

The first quarto edition of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*

William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*. London: John Smethwicke, 1631. 7 3/8 inches x 5 3/8 inches (187 mm x 136 mm), [72] pages, A–I4.

A WITTIE | AND PLEASANT | COMEDIE | Called | *The Taming of the Shrew*. | As it was acted by his Maiesties | *Seruants at the Blacke Friers | and the Globe*. | *Written by VVill. Shakespeare*. | [Smethwicke's device] | LONDON, | Printed by *W. S. for Iohn Smethwicke*, and are to be | sold at his Shop in Saint *Dunstones Church- | yard vnder the Diall*. | 1631.

Shakespeare's quartos, so named because of their format (a single sheet folded twice, creating four leaves or eight pages), are the first printed representations of his plays and, as none of the plays survives in manuscript, of great importance to Shakespeare scholarship. Only twenty-one of Shakespeare's plays were published in quarto before the closure of the theaters and outbreak of civil war in 1642. These quartos were printed from either Shakespeare's "foul papers" (a draft with notations and changes that was given in sections to actors for their respective roles); from "fair copies" created from foul papers that presented the entire action of the play; from promptbooks, essentially fair copies annotated and expanded by the author and acting company to clarify stage directions, sound effects, etc.; or from a previously published quarto edition. The quartos were inexpensive to produce and were published for various reasons, including to secure the acting company's rights to the material and to bring in money during the plague years in London when the theaters were closed.

This play begins with an induction, a set-up for *The Taming of the Shrew* as a play within a play. A lord decides to play a joke on Christopher Sly, a tinker who lay asleep from drink. The Lord dresses Sly in finery and puts him in good bed, and when he awakes the lord tells him he is a lord who has lost his memory. Sly is entertained by the performance of a play. In the play, three suitors are interested in marrying the fair Bianca, daughter of the wealthy merchant Baptista Minola. They are thwarted in their suit because the father insists that Bianca's older sister, the

shrewish Kate, be married first. Petruchio arrives in town from Verona determined to find a rich wife, and vows to marry Kate despite her temperament. They meet and exchange harsh words, but Petruchio prevails, marries Kate, and takes her with him to the country where she ultimately accedes to his will. Bianca's three suitors disguise themselves, two of them as tutors in order to get close to her and sway her decision. Bianca marries Lucentio, and in the final banquet scene, Petruchio boasts of his obedient Kate and wins a second dowry by proving that Kate has been tamed.

This first quarto of *The Taming of the Shrew* is bound in tan half calf with blind-stamped borders over marbled boards. "SHAKESPEARE TAMING OF THE SHREW. 1631." is lettered in gold up the spine. The fore-edge is uncut. This copy is now in the Bodleian Library; there are no traces of its previous owners.

Octavo code: **shatar**