*The Taming of the Shrew* has been the subject of critical controversy, due to its treatment of Katherina (which seems to legitimise this type of behaviour towards all women), which has elicited a range of responses; from supportive, to ethically uneasy, and absolute disgust.

Some scholars argue that even in Shakespeare's day the play must have been controversial, due to the changing nature of gender politics. It is suggested that this is why the induction was written so the audience would not react badly to the misogyny in the Petruchio and Katherina story. During this period the nature of romantic relationships were in a state of flux with arranged marriages beginning to give way to newer, more romantically informed unions.

Evidence of at least some initial societal discomfort with *The Shrew* is found in the *The Woman's Prize, or The Tamer Tamed*. This was authored by John Fletcher (Shakespeare's successor as house playwright for the King's Men), and tells the story of Petruchio's remarriage after Katherina's death. In a mirror of the original, his new wife attempts (successfully) to tame him – thus the tamer becomes the tamed.

However, others see the play as an example of a pre-feminist condemnation of patriarchal domination and an argument for equality of women. Some scholars believe that the play is a moral tale, warning audiences, "do not be like this" and "do not do this". Many find it hard to justify that for a second that the playwright behind *Benedict, Cleopatra and Romeo and Juliet* and strong lovers would be strongly misogynist. They see the play as a satire on this male behaviour and a cautionary tale. Shakespeare is using this story to investigate misogyny, exploring it and animating it and obviously damning it because none of the men end up looking particularly good.

Finally, some argue that the point is not that Katherina is, as a woman, weak, but that she is not well cast in the role in life which she finds herself having to play. The end of the play then offers blatant irony when a strong male actor, dressed as a woman, lectures women on how to play their parts.

Ultimately whether you see the play as being harmless or tragic, Shakespeare is offering us his interpretation of the battle of the sexes through both comic and tragic elements. Before theatre makers can even begin to consider either a critical or directorial exploration of the text in performance, they are faced with a sometimes perplexing play whose meaning is in constant change depending on the approach taken. These ambiguities can make any version of this play exciting for audience, actor and creative team alike.

### Points for reflection – take some time to make some notes on the following.

1. As a director / theatre maker how might you approach the issue of the misogynist content?
2. As a creative what is your opinion of this aspect of the play and why?
3. Is there an argument to say that this show should be confined to history or is it important to keep having these discussions?

**CONTEXT (ORIGINAL AND REIMAGINED PRODUCTIONS)**

Original	Reimagined
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Renaissance instilled men and women with the belief they could do anything and be anything; that their capacity for knowledge was limitless. However some attitudes remained.</li> <li>• Men were breadwinners and women were housewives and mothers.</li> <li>• Men were considered to be the leaders and women their inferiors. Women were regarded as "the weaker sex", not just in terms of physical strength, but emotionally too.</li> <li>• If married, their husband was expected to look after them. If single, then their father, brother or another male relative took this role.</li> <li>• Women were not allowed to go to school or to university, but they could be educated at home by private tutors.</li> <li>• Women were not allowed to be lawyers, doctors or politicians, but they could work in domestic service - cooks, maids.</li> <li>• Women were not allowed to act or write for the stage.</li> <li>• Women were not allowed to vote.</li> <li>• Titles and land was passed down from man to man. (Except the crown)</li> <li>• A man was the head of a marriage, and he had the legal right to chastise his wife. But he could still be punished if he was cruel or inflict bodily harm.</li> <li>• Marriage was seen as the desirable state for both men and women, and single women were sometimes accused of being witches by their neighbours.</li> <li>• One of the many sermons read in church from 1562 onwards by order of the Crown was the subjection of the wife to the authority of the husband, which was clearly set out in the Anglican Homily on Marriage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Much like during the renaissance there is a real sense that people can do anything they want. Including making changes in society through protest and grassroots movements.</li> <li>• The US President is on record as having made negative and sexually violent language against women.</li> <li>• The White House has made changes to US Military policy saying "transgender persons with a history or diagnosis of gender dysphoria ... are disqualified from military service."</li> <li>• We have access to more knowledge and opportunities through the internet which makes us more aware of other people's cultures, communities and environments.</li> <li>• There is a greater awareness of what separates us from other people – rather than what makes us the same as them.</li> <li>• The UK led by a female PM.</li> <li>• In the 2017 Election; 208 Female MPs (32% of Parliament) were elected. Just 8 of these are in the cabinet.</li> <li>• Today the #MeToo, #TimesUp and #ERA5050 movements are drawing attention to current gender inequalities and working to repair them.</li> <li>• Toxic masculinity is being actively challenged through education as well as through protest and grassroots movements who are challenging behaviour such as "Boys Will Be Boys".</li> <li>• Revenge Porn is now a chargeable offence.</li> <li>• The move to make Upskirting illegal was blocked in parliament by MP who didn't know what it was. This movement was created, and lobbied for by civilians</li> <li>• There is a huge increase in demands for intersectionality and the supporting of other women by women is being promoted.</li> <li>• There are Women's Marches across the globe to show support and pressure governments into change.</li> </ul>



- One of the punishments for disobedience was the whipping stool.
- Manners and etiquette were of prime importance, with men and women subject to strict rules on behaviour, including how to curtsy and bow.
- Elizabethan women would have had to learn how to govern a household and become skilled in all housewifely duties.
- The type of clothing worn by Elizabethan women was dictated by the Sumptuary Laws, which bought higher taxes on certain types of materials used on dress making.

- 2018 marked the 100 year anniversary of some of the first women receiving the vote.
- There is great debate surrounding the unequal tax policy on sanitary products - #PeriodPoverty
- *Period. End of Sentence*, was the 2019 Oscar Winner for Best Documentary. Directed by Rayka Zehtabchi, it follows the trials of an Indian women fighting the stigma surrounding menstruation and beginning to manufacture sanitary pads.



**Examining Gender**

Below we have included some contemporary examples of other Shakespeare productions where gender swapping has been used to great effect.

**Look up the whole review and consider the following:**

- 1) As a director why you decide between making a statement with their casting or gender blind casting?**
- 2) What elements of production might govern this choice? (Consider the style / tone / setting of the production).**
- 3) As a director consider what challenges are presented by making this choice?**

Shakespeare Trilogy at the Donmar with Clean break – Clean break was set up in 1979 by two women prisoners who believed that theatre could bring the hidden stories of imprisoned women to a wider audience.

“Lloyd's production proves that female actors can bring a fresh perspective to traditionally male roles.” (Michael Billington, Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/dec/05/julius-caesar-review>)

“One implication is that a gynocracy is no hedge against violence, and no egalitarian Utopia.” Kate Basett, Independent <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/ios-theatre-review-julius-caesar-donmar-warehouse-london-the-bodyguard-adelphi-london-old-money-8395806.html>

“One of the great joys of this venture is how directly and potently it reminds us that plays are powerful acts of storytelling in which we invest belief because they help us to understand who we are.” Sarah Hemming, FT <https://www.ft.com/content/b767d6e0-b185-11e6-9c37-5787335499a0>

“The show gives the lie to the idea that the Henries are essentially “masculine” plays. The trajectory of events can appear testosterone-fuelled: ego-driven rebels, a despairing monarch and father, a recalcitrant son who learns to be his rightful heir.... This production is about more than just giving the sisters more work, better parts. If it's empowering for a woman to play a man then it's also liberating for a man to watch a woman do so...” Dominic Cavendish, Telegraph <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/11153732/Henry-IV-Donmar-Warehouse-review.html>

Glenda Jackson as Lear at The Old Vic:

“What I find really interesting about getting older is that those gender-defining barriers begin to fray. They get mistier, less absolute. We are not stuck in the business of how men and women react differently.” Libby Purves Radio Times <https://www.radiotimes.com/news/2017-04-09/acting-legend-glenda-jackson-on-playing-king-lear-and-her-fight-against-ageism/>

“The fact that she was a woman playing a man turns out to be a non-issue.” Ben Brantley, Independent <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/glenda-jackson-three-tall-women-broadway-king-lear-old-vic-women-in-love-oscar-a8228971.html>

## **SOME ORIGINAL PRODUCTION CONVENTIONS**

Towards the end of Elizabeth's reign playwrights began focusing on the capacity for selfishness, and exaggerating the effects of human ambition, the nature of evil and ultimately pushing things to the extremes of human behaviour. Audiences flocked in to see these stories that offered dramas full of sex and violence.

### **Aside**

An aside is a convention that usually involves one character addressing the audience away from the main action, offering them valuable information in relation to the plot or characters that only the audience is privy to. The audience now feels empowered, knowing more about the events on stage than most of the characters do. This often led to moments of dramatic irony (where the audience know more than the characters).

### **Boys Performing Female Roles**

Women were not permitted on stage until Charles II was crowned in the year 1660 (although women already acted in some European countries). Young boys were cast in the roles of women, with men playing all the other roles.

### **Dialogue**

Plays commonly consisted of poetic, dramatic and heightened dialogue beyond the vernacular vocabulary. The lower-class characters' speech was colloquial (prose), whilst upper class characters spoke rhythmically (verse).

### **Eavesdropping**

This technique is between a soliloquy and an aside. Characters would overhear others on stage, informing both themselves and the audience of the details, whilst those being overheard had no idea.

### **Presentational Acting Style**

Plays were overtly a "performance" with actors being more aware of their audience. Movements and gestures were more stylised and dramatic with speech patterns heightened for dramatic effect. Today we would regard this performance style as melodramatic.

### **Play Within A Play**

This convention involved the staging of a play as part of the action of the play itself. It was not a flimsy convention, but rather one that was used judiciously and with purpose, such as in Hamlet.

### Soliloquy

This technique allowed a single character to talk aloud their inner thoughts, (but directing them towards God, a higher power or the audience). Typically, a soliloquy is lengthy with a dramatic tone, and was used to show the thought process of the character to illicit understanding (sympathy or empathy) from the audience.

### Stagecraft

Elizabethan dramas made use of elaborate costumes. Acting spaces were bare stage with isolated set pieces (a single tree equalled a forest, a throne for a King's palace) and minimal use of props. There were no stage lights of any kind, with plays performed only during daylight hours. A simple balcony at the rear of the stage could be used for, Gods or Heaven, while a trap door in the stage floor could also be used to drop characters into Hell or raise characters up from beneath. Entrances and exits were at two doors at the rear (tiring house).

Consider the following in relation to your own version of *Taming Of The Shrew*:

1. As a theatre maker which of these conventions would you expect to see in a contemporary adaptation of *Shrew*? And which should be abandoned?
2. How might your chosen conventions reflect on your design choices?
3. How would your chosen conventions be used to help a director further explore the themes within the production that they wished to show?
4. What other elements of contemporary theatre practice do we owe to Elizabethan practice that you might wish to include in your production?

Consider the following:

- i. Live music
- ii. Sound
- iii. Audience interaction

On the right-hand side of the page we have included a diagram of a theatre similar to The Globe on London's South Bank.

This is the type of setting in which *The Taming Of The Shrew* would have originally been performed.

