In this essay The Taming of the Shrew¹ will be read as a document that may shed light on issues of theatrical apprentice-training in Shakespeare’s day. Juliet Dusinberre² and Michael Shapiro³ have written in general terms about the parallels between boy actors and female characters in this play, Shapiro arguing for the first audiences’ dual consciousness of male actor and female character, and Dusinberre implying that both apprentices and women were seen as prime sites of potential unruliness. The emphasis in this paper is rather different. Taming and training were often seen as synonymous in Shakespeare’s day, and there is an analogous relationship between the taming of Kate – which involves training her to respond in ways that are perceived as ‘feminine’ – and the training of the apprentice actor who plays her. In these terms, what is interesting are the theatrical training-functions in the shrew’s role, and in particular the training-functions of its masculine elements.

Dusinberre claims that the apprentice playing Kate had ‘access not only to [great ladies’] momentary social superiority but also access to the stage power of the female heroine’,⁴ but it is useful to think more laterally about the actor’s relationship to his role. Given the size and dramatic importance of Kate’s role, it was almost certainly given to, if not actually written for, a senior apprentice; and we might predict that a senior apprentice is as likely as a confirmed shrew to resist the performance of a stereotypical ‘feminine’ role at this stage of his training. Thus Kate’s shrewish role seems designed to contrast in training function, as well as dynamically, with the more junior role of Bianca, about which Dusinberre and Shapiro are surprisingly reticent. Margaret Maurer and Barry Gaines⁵ propose a view of Bianca as a ‘silent woman’, whose indirection, ambiguity and capacity for flirtation makes her more dangerous to men than Kate, but on the surface, Bianca’s role conforms to the ‘good girl’ type, and, in theatrical terms, the
role seems clearly subordinate to her elder sister’s. The shrewish resistance to the ‘feminine’ built into the senior apprentice’s role is surely related to his desire for training in the ‘masculine’ modes of behaviour that he will be expected to manage once he graduates to adult male roles.\textsuperscript{6} In these terms the role of Kate may be seen as a prototype of the ‘masculine’ female role that reaches its apogee in Cleopatra, and is a training alternative to conventional male-disguise roles like that of Viola/Cesario. What makes the shrew role so compelling is the way in which it provides a vehicle for the training-issues it problematizes.

In Shakespeare’s day the term ‘shrew’ was still being applied to both genders, as Holly Crocker demonstrates.\textsuperscript{7} While it might be used to describe ‘malignant’ men, and Petruchio might be counted among those who, in Dekker’s phrase, ‘were shrewes to their wiues’,\textsuperscript{8} ‘shrew’ belongs ‘to a comic register’ as far as potential for violence is concerned, as Sandra Clark notes.\textsuperscript{9} Thus when Kate calls Petruchio a ‘rudesby’ (3.2.10),\textsuperscript{10} she assigns him a place at the blusteringly masculine end of the ‘shrew’ continuum. It is significant that in \textit{Twelfth Night} Malvolio associates the performance of shrewishness with the blurring of gender on the way to \textit{male} adulthood. He belittles Cesario by saying ‘He is very well-favoured, and he speaks very shrewishly: one would think his mother’s milk were scarce out of him’ (1.5.161–2).\textsuperscript{11} Unlike the audience, Malvolio does not know that Cesario is a mere appendage to a female part, but he does connect the young man’s ‘speaking shrewishly’ with inheritance from the female. He seems to be implying that shrewishness is passed on by the mother and that being ‘very well-favoured’ enables one to get away with it – notions that bear upon the way in which both siblings, Kate and Bianca, operate in our play.\textsuperscript{12} Malvolio glances more frankly at the apprentice actor in his earlier assessment that Cesario is ‘not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy’ (1.5.158–9).

His emphasis on male youth should be read as a counterbalance to the Duke’s telling Cesario in 1.4, ‘thy small pipe / Is as the maiden’s organ, shrill and sound, / And all is semblative a woman’s part’ (32–4). The Duke’s remark helps with gender blurring but should not be heard too literally, because it is largely about psychological preparation: the Duke will eventually marry this ‘boy’! What Shakespeare emphasizes is Olivia’s constant confusion of Cesario with Sebastian, whom she is in indecent haste to marry. Bruce R. Smith takes this confusion to mean that Sebastian is also Viola’s \textit{aural} twin,\textsuperscript{13} and jumps to the surprising conclusion that both Viola/Cesario and Sebastian are played by apprentices with unbroken voices. This is largely because he makes the