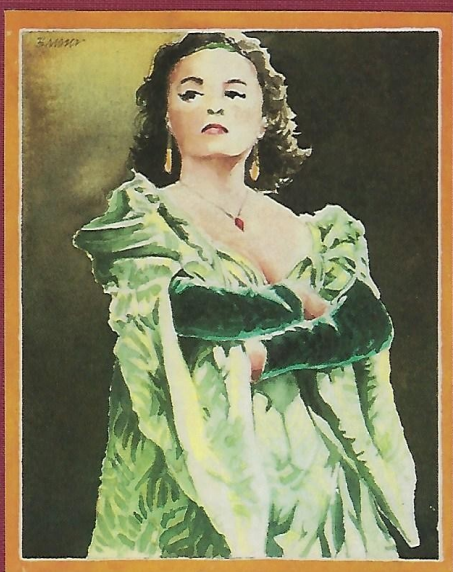


THE GUILD  
*Shakespeare*



THE GUILD  
*Shakespeare*

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW  
THE MERRY WIVES  
OF WINDSOR

BY  
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

EDITED BY  
JOHN F. ANDREWS

Foreword by Ian Richardson

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CONTENTS

Foreword to <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i> by Ian Richardson	vii
Editor's Introduction to <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> and <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>	xiii
<i>THE TAMING OF THE SHREW</i>	1
<i>THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR</i>	237

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## FOREWORD

to

### THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

by Ian Richardson



A favourite author of mine, one E. Nesbit who wrote for children at the beginning of this century, begins one of her books as follows: "Preface. Nobody ever reads prefaces . . ." This I believe to be true, and it encourages me somewhat in the task ahead.

I have been asked to say a word about "The Merry Wives of Windsor" because I played the part of Master Ford in a particularly successful production of the play (directed by Terry Hands) which started its life in Stratford-on-Avon and later went to London and the Far East. I grew to love and appreciate the play more the longer I played in it, and its intrinsic worth was proved by the fact that it was enjoyed by such diverse audiences. The laughter was as loud and sustained in Tokyo as in Warwickshire.

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IAN RICHARDSON has worked extensively with the Royal Shakespeare Company. His numerous Shakespearean credits include the title roles in *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Coriolanus*, and *Pericles*, as well as Cassius in *Julius Caesar*, Prospero in *The Tempest*, Berowne in *Love's Labor's Lost*, and Ford in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

vii

## THE GUILD SHAKESPEARE

The story goes—probably apocryphally—that Queen Elizabeth requested a play about "Falstaff in love," following the huge popular success of the character in the first of the Henry IV plays, and Shakespeare, ever the willing hack, dashed off the piece in record time with the Globe proprietors no doubt breathing heavily down the back of his neck. The result was the only play in the whole canon to be concerned with the English middle classes. No kings, no queens, no exotic locations.

We are in Windsor—prosperous suburbia—with the wives chatting over the fence, borrowing cups of sugar from each other, swapping recipes, and having the Vicar to tea. Being unprovided at this period of history with washing machines, they keep a few not very efficient men-servants to carry out the laundry and do the heavy work about the place. The husbands may be envisaged as the kind of men who today would take the commuter train to the city every morning with their newspapers and briefcases, and worry vaguely if their wives were overdoing the sherry parties. At weekends they dine with each other on good solid English fare—hot venison pasty with pippins and cheese to come.

Of course Windsor, as presented in the play, is not Windsor at all. It is quite unmistakably Stratford-on-Avon, with a few tell-tale references that give it away. Page's greyhound loses a race "at Cotshall"—the famous Cotswold games—and Shallow and Slender, the only "gentry" in the play apart from Falstaff, say that they come from Gloucestershire, which is a good two days' travel from Windsor but only an hour's ride from Stratford. The address is not genuine anyway; as every schoolboy knows, Justice Shallow is based on Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote Park, whose deer Shakespeare is said to have poached in his youth.

viii

## FOREWORD BY IAN RICHARDSON

This small-town community has all the insularity and clan-nishness of small towns everywhere. I have lived in Stratford-on-Avon for protracted periods, and I have met the Pages and Fords. Worse, I have met the Shallows. There is a standard opening gambit when one is introduced—"Are you a Stratfordian?"—and the polite glazed eye of contempt as one answers "No." Outsiders are all very well, and London is a nice place to visit, but who would want to live there?

This small-town feel is important to the play and needs to be established. In the production in which I was involved we had a set suggestive of a small high-street, the wives invariably carried shopping baskets, there were children everywhere, and we all affected a local accent (Berkshire, courtesy of tapes acquired from the BBC).

It is largely because Falstaff despises such provincials that he thinks he can seduce their women with ease, in spite of being old, fat, and bankrupt. They should be flattered by his attentions, he thinks. What! A knight, a habitué of the Court, and one who speaks the King's English to boot! How can they resist? His disreputable followers, Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph, for their part feel that they can rob and fleece these country bumpkins with impunity.

The Fords and the Pages, however, have their own tin-pot little dignity—the wives particularly—and it is as much the insult to that dignity that leads them to their revenge as the straightforward insult to their status as virtuous women. For virtuous they are, but they see no reason why this should make them dreary. They are both vivacious women, and Mistress Ford in particular shines in company. "She gives the Leer of Invitation," as Falstaff

ix

puts it, totally misunderstanding her cheerful friendliness. She has always had trouble with Master Ford, of course. It is made clear that he is constantly jealous, and searching the house for a concealed lover is no new event. "She leads a very framped Life with him, poor Soul," but manages to keep her good humour most of the time, contenting herself with a cool "You use me well, Master Ford, do you?" after he has made yet another deeply embarrassing scene, humiliating both her and himself.

The Jealous Man was a dramatic stereotype of the period, both in comedy and in tragedy, and Ford is a classic example of him. He is jealous as Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* is jealous: for no reason at all but simply because it is his nature. And it is also his tragedy: "'Tis my Fault, Master Page; I suffer for it." And suffer he does, dreadfully, both in the violence of his emotion and in his consciousness of making an utter fool of himself every time he fails to find any proof of his wife's infidelity. The fear of being cuckolded is exacerbated a thousand times by the fear of ridicule—that he will be mocked with "the Word of Fear, so hateful to a Married Ear, Cuckoo!" It is an agony to him, and it leads him into wild excesses, for he is not a man for half measures when the fit is on him. When he says he will search for Falstaff in "impossible places," he means it. I seem to remember that I looked inside a tea-pot at one moment. He is a great comic creation, largely because he is so desperately serious, having himself no sense of humour whatsoever.

The broader comedy of the play is supplied by Falstaff's old gang of disreputable hangers-on, and two new creations: Doctor Caius and Parson Hugh Evans. That *Foreigners are Funny* is a standard maxim in British comedy, as in British life, and Shake-

peare was neither the first nor the last to exploit this national attitude. The irascible Frenchman, jealous of his honour and quick to draw his sword, is another stereotype, and the accent gives the opportunity for introducing a few rude jokes for the groundlings. The comic Welshman is another standard figure of fun, but Parson Hugh is a little better than the stereotype. He has the comic accent and the over-pedantic classicism that we find in that other great Welshman, Fluellen (in *Henry V*). Both these characters are treated sympathetically in spite of their occasional idiocies, and their basic worth shines through. Parson Hugh is obviously a good schoolmaster, if a terrible swordsman, and I wonder if there was just such another teaching at the Grammar School in Stratford when Shakespeare was a boy? The boys would have mocked his mannerisms behind his back, but by Gott! he certainly taught them Latin they would never forget.

This is a good-natured play. The humour is not cruel, and everyone gets forgiven in the end, "Sir John and all." After the frolic at Herne's Oak, the twinkling lights of the children's candles, and a little magic which is not altogether bogus, it is back to good cheer and another of Mistress Page's splendid meals. Ford is cured, Anne is married to the man of her choice, enemies have become friends, and we are left with the cosy glow of the "Country Fire" around which the protagonists will sit to "laugh this Sport o'er."

"If it be true that a good Wine needs no Bush," says Rosalind in another play, "Then it is true that a good Play needs no Epilogue." No, nor no Prologue neither; but "Admit me Chorus to this History," and enjoy.

## Editor's Introduction to

### *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW*

and

### *THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR*



At first glance the two plays in this volume would seem to be an odd couple. One is set in Italy and is written almost entirely in verse. The other is set in England and is written almost entirely in prose. One could be described as a male-centered comedy about the putting down of women. The other could be approached as a female-oriented comedy about the putting down of men. One is a treatment of wooing, wedding, and the establishment of marital harmony. The other is a study of jealousy, fidelity, and the preservation of marital trust.

What we have, in short, are two plays whose unique features become all the more salient by their juxtaposition. But if *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* initially impress us as more different than alike, there is in fact one trait that both links them and sets them apart from every other Shakespearean comedy: they both offer realistic portrayals of the rural England so dear to the playwright's heart.

*The Taming of the Shrew* begins with an "induction" (a dramatic prologue to the main event) in which a drunken beggar named Christopher Sly is taken up by the Lord of a Warwickshire manor, deluded into believing that his years as an itinerant tinker have all been a dream, and installed for an indeterminate period as the Lord of the Manor himself. The playwright's main objective in presenting such an induction is to supply a frame and an onstage audience for the Italianate comedy that follows. But what Shakespeare provides in the process is a vignette of the verdant Midlands he roamed as a boy. We meet loud tavern hostesses and hear about stern constables and humble peddlars. We observe a bluff nobleman as he appraises the prowess of his hunting dogs. We learn about sturdy yeomen in villages with names like Wincot and Burton-Heath. And we get an insider's view of the Elizabethan acting troupes who brought their talents to the great country estates during tours of the provinces.

But if the induction to one of the playwright's earliest comedies permits a sly glance at the rural pleasures Shakespeare enjoyed during his salad days, the Court entertainment he produced a few years later offers a detailed portrait of the sixteenth-century town life he knew so intimately. As Ian Richardson points out in his delightful foreword to this volume, the setting for *The Merry Wives of Windsor* evokes Stratford as well as Windsor. And the society it depicts would seem to belong as much to the world of Shakespeare's own era as it does to the fourteenth-century environment into which the playwright had originally introduced such memorable characters as Falstaff, Bardolph, and Mistress Quickly. Here we are treated to a rich palette of personalities, accents, and idioms. Here we find a broad spectrum of occupa-

tions and daily activities. Here we witness a vivid dramatization of the values and customs that hold a typical English community together. And here, in the play's allusions to the "great affair" that ties Windsor to the Court and thence to the rest of the nation, we discover ourselves in the presence of chivalric traditions that lie at the very root of British civilization.

The dates for both plays are problematical. There are some who now believe that *The Taming of the Shrew* was written in the late 1580s; there are others who doubt that it was on the boards before 1594. And whether it was Shakespeare's first comedy, as some think, or a comedy that came after such works as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Comedy of Errors*, is still a matter of debate.

Similar questions surround the dating of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. It contains an allusion to *Henry IV, Part 1*, a play that is usually placed in 1596, so its earliest possible date would seem to be the latter half of that year. But its relationship to *Henry IV, Part 2* (1597-98) and *Henry V* (1599) is difficult to establish with certainty, and there are a few scholars who would put it as late as 1600 or even 1601. The date that now seems most likely is early 1597.

Both comedies have long been favorites in the theatre, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is notable as the inspiration for what many consider to be the most sophisticated of Giuseppe Verdi's great Shakespearean operas, the *Falstaff* he completed at the age of eighty in 1893. The play that has attracted the more controversy, however, particularly in recent years, is *The Taming of the Shrew*.

The basic idea of shrew-taming derives from an anti-feminist

tradition that goes back to the Middle Ages and is most crudely illustrated in a 1550 ballad, the "Merry Jest of a Shrewd and Curst Wife Lapped in Morel's Skin for her Good Behavior." Here a husband whose termagant wife has sought to dominate him beats her until she collapses from loss of blood; he then wraps her in the salted skin of a dead horse named Morel. Thus punished for her recalcitrance, she finally relents, promises to obey him, and becomes a model of the well-behaved spouse.

Fortunately, the physical violence exhibited by the man in the "Merry Jest" was not the only approach recommended for husbands with surly, unruly wives. There were other writers, among them such Renaissance humanists as Desiderius Erasmus and Juan Luis Vives, who advocated a gentler method whereby a caring husband firmly but lovingly "trained" his wife to accept his authority in much the same way that a falconer taught a hawk to obey his commands or a horseman "broke" a wild colt to accept him as its rider and master.

To a typical modern audience, of course, even the most "humane" of shrew-taming methods will probably seem intolerable, a violation of fundamental human rights. But lest we judge an earlier era too harshly by standards that represent a later stage of social and political evolution, we should bear in mind that in Shakespeare's time the whole of society was conceived and organized hierarchically. Just as subjects were expected to obey kings, and children parents, and servants masters, so wives were enjoined to obey their husbands. *defer to*

The ultimate authority for all these doctrines was the New Testament, and the passage most often cited to define the marriage relationship was the Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians

(5:22-24): "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church. . . . as the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be to their own husbands in every thing." Men were fond of quoting these words to wives who gave them difficulty. What they sometimes overlooked, however, was the next sentence, in which Paul goes on to say "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."

On his first appearance in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Petruchio seems very unlikely to be the sort of man who will "give himself" to his wife in loving kindness. He has come, he says, "to wive it wealthily in Padua," and the only thing that makes the prospective bride interesting to him is the fact that Baptista, her rich father, has offered a large dowry to any man who will take "Katherine the Curst" off his hands. Once he meets Katherine, however, and encounters her fiery spirit, Petruchio is immediately attracted to her as a woman. Here is a fine "Haggard," he notes, and he is determined to make her his prized falcon.

His first step is to "face the matter out" by telling her that he loves her, has arranged with her father to marry her, and is resolved to carry out his intentions with or without her cooperation. Katherine is so accustomed to men she can push around that she doesn't know what to make of one who refuses to be gainsaid. So almost before she realizes what has happened, she finds herself engaged to be "marri'd a' Sunday."

Petruchio now puts into effect a program of rehabilitation whereby he "kills her in her own Humour." Without resorting to the whip or using any of the physical aggression that shrew-

because the earlier Falstaff lived and moved in a dramatic context that allowed him to function to some extent as a licensed jester. Here, on the other hand, he operates in a dramatic setting that requires him to be a comic butt. The Falstaff who exchanged gibes with Prince Hal and satirized both Henry IV and Hotspur was a character who could offer a pointed critique of the excesses to which men resort in the name of lofty ideals. The Falstaff who now makes an ass of himself in his pursuit of Mistress Ford and Mistress Page serves merely to exemplify the bankruptcy of a lust for profit without honor.

In many ways the Falstaff of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* can be seen as an illegitimate intruder who challenges and is eventually defeated by a middle-class village intent on retaining the integrity of its values and institutions. But Windsor also has another "outsider," and one whose quest, though superficially similar to that of Falstaff, is both legitimate and successful. Young Fenton is initially rejected as a suitor for Anne Page's hand because her father regards him as a predatory young lord who has wasted all his fortune in prodigal behavior. Fenton admits that his interest in Anne was initially prompted by her father's wealth and his own impecunious circumstances; but over the course of the play he proves that his love has become true and constant.

In the play's concluding scene, Fenton and his sweetheart contrive to turn the tables against the same schemers who have plotted so flawlessly against Falstaff. What results is a resolution that unites deceived and deceiver alike in a genial recognition that sooner or later everybody plays the fool.

The most reliable texts for the two plays in this volume are the ones that appear in the 1623 First Folio.

A 1594 quarto, *The Taming of a Shrew*, is frequently drawn upon by directors for episodes of the Christopher Sly plot not to be found in the Folio text of *The Taming of the Shrew*. But because the Quarto text is so radically inferior to the good text published in 1623, most scholars assume that it is either an unusually corrupt reconstruction of Shakespeare's play from memory or an adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew* by a different playwright woefully lacking in Shakespeare's dramatic skills.

The 1602 quarto text of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* bears a closer resemblance to its counterpart in the First Folio. But it is only a little more than half the length of the Folio text, and it appears to have been printed from a manuscript compiled from memory by two or more of the actors who had performed in the play. Apart from a few isolated readings, and aside from occasional lines that appear to have been inadvertently omitted from the Folio text, the only feature of the Quarto text that is universally adopted in modern editions is the name "Brooke" (rather than the Folio's "Broome") for Master Ford's alias in his visits to Falstaff.

Several puns on "Ford" and "Brook" make it clear that Brooke was the name that appeared in the earliest version of the play. Just why the name was changed to "Broome" in the Folio is uncertain. The most likely explanation would seem to be that "Brooke" gave offense to the same powerful family (one of whom, William Brooke, Lord Cobham, had served as Lord Chamberlain from July 1596 till March 1597) who had forced Shakespeare to substitute Sir John Falstaff for Sir John Oldcastle, the name he had originally given the roguish knight in *Henry IV, Part 1*. (The historical Oldcastle was an earlier Lord Cobham, and

the Brooke family clearly felt that it was an affront to their honor to have Shakespeare's disreputable character named after their ancestor.)

Another possibility is that "Brooke" was changed to "Broome" for performances of the play that occurred after 1604. By that time one member of the Brooke family (George) had been executed for treason; meanwhile another, his brother (Sir Henry Brooke, Lord Cobham), had been imprisoned and removed from the Order of the Garter. It has been suggested that King James, who now occupied the throne and in whose name Shakespeare's company now performed as the King's Men, would not have wanted to be reminded of the two Brookes who had committed treason against him.

It is also conceivable that there was some connection between the Brooke alias and the name of a cantankerous member of the College of Heralds who objected to the College's decision to grant Shakespeare a coat of arms in 1596. In 1602 Ralph Brooke, the York Herald, circulated to his colleagues a complaint alleging that the College's standards had fallen so low that they were now awarding armorial bearings to men as common as "Shakespeare the Player." If Shakespeare knew of the York Herald's views when he wrote *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, he may well have used the name Brooke not to reflect on the Cobham family at Court but to poke some fun at his adversary in the College of Heralds.

It has long been assumed that the "lucres"/"louses" joke in the first scene of the play is a playful jab at Sir Thomas Lucy, the owner of an estate from which the youthful Shakespeare was

reportedly accused of poaching deer. If so, it would be altogether fitting if the Brooke reference was aimed at yet another of Shakespeare's private targets, this one a man who had impugned the author's right to style himself a gentleman.