

Tranio Transformed: Social Anxieties and Social Metamorphosis in *The Taming of the Shrew*

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Abstract

The article discusses Elizabethan anxieties about the increasing fluidity of social status through an examination of the servant Tranio in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. It argues that Tranio's informed and willing participation in this social performance embodies the anxieties about social mobility held by members of the Elizabethan elite. In contrast to other figures of social metamorphosis in the play, Tranio's social transformation is temporary, even though, like Christopher Sly, he is transformed into a gentleman at the behest of his Lord. He must return to his servile status in the final act, however, not only because he can so successfully perform the role of master, but because he knowingly participates in his own social metamorphosis. The article suggests, in conclusion, that it is the servant's knowledge of his own performative power that makes him a threat in Elizabethan society.

Keywords: Class Performance, Servants, Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, Tranio

Only, good master, while we do admire
This virtue and this moral discipline,
Let's be no stoics nor no stocks, I pray,
Or so devote to Aristotle's checks
As Ovid be an outcast quite abjured.

The Taming of the Shrew 1.1.29-33

1. *Introduction*

The Taming of the Shrew's overt attention to the proper performance of gender norms obscures anxieties about the increasing fluidity of social class in the early modern era, especially in relation to matters of public performance and social identity. In his first speech, Lucentio's trusty servant, Tranio, uses deferential language of service while simultaneously alerting the audience



to his gentlemanly education, as he differentiates between the potentially restrictive philosophy of Aristotle and the more liberal poetry of Ovid. Moreover, this particular comparison calls attention to Ovid in a way that recalls the Induction's allusions to the *Metamorphoses*, where Ovidian transformations figure prominently. As part of the Lord's practical joke at the expense of Christopher Sly, serving-men offer to bring the drunken tinker paintings of Adonis, Io, and Daphne frozen in the moments before their various transformations (Ind.2.44-55).¹ In the context of the play's missing closing frame, these images of mythic figures caught in stasis before their metamorphoses is especially apt; Sly, like the figures in the paintings, remains caught up in the Lord's joke, never to be returned to his lowly status as tinker, nor receiving the moral lesson his counterpart in the anonymous *The Taming of A Shrew* takes away from the experience.²

Tranio's social transformation within the play, however, has been left relatively under-interrogated.³ Like Christopher Sly, he is transformed at the behest of his Lord, but unlike Sly, Tranio comes full circle, returning to his servant status before fading into the background in the final act. How should we read his temporary transformation in relation to the play's other figure of social metamorphosis? Tranio's *informed* participation in his social metamorphosis, I suggest, necessitates his comeuppance at the play's closing because he so fully signifies the possibilities for resistance within the Elizabethan power structure of service. For the bulk of the play proper, Tranio performs the very act of social climbing that another Shakespearean servant, the much-maligned Malvolio, only imagines in *Twelfth Night*. It is therefore quite fitting that Tranio's name derives from the Latin preposition *trans*, meaning 'across'.⁴ He threatens social order precisely because he crosses social

¹ All references to *The Shrew* are from Dolan 1996.

² *The Taming of a Shrew* was entered into the Stationer's Register and published in 1594, while *The Taming of the Shrew* was first printed in the 1623 First Folio. Critics have long debated the two plays' relationship and order of composition, but most contemporary scholars agree that *The Shrew* is the source for *A Shrew*. For my purposes, the most significant departure *A Shrew* makes from Shakespeare's text is that it retains Christopher Sly's frame narrative. He comments throughout the play proper before ultimately waking from what he believes has been a dream and announcing his intention to use what he has just seen to 'tame' his own wife.

³ Tranio's social transformation is briefly mentioned by Holbrook 1994 and Schalkwyk 2008, while Evett 2005 presents a fuller analysis of Tranio's function in the play. The most comprehensive consideration of Tranio's social performance in the play, however, comes in Bailey 2007.

⁴ Malvolio's Latinate name suggests not only the servant's 'ill will', but also, perhaps, that his desire, from the Latin *volo*, is also *mal*, or bad. *OED*, s.v. 'trans-, prefix' (<<http://www.oed.com/>>, accessed 27 January 2015). Tranio is a common servant's name in Roman comedy. As others have noted, Shakespeare takes the *servus callidus* of Roman comedy as his

boundaries, successfully performing the roles of both servant and master. Elizabethan anxieties about the increasingly blurred boundaries between social strata thus imbue Tranio's performance of social metamorphosis with a transgressive power.⁵

2. Elizabethan Service and Social Class

Servants played a vital role within the social and economic power systems of early modern England. In *The World We Have Lost* (1965), Peter Laslett describes service in terms of its place in the life cycle of English people, as an institution impacting not only large numbers of English youth, but the families they joined as well. Keith Wrightson considers service as a part of a child's maturation, as 'preparation for an independent existence in an adult world' (1982, 113). Stefano Guazzo, whose 1574 *La civil Conversazione*, first translated into English in 1581 as *The Ciuile Conuersation*, highlights the institution's position in the social life cycle, asserting, 'I think it a matter impossible, that he should know how to play the maister wel, who never had maister' (1581, 168).⁶ To be a good master, one must experience life from the other side of the equation. In his foundational study of service in early modern drama, *Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture: Authority and Obedience*, Mark Thornton Burnett notes that twenty-nine percent of all households during the period had servants, and that many young Elizabethans would be servants for some part of their lives. He goes so far as to claim that such servitude was, perhaps, the most distinctive socio-economic aspect of Elizabethan society (1997, 1). This idea that people would act as servants for only a period of time – and that they may well move on to be masters in their own rights – underscores the social mobility of this

inspiration for Tranio. Like his Roman predecessors, Tranio's fidelity to his master Lucentio motivates him to commit acts of impersonation and trickery (Burnett 1997, 80). E.M.W. Tillyard notes how this clever slave figure is vital 'in promoting the action' of the earlier comedies (1965, 92); David Evert suggests Tranio is the playwright's 'fullest straightforward development of the New Comic wily servant' (2005, 65). For a fuller consideration of the clever servant figure in English literature, see Bruce Robbins, *The Servant's Hand: English Fiction from Below* (1986).

⁵ Earlier works on class distinctions in Shakespeare have dealt with the problem of anachronism in dealing with such a loaded term as 'class' in study of early modern texts. In particular, David Scott Kastan's 'Is There a Class in This (Shakespearean) Text?' (1993) acknowledges the potential difficulties of speaking of class in Shakespeare. Ralph Berry is content to use 'class' as a social marker in his foundational work, *Shakespeare and Social Class* (1988), while Peter Holbrook offers the terms 'degree' or 'social stratification' as more appropriate for the era (1994, 7).

⁶ In this and subsequent quotations from early English texts, I have modernized orthography.

distinctive social group. And, more problematically, as Amanda Bailey has suggested, much 'to the distress of their masters', many of those Elizabethans engaged in this sort of service embraced that liminality (2007, 52); they refused to shape their identities by their household positions.

Moreover, a servant occupied a dichotomous social space within Elizabethan society, simultaneously acting both as an employee and as a member of the master's family, or what David Schalkwyk describes as a 'combination of reciprocity and subordination in love' (2008, 7).⁷ The idealized image of servitude therefore casts the servant as what Thomas Moisan calls a 'quasi-mythic ... surrogate family member' whose identity was, in many ways, simply considered an extension of his master's (1991, 280). By performing their required duties with filial reverence, Elizabethan servants could successfully negotiate this social space in which masters were recognized as more than employers. However, this notion of the servant as surrogate family member hinged not only on the expectation of the master's complete authority, but on an idealized portrait of the master as both self-assured and paternal. William Gouge outlines the proper duties of a master in the eighth treatise of his *Of Domesticall Duties: Eight Treatises*, first published in 1622. Masters, he writes, must 'carry themselves worthy of their place, and worthy of that honor which is due to them, which may best be done by making themselves a pattern of such good things as in their place appertain to them' and 'do the things which they do towards their servants with authority' (Gouge 1634, 660). In households where the master fell short of this ideal, however, servants risked being put in the position of forcible submission to an irksome, wayward master. Petruchio's violent response to Grumio's word-play – indeed, Petruchio's treatment of all of his servants – exemplifies how such an imperfect master must rely on force, rather than the servant's loving subordination, to maintain his authority. (1.2.11-17).⁸ These masters' insecurities about their own unstable social positions in an increasingly mercantile culture led them to fear the dangerous mobility of their servants.⁹

Within the master-servant dynamic of Elizabethan England, power relationships became increasingly volatile. Social hierarchy reflected growing tensions between an outmoded feudal system and the rising orders

⁷ Schalkwyk's reading of Shakespearean service and love goes against the reading of the power imbalances within service found in Weil 2005.

⁸ Michel Foucault describes the life of such a servant as 'a constant, total, massive, non-analytical, unlimited relation of domination, established in the form of the individual will of the master' (1979, 137).

⁹ Ralph Berry reminds us that although the Folio's *Dramatis Personae* identifies Baptista Minola as a merchant, his only reference to that role indicates that he is not one (1988, 25). He tells Gremio and Tranio that he must 'play the merchant's part' in their negotiations for Bianca (2.1.318).

of capitalism. In particular, the mobility of lower classes, as represented by servants like Tranio, threatened the social status of the gentry, a class that existed in its own sort of liminal space within Elizabethan society. In *Shakespeare and Social Class*, Ralph Berry identifies ‘gentleman’ as ‘the key term in the stratification of classes’ in early modern England (1988, xii). To be a gentleman meant to be a member of the power-holding social minority, but it also implied ideas about proper birth, conduct, values, and education. More importantly, status as a gentleman involved a tension about self-definition absent from other levels of the social hierarchy. Unlike the nobility, who had class status secured by title, genealogy, and law, the early modern gentleman had ‘to assert himself against the usurper, against the inferior classes, against all manner of challenges’ (Berry 1988, xiii).¹⁰ Elizabethan gentry thus exercised power within both social and legal spheres to promote visual status markers in order to bolster their own potentially unstable social position.

3. *Clothes Make the Man: Sumptuary Legislation and Elizabethan Convention*

Sir Thomas Smith, whose *De Republica Anglorum* describes the ‘four sorts’ of men who comprise England, stresses the importance of visual markers distinguishing between the different classes of men: ‘As for their outward shew, a gentleman (if he wil be so accompted) must go like a gentleman, a yeoman like a yeoman, and a rascall like a rascall’ (1583, 28). We must pay particular attention to Smith’s parenthetical phrase here – ‘if he wil be so accompted’ – because it emphasizes the perception of others. For a gentleman to be ‘accompted’ a gentleman, he must dress the part in order to present a suitable ‘outward shew’. In other words, clothes make the man. Emergent anxieties about destabilization of the socioeconomic order are especially apparent in the relationships between dress and social status. Tudor sumptuary legislation was a legal attempt to maintain visible distinctions of social rank by mandating what fabrics and embellishments a person of a given social order was allowed to wear. Throughout Elizabeth’s reign, increasingly elaborate sumptuary laws emerged in direct response to the increasing social mobility of the middle classes. These Elizabethan statutes built upon earlier proclamations, including Henry VIII’s London proclamation of 1532, amending and revising earlier sumptuary laws according to the social climates of the times.

In an October 1559 proclamation, Queen Elizabeth’s Privy Council urged lords and masters to monitor their servants’ apparel, noting any ‘abuses of apparel’ committed by servants wearing materials, ornaments, or colors

¹⁰ Edmund Spenser’s claim that the purpose of *The Faerie Queene* is ‘to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline’ (1589), taken up as the central image of Stephen Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980), implies an element of artifice in the label, that it is possible to make oneself a gentleman through deliberate actions.

restricted to higher social classes and prohibiting any future abuses.¹¹ As the following excerpt shows, although it was unlawful for servants to wear restricted clothes, early Elizabethan sumptuary legislation made allowances that enabled servants to continue wearing the clothing they already owned, thus providing legal venues for what David Scott Kastan describes as ‘social crossdressing’ (1993, 104):

First as many as have any apparel unlawful for them to wear, and can without their loss leave the same, to leave it forthwith, and to be straightly charged that they procure no new ...

Item, order shall be taken and charge given by the Lords and Masters, that upon this reformation the malicious invention and froward nature of any servants, shall not devise any new fashion or sort of apparel, that should be as sumptuous as the former, though not contrary to the words of the statute, thereby seeking by fraud to avoid the pain of the law, with which perverse condition the wisdom of the Masters must mete, both to chastise such lewd servants, and to comfort such as will live in order and honest and comely manner. (Privy Council 1559)

Thus, in the mid-sixteenth century, servants were able to wear ‘unlawful’ garments only if they owned no suitable clothing that could replace the offending sumptuous articles. Such early proclamations allowed servants to wear restricted garments already in their possession, but they distinctly forbade future transgressions of sumptuary regulations.

As Elizabethan mercantile culture developed, however, the growing wealth of the mercantile middle classes blurred social boundaries of income and apparel, thus creating an increasingly mobile segment of the Elizabethan social order. This social mobility thus necessitated new royal statutes and allowances regarding appropriate apparel for increasingly fluid social classifications. Elizabeth I issued a proclamation ‘dispensing certain persons’ from earlier sumptuary restrictions in 1597. In particular, this statute allowed certain servants to dress more lavishly:

Also it is not meant for anything before expressed but that her majesty’s servants, and the servants of noblemen and gentlemen, may wear such liverycoats or cloaks as their masters shall give or allow unto them, with their badges and cognizances or other ornaments of velvet or silk to be laid or added to their said liverycoats or cloaks. (Hughes and Larkin 1969, 180)

This late-century proclamation suggests a growing need for the upper classes of Elizabethan society to distinguish not only themselves, but also their servants

¹¹ Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass address the complexities of sixteenth-century clothing legislation and practices in *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (2000).

from commoners, as well. As greater numbers of the non-elite classes could afford to keep servants, the apparel servants were legally entitled to wear became yet another way to reinforce an unstable social hierarchy. Within this changing social system, only those servants in elite households were entitled to wear such luxuries as velvet or silk, and they could only do so if authorized by their masters. However, as Bailey notes, wealthy householders continued to dress their liveried servants in lavish materials in order to proclaim their own status (2007, 52). Thus, sumptuary legislation could be – and often was – subverted by masters who sought to display their own social prestige by dressing up their servants.

Just as Elizabeth's sumptuary laws sought to restrict lavish materials and ornaments to members of the elite social classes, social convention dictated the dress traditionally worn by servants. For example, blue clothing was typically associated with servants and lower classes because blue dye, made from indigo, was inexpensive and easy to acquire. Because blue was commonly used for servants' clothing, the term 'blue coat' became a metonym for servant. Shakespeare refers to this traditional, nondescript dress of servants in the fourth act of *The Taming of the Shrew*, in which Grumio demands that Petruchio's other servants 'let their heads be sleekly combed, their blue coats brushed, and their garters of an indifferent knit' (4.1.64-66). Petruchio's servants play by the rules of Elizabethan sumptuary legislation and social convention, wearing both the color and the 'indifferent', or unremarkable, materials of service, even as their master makes a parodic spectacle of sumptuary tradition, as evidenced by his wedding clothes, comprised of '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' (3.2.41-44). Notably, Biondello tells us, Grumio attends to his master 'caparisoned' like Petruchio's horse (3.2.57); although he may butt heads with his master in what Moisan describes as 'comic misprision' (1991, 276), Grumio consistently adheres to the sartorial conventions of servitude and ensures that Petruchio's other servants do so as well. Petruchio's status as a gentleman allows him to get away with such outlandishly tattered wedding attire, even though the other characters condemn his bizarre appearance,¹² for, as he tells Baptista, 'To me she's married, not unto my clothes' (3.2.107). Petruchio's wedding costume not only blurs social classes from above; it also highlights his sartorial choice as a social performance, as Tranio's subsequent response demonstrates: 'He hath some meaning in his mad attire' (3.2.114). Petruchio has chosen these clothes deliberately, even if those who witness his performance cannot interpret his meaning.

¹² Notably, Tranio's first comment upon seeing Petruchio arrive in his wedding ensemble is about his clothes: 'Not so well appareled as I wish you were' (3.2.80).

4. *Playing the Part: Social Crossing, Performance, and Tranio*

Sumptuary laws were grounded in the notion that clothing was a visual marker of the gap between social classes in an age when boundaries between gentility and lower classes were becoming increasingly blurred, and nowhere were these boundaries more blurred than in the commercial theaters. Schalkwyk notes that the ‘revelation that the difference between man and master may be no more than a fashionable cloak and an easily assumable mode of speech and carriage is the work of Shakespeare’s theater as institution’ (2008, 60). Following a 1572 Statute of Retainers, professional players were at least superficially contained within the structure of service, even if, as Kastan posits, their status as servants was ‘more as legal fiction than social fact’ (1993, 108). Michael Neill calls attention to the symbiotic nature of this fiction of service, claiming that players’ ‘liveried presence’ could bolster their patron’s reputation at public events just as ‘the fiction of “service” could be vital whenever they required protection from hostile authorities’ (2000, 19).

The *quid pro quo* relationship between patron and player thus fit uneasily within the larger structure of Elizabethan social status. Although players were technically liveried members of noble or royal households, in the commercial theater, they relied on ‘social crossdressing’ for their livelihoods:

Social cross dressing, legally prohibited on the streets of London, was of course the very essence of the London stage. Actors cross dressed with every performance, and although the early Tudor iterations of the sumptuary laws specifically exempted ‘players in enterludes’ from its edict, none of the Elizabethan proclamations restating them mentions this exemption. (Kastan 1993, 105)

Kastan’s observation highlights anxieties about how theatrical performances destabilized social identities in the late sixteenth century. Bailey furthers this argument, suggesting that *The Shrew* represents domestic labor itself as a ‘theatrical endeavor’ and that the household ‘is a space not unlike the theater’ (2007, 53). In other words, through his portrayal of master-servant relations in *The Shrew*, Shakespeare emphasizes that Elizabethan service is, at its core, a social performance.

Since Elizabethan sumptuary legislation emphasized the importance of clothing as a signifier of the social order, it is fitting that, within *The Shrew*, images of clothing typically call attention to displays of power relationships within Paduan social order. Lucentio’s proposal to Tranio that they switch places acknowledges that without outside markers of status, the two are indistinguishable:

We have not yet been seen in any house,
Nor can we be distinguished by our faces
For man or master. Then it follows thus:
Thou shalt be master, Tranio, in my stead;
Keep house, and port, and servants, as I should. (1.1.193-197)

They cannot be distinguished by their faces; therefore, with a simple change of clothes, they may change identities. ‘Thou shalt *be* master’, Lucentio tells his trusty servant; he is not simply to play the role of master, but to *become* him.¹³ Tranio’s destabilization of Paduan social order thus begins with an exchange of clothes. Shakespeare marks the beginning of Tranio’s performance as Lucentio through his attire: ‘Enter Tranio, *brave*’ (1.2.s.d.; emphasis added). He is finely dressed, and he has taken on the guise of a *brave*, a gallant, showy both in dress and in behavior.¹⁴ Exchanging the customary blue coat of his station for gentlemanly finery is Tranio’s first step toward performing the role of Renaissance gentleman; he can more readily assume Lucentio’s status and behavior once he is dressed – bravely – in his master’s clothes.

5. *The Dangers of Social Appropriation*

Adopting Lucentio’s status along with his clothes, Tranio engages in what Susan Baker labels ‘imitative disguise’, assuming the identity of another using ‘knowledge which is shared in advance by both the disguisers and those they delude’ in his impersonation. Baker contends that such disguises often ‘tend toward the exaggeration of caricature’ (1992, 306); however, for Tranio, exaggeration is vital to his success. Following his first disguised encounter with Hortensio and Gremio, this overstated gentility leads Gremio to exclaim, ‘this gentleman will out-talk us all!’ (1.2.238). Frank Lentricchia has argued that ‘unlike real estate, the language of privilege and authority is not the private property of any person or class. The linguistic symbols of authority ... are appropriable’ (1985, 79). Tranio quite effectively appropriates the language of authority; in fact, the key to his successful impersonation of Lucentio lies in his ability to ‘out-talk’ his rivals.¹⁵

It is Tranio’s way with words, coupled with a tendency toward exaggeration, that win Baptista’s consent for Lucentio’s marriage. As he and Gremio engage in a bidding war for Bianca’s hand, Tranio seeks to win Baptista’s approval, regardless of what he must fabricate as he makes his offer:

¹³ As Brian Blackley points out, this gesture requires an enormous amount of trust on Lucentio’s part because ‘in a literal sense he gives Tranio authority over him and all he owns, allowing Tranio temporarily to rule him’ (2010, 68). Gouge, however, condemns such trust on the part of a master, exhorting his readers that ‘They who in this kind so far debase themselves as to give their servants power over their own body, do make both themselves and their true lawful bedfellow to be despised’ (1634, 661-662).

¹⁴ *OED*, s.v. ‘brave, adj.’ (<<http://www.oed.com/>>, accessed 27 January 2015).

¹⁵ Bailey describes this behavior – Tranio’s need to out-talk his competition – as ‘braving ... a demonstration of verbal bravado that allowed one to simultaneously disguise and convey hostility’ (2007, 61).

Gremio, 'tis known my father hath no less
 Than three great argosies, besides two galliases
 And twelve tight galleys. These I will assure her,
 And twice as much, whate'er thou off'rest next. (2.1.370-373)

In his quest to win his master a bride, Tranio 'bears down Gremio with no pretense of finesse' (Tillyard 1965, 95). Moreover, as Evett points out, the items Tranio offers Baptista underscore the 'increasingly capitalistic nature of service' apparent in his 'bourgeois privileging of chattels over land as the determinant of wealth' (2005, 45). What Lucentio may realistically offer to secure his bride's future is irrelevant to Tranio. Instead, his primary intention is simply to win. In other words, at this point, Tranio is, to borrow Bailey's language, simply 'braving it'.

Blackley suggests that Tranio's 'best acting' comes during this exchange, noting that he 'has stretched the possibilities of his role to its greatest extent and won', even though his boldness and exaggeration have 'no doubt stretched his nerves just as tightly' (2010, 71). Likewise, Bailey claims that Tranio's negotiating strategy 'reveals an uncanny ability to manufacture the illusion of largesse', even if his exaggerations may cast doubt on his credibility (2007, 61-62). I contend, however, that Tranio's performance in this scene reveals the cracks in his lordly façade. He may know the rules of engagement and how to appeal to a gentleman's desire for financial improvement, but as a servant, he lacks the sense of social and economic urgency inherent within these negotiations. In making such grandiose offers to Baptista, Tranio gambles with the economic futures of both Lucentio and Bianca. His primary goal is simply to ensure his master's happiness by facilitating the marriage to Bianca; Tranio shows little concern or awareness for what happens after Baptista discovers his deceptions. Tranio's motivation – a desire to please his master – distinguishes him from the Renaissance gentleman's need for self-definition through social relationships (Berry 1988, xiii). His exaggerated claims thus mock actual gentlemen like Petruchio, who must approach marriage as a means of legitimizing power and increasing wealth. By so overtly appealing to Baptista's greed, Tranio also risks the potential consequences of Baptista or Gremio realizing his deception.

While the economic ramifications of Tranio's offers will have lasting impact on Vincentio's fortunes, from Tranio's perspective, the most pressing concern about his outrageous promises is that the 'supposed Lucentio' now needs to 'get a father' in order to guarantee his victory over Gremio (2.1.400-401). By recruiting another commoner to play Lucentio's father, Tranio willingly steps even further outside the boundaries of social propriety. Although he performs as gentleman under his master's orders, it is Tranio's decision to enlist the Pedant to play the role of 'supposed' Vincentio: 'If he be credulous and trust my tale, / I'll make him glad to seem Vincentio, /

And give assurance to Baptista Minola' (4.2.68-70). In this action, Tranio fully internalizes his role as Lucentio, going so far as to authorize another commoner's performance of social elevation. Whereas Lucentio's order to Tranio falls under the auspices of a master's caprice, Tranio's action is one of subversion, no matter the motivation. He assumes an agency for social transformation that he, a member of the lower classes, should not be able to claim.

Although Tranio's subversive performance as gentleman is at times overstated – though I would not go so far to say, as Bailey suggests, to the point of parody (2007, 62) – while impersonating Lucentio, he consistently dominates Bianca's other suitors. His ability to perform successfully as gentleman underscores the performative nature of class distinctions in Elizabethan society. As Amy Smith puts it, the concept of performativity presents 'a theoretical framework which allows that subjects can work from within the very power structures that bring them into being ... it is the repetition required by all "ritual social dramas" that makes agency and even cultural change possible' (2002, 290). Tranio performs as Lucentio using what he knows of gentlemanly behavior and status, but as he performs, he creates a new version of that social class, as shown in his successful, albeit naïve, exaggerations to Baptista. The dynamic nature of performance thus creates the possibility of change, and each scene in which Tranio acts as supposed Lucentio becomes a possible impetus for a critical reworking of the social order.

The more he internalizes his gentlemanly performance, the more Tranio manipulates the social conventions of Padua. In the opening scene of the play proper, Tranio plays the servant with appropriate reverence and affection, adhering to linguistic customs of social propriety by repeatedly addressing Lucentio as 'master' or 'sir' (1.1.25-41). Likewise, as he gains confidence in his performance as a gentleman, he employs the language conventions of the gentry, appropriating the linguistic symbols of authority. In particular, we see this with Tranio's use of *you* or *thou*. *You*, the stylistically neutral form, is typically used between equals or when addressing social superiors. In contrast, *thou* conveys a sense of familiarity, whether used intimately or out of hostility. As servant, Tranio only uses the neutral *you* in his conversations with other characters. Acting as gentleman, he uses the familiar form in response to Gremio's condescension:

GREMIO. Youngling, thou canst not love so dear as I.

TRANIO. Graybeard, thy love doth freeze. (1.1.330-331)

In using the familiar pronoun, Tranio simply follows the pattern that the gentleman Gremio has set in the previous line. Fittingly, throughout the rest of the play, Tranio directs his contemptuous *thou* only at Gremio. Gremio's

use of *thou* unwittingly invites a like response from the socially inferior Tranio. The grumpy old suitor thus indoctrinates the servant Tranio into the linguistic conventions of the gentry, further legitimizing (and problematizing) Tranio's performance by, ironically, making himself the target of the false Lucentio's derisive *thou*.

Tranio's performative acumen allows him to manoeuvre readily between his social status as servant and his assumed role as gentleman.¹⁶ In *Tranio*, Shakespeare presents a theatrical embodiment of the gentleman's anxiety about members of the inferior classes usurping his social power, about the possibility of these classes extending such performances beyond the confines of the theater and into the streets of England. This tension about the mobility of commoners that the cunning Tranio represents, however, arises precisely because of how the Elizabethan elite established the system of service. Specifically, by positioning servants in the liminal space between employment and family membership, masters forced their servants to straddle different social strata. Tranio can move fluidly between the classes only because his position as servant to Vincentio's family has given this son of a rustic sail-maker the skills – namely, a gentleman's manners and education – to do so.

Although this manner of service affords Tranio opportunities otherwise unavailable to a craftsman's son, it leads to Lucentio's 'intellectual dependence' on his servant (Moisan 1991, 282). The liminal space of Elizabethan servitude contributes to Lucentio's reliance on Tranio as a confidante, one whom he feels is 'as secret and as dear / As Anna to the Queen of Carthage' (1.1.145-146). Lucentio conflates the servant's dual roles within his household, drawing connections between his relationship with Tranio and Dido's relationship with her sister Anna in the *Aeneid*. Of a master's overly intimate relationship with a servant, Gouge writes, 'When masters suffer their servants to be their companions, playing, drinking, reveling with them, and saying, as it is in the proverb, "hail fellows met". Thus servants oft take liberty to presume above their master. For men are naturally prone to ambition, and "if an inch be given, they will take an ell"' (1634, 661). Lucentio's dependence on Tranio – as confidante and conspirator in his scheme of social metamorphosis – thus casts doubts not only on his own fitness as master, but on the purity of Tranio's motives, as well; for, as Judith Weil contends, the play's treatment of service opens up questions about 'whether the loving, grateful professions of subordinates can ever be trusted' (2005, 52).

Lucentio may view Tranio as a brother, but Tranio must remain acutely aware of the role he plays within Lucentio's household; although he has the manners and education of a gentleman, as Vincentio's comments remind us,

¹⁶ As Tillyard remarks, Tranio 'has observed acutely the manners of his betters and has picked up enough ... to carry conviction in polite society' (1965, 92).

he is not one. He is simply a servant, and beyond that, a ‘monstrous villain’ for having stepped beyond acceptable social boundaries (5.1.83). As Bailey argues, ‘The various points at which onlookers accuse Tranio of abusing his master’s generosity, of stealing from him, and even of murdering his master function as commentaries on the hermeneutics of suspicion employed by those who encounter a flamboyantly attired servant who conveys confidence in his appearance’ (2007, 63-64). Even though he acts out of loyalty to Lucentio’s cause, Tranio has taken ‘liberty to presume above [his] master’ (Gouge 1634, 661). Specifically, by calling for Vincentio’s imprisonment after tapping another commoner to perform as ‘supposed’ Vincentio, Tranio has upended the social hierarchy to such an extreme that he can no longer perform his way out of the mess. Moreover, as Evett has claimed, it is as if ‘by continually talking in the master’s vein to other masters (including Lucentio), he had become so fully committed to the exchange that he could not abandon it’ (2005, 66). Tranio grows so comfortable in his role as master that he refuses to abject himself to Lucentio’s father, even if it may save his life.

In *The Politics of Shakespeare*, Derek Cohen contends that the Shakespearean servant’s purpose ‘is to do the dirty work, clean up the mess, of the master’ (1993, 45); however, in the context of Tranio’s social metamorphosis, these roles are reversed. The real Lucentio must come in and clean up the mess of supposed Lucentio, ‘that damnèd villain Tranio, / That faced and braved’ Vincentio (5.1.94-95). Vincentio’s language here recalls the earlier stage direction – ‘Enter Tranio, brave’ – that signals Tranio’s transformation to master. By the play’s final act, Tranio has so internalized his performance that he becomes willing to ‘brave’ his master’s father.¹⁷ It is only Lucentio’s abjection and plea for mercy that earns Tranio his pardon: ‘What Tranio did, myself enforced him to; / Then pardon him, sweet Father, for my sake’ (5.1.103-104). Tranio remains safely offstage while Vincentio rages against his villainy, swearing ‘I’ll slit the villain’s nose ... I will in, to be revenged for this villainy’ (5.1.105, 108-109). Evett finds it odd that ‘this voluble rogue remains silent’ at a moment ‘where common sense seems to demand appeals for mercy’ (2005, 66). I argue, however, that Tranio’s absence from this exchange marks another moment of transformation: this time, a return to his rightful place in the social hierarchy as a liveried part of Lucentio’s household, as one ‘not merely clothed in his master’s identity but absorbed into his social body’ (Neill 2000, 23). Although he is willing to gamble with Lucentio’s economic future, when it comes to his own safety, Tranio leaves it to his master to ‘out-talk’ the angry Vincentio.

Tranio’s appearance in the final scene is thus an exercise in servile humility. He enters with other servants, ‘bringing in a banquet’ (5.2.s.d.);

¹⁷ *OED*, s.v. ‘brave, v.¹’ (<<http://www.oed.com/>>, accessed 27 January 2015).

although he is named with Biondello and Grumio, the stage directions specify that, of these named servants, only Tranio is tasked with serving food. Moreover, his response to Petruchio is that of, to borrow Tranio's own simile, a metaphoric dog with his tail between his legs: 'O, sir, Lucentio slipped me like his greyhound, / Which runs himself and catches for his master' (5.2.53-54). Tranio shows his master (and, by extension, his master's father) deference appropriate for someone of his station. Evett claims that Tranio's behavior in this scene 'not the behavior of someone who has been effectively punished – certainly not of someone who has undergone the terrible humiliation of the slit nose' (2005, 67). While I agree that Tranio's demeanor here shows no evidence that Vincentio has made good with his threat, he speaks and acts as one who has been put in his place.

Even his impudent response to Petruchio's next jibe attends to matters of social hierarchy, revealing not just his own status as servant, but a sense of Petruchio's status:

PETRUCHIO. A good swift simile, but something currish.

TRANIO. 'Tis well, sir, that you hunted for yourself.

'Tis thought your deer does hold you at a bay. (5.2.55-57)

Tranio's taunting reply insults Petruchio on two levels: not only has Petruchio had to hunt for himself, he has done a poor job of it. In other words, it is Petruchio, not Tranio, who has 'shot and missed' (5.2.52). Tranio responds in kind to Petruchio's teasing because Petruchio falls lower in the social hierarchy than Lucentio. Just as Katherina reserves her shrewishness for other women in this final scene, so too does Tranio reserve his gentlemanly wit for that master he deems unworthy of deference.¹⁸ Thus, even though Tranio has been put in his place, so to speak, his final comment in the play still acknowledges a sense of fluidity in matters of social class.

6. *Christopher Sly's Inescapable 'Plebeian-ness'*

Like Tranio's social transformation in the play proper, the comic social climbing (or, more accurately, dragging) of Christopher Sly in the Induction accentuates the performativity of class distinctions in Elizabethan society. In each instance, the characters involved create classed identities through performance. Although both characters are cast in higher social roles than they occupy, neither character assumes this dominant role of his own initiative. As is usually the case with disguises in Shakespearean drama, they do not 'of

¹⁸ Tranio's free speech toward Petruchio is a linguistic parallel to the velvet and silk clothing that servants of the elite were allowed to wear. He is licensed to speak insolently to Petruchio as a show of Lucentio's social superiority to Petruchio.

their own (represented) volition disguise *up* the scale' (Baker 1992, 313). They act above their given social ranks only because their social superiors authorize such performances. Tranio's disguise is for Lucentio's romantic benefit, and he is complicit in his boundary-crossing class performance. In contrast, Sly's social elevation is part of an elaborate practical joke the Lord devises to make the drunken beggar 'forget himself' (Ind.1.37). In this respect, Shakespeare aligns the Lord with the Paduan gentlemen who see Katherina as a creature who must be tamed. The Lord views Sly as a 'monstrous beast' in need of behavioral adjustment (Ind.1.30). Sly's performance as a lord, then, serves as the Lord's mocking attempt to transform, albeit temporarily, the drunken tinker into something less repugnant.

Sly's social elevation in the Induction looks forward both to Tranio's performance of class in the play proper and to the inevitable end of the Lord's joke, when Sly must return to his life as a poor tinker. Sly differs from Tranio, however, in that he never ventures beyond the parameters established by the Lord in his performance. The social order of the English household is never destabilized because of what Holbrook describes as Sly's 'immovable plebeian-ness' (1994, 116). The tinker's language betrays his true status; much as he tries to assume the role of Lord, he lacks the vocabulary to do so. He asks his 'wife', 'Are you my wife, and will not call me husband? / My men should call me "lord"; I am your *goodman*' (Ind. 2.97-98; emphasis added). Evett critiques the Arden editor's gloss of 'goodman' as 'husband', suggesting instead that the *OED*'s broad sense of the term as 'master or head of household' is more fitting (2005, 224). I would put even more pressure on this term, however, by looking at Sir Thomas Smith's distinction between the labels 'goodman' and 'master'. Specifically, he reserves the title 'master' only for those considered gentlemen: even well-to-do yeomen may 'be not called masters, for that (as I saide) pertaineth to gentlemen onely: But to their surnames, men adde *goodman*' (Smith 1583, 30). To follow Smith's figuration, even when he attempts to assume the mantle of lordship, Sly's language, unlike that of the smooth-talking Tranio, never rises to that of a gentleman. Ultimately, Sly poses no threat to the social hierarchy because he never truly straddles two social classes. Unlike Tranio, he cannot comprehend the possibility that social status can be performed, and, as such, he has no power to manipulate class conventions to suit his own purposes.

7. Framing Social Matters: A Conclusion

The Shrew's lack of a closing frame deflects attention from Sly's inevitable return to his role as beggar onto the closing of the play proper, in which Vincentio's arrival in Padua has contained the threat posed by the socially mobile Tranio. As such, Moisan argues, the play is 'orchestrated to suppress, rather than resolve, the dissonances it evokes in the march to its festive close' (1991, 282). Holbrook suggests that the play, 'with its emphasis on clever

deceit, or the strategic trickery of art, preserves the notion of an unchanging social reality only temporarily distorted by these fictions and subterfuges' (1994, 120). Evett contends that Tranio's final appearance in the play signifies another transformation for the clever servant, to that of 'the household's allowed fool' (2005, 67). Ending the play without a return to Sly's drunken performance or an end to the Lord's practical joke does make Tranio's containment within Paduan society more immediate, but it problematizes this containment by drawing *The Shrew's* audience closer to the anxieties stirred by Tranio's social transgression. His final line in the play, that barbed retort to Petruchio – 'Tis well, sir, that you hunted for yourself. / 'Tis thought your deer does hold you at a bay' (5.2.55-56) – suggests that this ostensible return to social order remains somewhat incomplete. Just as he used Gremio's familiar language as an excuse to respond in kind, so Tranio ends the play reminding his audience that he has not lost his sharp tongue.

Whereas Tranio shows the potentially dangerous mobility of savvy Elizabethan servants, notably in his derision toward Gremio and Petruchio and his authorization of the Pedant's impersonation, the 1594 quarto of the anonymous *The Taming of a Shrew* limits the actions of the lower classes, as shown in the portrayal of the servant Valeria.¹⁹ In contrast to *The Shrew's* transgressive class performances, it is Valeria's master, Aurelius, who holds agency for the social elevations of the play. Valeria simply follows his master's orders. As the ninth scene opens, for example, Aurelius tells the man impersonating him 'be sure you say / As I did tell you' (9.2-3). The play-proper of *A Shrew* lacks the transgressive element of social performativity found in *The Shrew*; therefore the inclusion of its epilogue does little more than tidy up the play's structure. Sly simply awakens where he first fell asleep, convinced his social elevation was only a dream illustrating a practical method of wife-taming: 'I know now how to tame a shrew. / I dreamt upon it all this night till now' (15.16-17). The class performances are wholly contained; both Sly and Valeria remain firmly ensconced in the lower tiers of social hierarchy. Considered alongside the complete frame of *A Shrew*, the missing closing frame of *The Shrew* acts as a metatheatrical element that blurs the boundaries between class performativity within the play and its possible existence within contemporary society.

In *The Shrew*, Tranio exists in the subordinate space commoners uneasily occupy within the social hierarchy. As Burnett relates, Elizabethan 'theater made manifest both the servant's dangerous mobility and the concerns

¹⁹ The characters in *A Shrew* do not correspond fully to those in *The Shrew*; however, Valeria is Tranio's closest equivalent in this play. Likewise, Aurelius plays a role most closely aligned with that of Lucentio, while Phylotus corresponds to *The Shrew's* Pedant. For a more thorough consideration of the plays' correspondences, see Barry Gaines and Margaret Maurer, *Three Shrew Plays* (2010).

of the employing class' (1997, 9). His liminal position, as what Bailey describes as a 'braving' Renaissance servant, fuels Elizabethan anxieties about the social mobility of lower classes (2007, 61). Moisan suggests that Shakespeare addresses these anxieties in the play 'only to marginalize them' within the context of extant social hierarchies (1991, 278). Whereas Tranio's comeuppance in the final act takes the wind out of the ambitious servant's sails and suggests that those who willingly seek out social mobility must be quashed, the play itself showcases the relative ease with which such an ambitious, educated servant can operate in higher social strata. Although he has been temporarily put in his place, Tranio's ability to play the master remains unchanged, and that is what makes him such a transgressive character for Shakespeare's Elizabethan audiences.

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