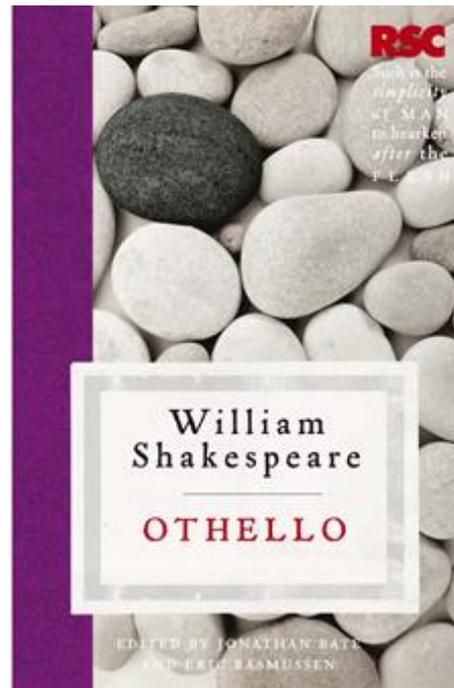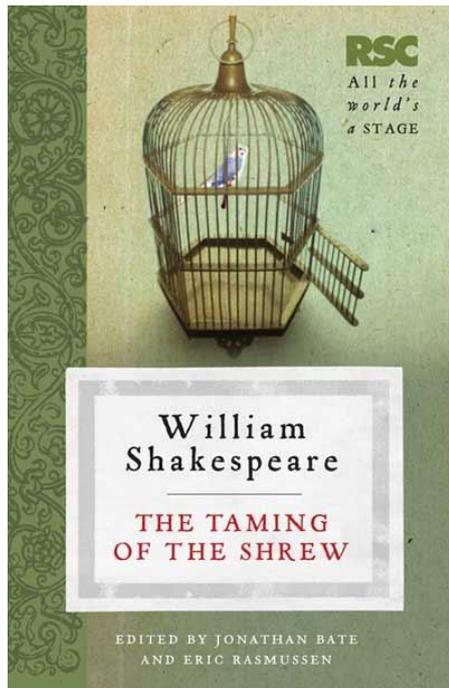# Social Issues in the Classroom:

Teaching *Othello* and *The Taming of the Shrew*

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Contents

Introduction

Recently, heated debates regarding Dutch literature lessons featured in several newspapers. Writers, teachers, and scholars argue about the use of literature lessons, set reading lists, and whether or not the classics should retain their elevated rank. They seem to be divided into two groups; one group believes that the main purpose of literature lessons should be instigating a love for reading in new generations. They think that teachers should not force their students to work their way through dry classics but rather let them read whatever they like. One of the most outspoken writers of this group is Christiaan Weijts. He even went as far to say that the canon should be abolished as it refutes the freedom literature stands for (qtd. in Peppelenbos). Another well-known Dutch writer who agrees with Weijts is Kluun; he believes that students should have some knowledge of the classics, but at the same time they should have complete freedom in what they choose to read (qtd. in Rhee). The other group, however, believes that literature lessons are meant to serve a higher purpose. Aleid Truijens argues in her column that literature lessons can be compared to complicated math lessons; they might not be fun, but you learn important knowledge and skills which can be used throughout your life. She argues that school should motivate students to try new things and help to expand their horizons. Literature lessons can play an important role in the education of future generations.

Literature fulfils an important role in the cultural body; as it is seen as both instructive and entertaining. Literature can be seen as a social tool; "[it] has the power to facilitate personal understanding and encourage social cohesion" (Weber). According to Stanford professor of English Paula Moya, literature is an important factor in shaping the frameworks within which we view the world; it also influences our attitudes towards race, gender and social structures (qtd. in Heinz). Moya asserts that, "the study of literature can have powerful implications for social justice"; literature can function as a bridge between our own lives and

the insights of people whose lives are different from our own. Literature can increase understanding and tolerance by fulfilling this social function.

In 2007 the Dutch government changed the standards of exam requirements for modern foreign languages. This alteration of standards entailed that teachers have more freedom in selecting the literature they want to teach, or require students to read (Meijer and Fasoglio). There is no nationally set curriculum; just three core objectives that have to be met. These can be found in the exam regulations and are defined as follows: the first requirement a VWO student has to meet in order to graduate is to have read at least three books and be able to give a report of their own reading experiences supported by arguments. The second is that the student also has to be able to recognise and distinguish between different types of literary texts, as well as be able to use literary terms in their interpretation of literary texts. The third and last requirement is that the student has to be able to give a general overview of literary history and place the read works in their historical perspective (College voor Examens 24-26). This means that teachers have much freedom in the texts they choose or allow their students to choose.

Keeping this freedom in mind, why, out of all authors in the world, should English teachers choose plays that are 450 years old. Why teach Shakespeare and not someone else? There are multiple reasons. First of all the themes Shakespeare deals with are can be seen as universal. Even after all these years his plays are still relatable to people; students will be able to recognise certain situations and empathise with some of the characters. A second reason is that Shakespeare has contributed to the English vocabulary in a monumental way; his plays have changed English language. His plays are the first known written source for an abundance of words and phrases that are used every day in nearly every conversation (Washbrook). A third reason can simply be that Shakespeare has become an icon in English (and perhaps world) literature. He is often referenced or alluded to in other works, including film,

popculture and even commercials. Shakespeare has become a major part of Anglophone culture in general; by studying Shakespeare, students will be able to visit the source and make more sense of other works.

In this thesis I want to introduce a way of approaching and teaching Shakespeare that focusses on current social issues that also play a role in Shakespeare's plays. Through this method the students will learn to use tools, learned from literary lessons that can help them reflect on social issues throughout their lives. Secondary school students are on the verge of experiencing the world for themselves for the first time. Literature could help them think about the larger issues in life before they are confronted with reality (Blum 4). I want to show the possibilities and advantages of literature lessons that deal with the larger issues instead of just the technicalities that can be found in literature. By dealing with the larger themes of a play and, for example, analysing the motivation of characters for their actions, literature lessons could be elevated beyond the study of literary terms, motifs and iambic pentameter. Although this thesis was written with a Dutch classroom in mind, the issues I have chosen to focus on are broad enough to be applicable for students from various other countries as well.

Teachers have often used literature lessons to inspire their students to think about complicated social issues such as social inequality and racism. Lawrence Blum, for example, writes about his experiences in an American high school; he used literature in class to let his students discuss their own feelings and opinions regarding race and racism in an "open and honest way" (4). He found that his students were "grateful for an opportunity to discuss, explore, and learn about race-related matters" (4). Blum's students where interested in the opinions of their fellow students, and felt secure enough to share their own thoughts on race- and racism-related issues. This is just one example out of a vast body of works in which teachers share their experiences with literature as a starting point for social discussions. Jennifer Trainor, for example, gives a few quotations of students essays which show how they

experienced Maya Angalou's *I Know Why the Cadged Bird Sings* in her paper about how racism is shaped in high school (84). These quotations show that the students have thought about the social aspects of the text and its racial implications (Trainor 85). There are also many websites such as *Teacher Vision*, for example, on which teachers can share their experiences in the classroom, as well as teaching strategies and sources that can be helpful when teaching about social issues. The issues each teacher decides to focus on can be altered to fit the needs of the students.

In my research I will close-read the plays' texts. I will also analyse scholarly texts written about the plays, research the Elizabethan vision on certain subjects, and teaching methods for Shakespeare in general. I intend to analyse the role of each social problem in each play separately, and then I will look for overlap between the two plays. The plays have certain large issues in common, which can be used in literature lessons. Much work has been done on the texts of the plays separately, but they have not often been combined. It is impossible for secondary school English teachers to take all their students to several live renditions of the plays, or view several (full-length) film adaptations; this is why I will focus on the text and possible interpretations of that, rather than the interpretations of the ways in which the plays have been performed.

In this thesis I will explore three main important social issues that occur in the plays *Othello* and *The Taming of the Shrew*[1]; each social issue will be analysed in a separate chapter. In the first chapter, however, I shall briefly explore other innovative methods of approaching Shakespeare that involve the use of modern media or tend to focus on specific aspects of the plays. These methods were developed for the Anglosphere, but some of these methods would also be applicable to Dutch lessons. The second chapter will be about discrimination; this issue goes much deeper than just racism or sexism. I shall therefore first

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[1] From now on referred to as *The Taming*

focus on different types of discrimination and the construction of the 'other'. Both plays feature main characters that are ostracised by the other characters, but discrimination is often not immediately associated with *The Taming*, which is why this subject is so interesting. In this chapter I shall also elaborate further on how language and imagery are used to construct the 'other'. The third chapter is about the issue of gender and sexuality. I will first explore the Elizabethan view on gender and sexuality on stage, and the usage of boy-actors for female characters. I shall then elaborate on how femininity is presented in the plays; both plays reflect on how women are divided into either the category of Madonna or that of whore. I will also give some character analyses in which I incorporate not only that character's view on gender and sexuality, but the views of others of that character as well. In the end of this chapter I will focus on the similarities between the plays, and elaborate on some issues that could be used during literature lessons for students of the second phase of Havo and VWO. The fourth chapter will be about relationships. In both plays romantic relationships, parent-child relationships, and friendships are a main source of conflict. Secondary school students often juggle many different types of relationships and are carefully trying to determine where they stand in the pecking order, which is why this subject could be useful during literature lessons. A number of different types of relationships will be explored and analysed. In the conclusion I will briefly look back at my findings.

<div align="center">The Plays</div>

One of the main things that ties these two plays together is that they both deal with controversial subject matter. At first reading, *The Taming* perhaps appears to be sexist; the majority of male characters in the play see themselves as superior in most ways and belittle the female characters (Traub 133). The female characters are either seen as treasures or as burdens that can be owned and passed over to other male characters (Traub 133). Throughout most of the play several male and female characters fight for the upper hand in their

relationships in a battle of the sexes. The difference between men and women on any social, biological and psychological level is an important feature of the play, but that raises the question whether this is enough to label the play as sexist. *Othello* has been judged in a similar fashion, but for a different crime; by some people it is seen as a racist play (Campbell). In the play racial issues is one of the main causes for rifts between the tragic hero and the several other characters. Dozens of books and articles have been written about the racial issues in *Othello*, and the question whether the play is racist or questions racism: books such as *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* by Ania Loomba, *Racism, Misogyny, and the 'Othello' Myth* by Celia R. Daileader, and *Othello and the "plain face" of Racism* by Martin Orkin. Some people, however, find this play offensive to such an extent that they urge for the play to be banned from school curricula altogether (Campbell). Both plays have been labelled as offensive in their own ways; that is exactly why these plays would make for an interesting comparison in any classroom.

Another reason why I chose these two specific plays, is that they can diversify and nuance the image most secondary school students have of Shakespeare's body of work. *The Taming* is one of the earliest plays by Shakespeare's hand[2] and has a relatively light tone; *Othello* on the other hand is a relatively late play and reflects on more serious subject matter. Both plays were court favourites when they were first played even though they are sometimes seen as controversial by modern audiences (Sanders 12 and Thompson 19). *The Taming* and *Othello* also illustrate a great diversity in genres. *The Taming* is a textbook example of a low-brow comedy; it has several folktale motifs such as Katherine's taming and the strange wedding scene, and sometimes even shows slapstick-like comedy (Charney 31). It would have probably been an accessible and light-hearted play for Shakespeare's contemporary audience. *Othello* is in these respects quite different from *The Taming*; it is written as a high-

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[2] It cannot be dated exactly, but scholarly consensus places *The Taming* amongst the first two plays written by Shakespeare together with *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Thompson 1988).

brow tragedy. The subject matter is generally much heavier, despite some moments of comic relief, such as the clown-scene in act 3. Dramatic irony plays an important role as well, as the audience is painfully aware of Desdemona's innocence when she is murdered by her husband. Shakespeare uses far more delicate strategies in this later play and the audience would have left with a completely different feeling than if they had just seen *The Taming*. These two plays will broaden students' perspectives on Shakespeare's work as they stray from hopelessly romantic stories and show the hardship some people had to face.

Another reason for choosing these two plays is that they both reflect on universally relatable themes, but in radically different ways. Discrimination for example is an important theme in both plays; Othello is discriminated against because of his skin colour and cultural heritage, and Katherine is discriminated against because she cannot conform to the social standards of her peers. Discrimination is an issue nearly everyone will have to deal with at some point in their life (Blum 4). By handing students these plays they could become better prepared for the world outside of school walls. The plays also reflect on other large issues such as love, jealousy, peer pressure and gender roles; for secondary school students these issues are just becoming important, and these two plays could be perfect starting points for in-class discussions which allow students to explore different points of view.

Over the years many new and innovative ways to teach Shakespeare have emerged. In some strategies teachers use adaptations of the plays to put them in a new context. Clips of the same scene in different film adaptations are often used for this purpose. Another teaching method puts emphasis on different perspectives within the plays to increase the sense of empathy the students feel for the characters (Vickers 228). Yet another method tries to turn a play into a mystery in which the students have to try to solve it by finding clues in the text (Heffner 177). These methods can inspire students to become actively involved in the play. When executed well and if teachers do not over-complicate and keep the level of their

students in mind, these methods can also broaden students' horizons by making them look at certain things from a different perspective.

Chapter 1: Different Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare

Educators continuously debate about what teaching methods are best and whether or not new developments in schools will enhance the education of students. One of the current hot issues is centralised around the usage of computers and technology in the classroom, but in the past phenomena such as CLIL, content and language integrated learning, or how much responsibility students should bear for their own educational process, have also been topics for extensive debates. Teaching methods are constantly renewed as teachers do what they think is best for their students, which can lead to unconventional teaching styles. New or unconventional teaching methods for traditional subject matter can help to actively engage the students; when literature is taught in a way that urges the students to interact with the text, students would perhaps be able to broaden their horizons and learn about social issues rather than cramming literary terms which are easily forgotten after the exam. Most of the methods described in this chapter were made for the Anglosphere rather than for students that are learning English as a second or sometimes third language. These methods, however, could also be used in a Dutch classroom, especially in the last stages of secondary education; at that point students are already sufficiently familiar with the English language and the Dutch exam requirements give teachers much freedom to give more literature and culture lessons.

New Methods

An interesting way of approaching Shakespeare could be by creating a link between the plays and the adolescent viewpoint of the students, by teaching Shakespeare in combination with young-adult literature that can be connected to the main themes of the plays. Young-adult literature can serve as a bridge between the students and the issues that come forward in the play (Lierop 50). Shakespeare's plotlines have been adapted to young-adult literature more than once, but there are also books that reflect on similar situations, problems or issues without a direct connection to Shakespeare. Young-adult novels can also

help with the transition from simple youth or children literature to more complicated works as they vary greatly in both difficulty and intensity of subject matter (Lierop 52). Some young-adult books have a clear connection to a certain play such as *Hamlet* and the novel *Ophelia* by Lisa Klein, in which the story of *Hamlet* is told from Ophelia's point of view, but there are also books which have a more indirect connection such as *Romeo and Juliet* and the book *Twilight* by Stephanie Meyer. When teaching *The Taming*, for example, a teacher could use the relatively accessible *The Taming of the Drew* by Stephanie Kate Strohm, which tells the story of *The Taming* in a high school setting with reversed gender-roles. In this book the plot of *The Taming* has been adapted specifically for young adults and could function as a stepping stone towards Shakespeare's play. For a more serious play like *Othello* the book *Noughts and Crosses* by Malorie Blackman could function as a bridge over 400 years of discrimination. The young-adult novel by Blackman is set in an alternate world in which white people are discriminated against rather than people of colour; this book deals with the heavy subject matter of racism in a way that is relatable for secondary school students and could be used as a starting point by teachers in order to teach *Othello*. Young-adult books are often not taken seriously by literary critics, but they can be useful in the classroom, both by themselves and in a combination with other works (Coats 316).

Several non-traditional ways of teaching Shakespeare are presented in the book *Teaching Shakespeare*. Although first published in 1977, a modern-day English teacher could still benefit from reading it. One of the interesting teaching strategies presented in this book is centralised around a certain aspect of theatre, without taking away much attention of the aspects of the play that are usually reflected on when teaching the plays, such as: the plot, language, literary motives etc. Brian Vickers emphasises that it is easily forgotten by students that Shakespeare's plays were written to be performed rather than read (229). In his teaching method he emphasises the importance of perspective in a play, and how the difference in

perspective between the audience and the characters leads to dramatic irony. Vickers uses the play *Coriolanus* as an example and he explores the different perspectives the characters have throughout the play, and shows that the characters do not have all the information the audience has. By showing students how each character only has access to a piece of the puzzle, they will become aware of the dramatic irony the audience feels in being able to see the entire puzzle. In this method the teacher zooms in on one specific aspect of theatre and in doing so teaches students to see the larger picture. It can also teach students to have empathy for some of the characters on stage or in a text. This method could also be used for other plays such as *Othello*; most of the characters in this play are manipulated by Iago. By studying the reasoning of characters for believing Iago, and what his ulterior motives are for each manipulation, in relation to what the audience sees, the importance of perspective can become apparent. The same can be done for Bianca's suitors in *The Taming*; they disguise themselves and use fake fathers and while the audience is aware of this, the characters are mostly unaware of the deception that surrounds them.

Another perhaps slightly more elaborate way to teach Shakespeare from *Teaching Shakespeare* turns the plays around and lets the students be active in their pursuit of answers to questions raised by the play. Ray Heffner turns the play into a sort of murder mystery game for his students; he uses the play *Much Ado About Nothing* as an example. Each character is seen as a suspect for certain issues that occur in the play, or conflicts that have evolved throughout it. Presenting a play like this can inspire students to become actively involved in the play, and it can also possibly broaden their horizons by having to look at certain things from a different perspective (Heffner 179). This method could, for example, be used to turn *Othello* into a court case where the students will have to defend or prosecute the main characters. If someone has to think, for example, about why Iago did the things he did and look for ways to defend him, it can lead to interesting new insights, but it could also lead to an

interesting debate about whether or not Othello is truly guilty for killing Desdemona. By asking questions and playing the devil's advocate a teacher can motivate students to become more open-minded and see the play in a different light (Eddleston 12).

New Technology

Some schools embrace the use of computers and technology as a way to individualise the learning curve for students. Students finish modules on the computer and their teacher can monitor their progress and step in when more attention is required. In these sort of schools contact hours with the teacher are reserved for more complex issues and the answering of any questions (Schuijt). An article in the *New York Times* describes the remarkable Waldorf School in Silicon Valley, one of the technological hotspots of the world. Rather than embracing technology, there are no computers or other screens allowed in this school. This is interesting as most students at this school are the children of employees of major companies such as Google, Yahoo and Apple that continuously develop new technology (Richtel). The Waldorf School is a perfect example of how divided a region can be when it comes to the issue of computerising education. With the introduction in the Netherlands of so called "Steve Jobs Schools", where practically all lessons are taught through an iPad, this issue has become even more important for Dutch teachers (Schipper). Aside from educators and scholars that take a stand either for or against technology in the classroom the majority believes that technology could be a great tool to support their lessons if it is used in moderation. The usage of technology in the classroom has opened up many possibilities for teachers in general, and perhaps especially when teaching Shakespeare.

By using modern technology teachers have the freedom to use adaptations of the plays in order to put them in a new context. Film adaptations are often used for this purpose; the students can compare the adaptation to the play or look for the filmmakers' interpretation of the play (Carlson 420). It is not necessary for educational purposes to show entire films; by

using clips of how one specific scene or character is portrayed in several adaptations, the teacher can provide the students with enough material to compare different interpretations without many time consuming film viewings. *Othello* and *The Taming* have often been adapted to the big screen and could each be used for this method. When the students view different adaptations of Katherine's last speech, for example, they will be able to see different interpretations of how Katherine words were meant according to the filmmakers. The ending of *The Taming* has been interpreted in various ways. In the 1967 adaptation, for example; Katherine, played by Elizabeth Taylor, appears to have become obedient at the end of the film, but after her speech she quickly disappears and leaves Petruchio no choice but to come running after her. This perhaps shows that according to director Franco Zeffirelli Katherine is willing to be obedient, but on her own terms and conditions.

Another advantage of Shakespearian plays for a method that involves adaptations is that practically all of the plays have inspired other playwrights and authors to give their answer to Shakespeare's play. Adaptations range from *The Woman's Prize*, a sequel to *The Taming* written by John Fletcher, and first published in 1647, to *Manga Shakespeare: Othello*, a contemporary graphic adaptation of *Othello* written by Richard Appignanesi, and first published in 2009. Shakespeare's plays have, throughout time, been interpreted in a great variety of ways, and it could be enlightening for students to realise this through adaptations of the texts. Usage of modern technology also creates opportunities for larger projects for the students; video-projects of scenes or plot-overviews of the plays can become interesting film-projects, in which the students have to take into account in how many different ways the plays can possibly be interpreted. Another project involving modern media could be to have students transform a play to a social media feed; the students will have to empathise with the characters as well as adapt the plot of a play to a different medium. This exercise could also strengthen the relationship between the issues of the play and the view point of the students; if

the story of Petruchio and Katherine in *The Taming* was told via social media, it would probably resemble an episode of a bad reality television show.

Conclusion

It is important for teachers to keep an open mind about new or different teaching methods; they can help elevate the subject matter and can also help to actively involve the students in what they are studying. The methods described in this chapter could also work in classrooms outside the Anglosphere, if the students have gained enough control over the English language already, and thanks to the internet, games, social and other media most students learn the language fairly quickly. There are also clear resemblances in interests between students within western society in general; an indication for this could be the popularity of certain English books and films. The *Harry Potter* franchise, for example, is also popular in the Netherlands; this could indicate that there is an affinity between the interests of students from the Anglosphere and those outside it. Perhaps these methods will have to be simplified or altered to fit the need of a specific class, but they could very well be implemented in the Dutch classroom for literary education in general. During Dutch, or other, language lessons literature could be mixed with young-adult literature. Certain aspects of theatre, such as the difference in perspective amongst characters, can be useful for all manners of literature education. These techniques are not restricted to Shakespeare or the English language and can broadly be applied in classrooms.

Chapter 2: Discrimination Amongst Characters

Throughout the years, discrimination has been a source of inspiration for various texts, films and other forms of expression. In the Netherlands, discrimination on whatever ground is illegal. The government even started a national campaign of short televised adds in which influential Dutch people pick up a paint brush and paint a line over the word discrimination on a big white screen[3]. The campaign is supposed to make people aware of discrimination, and inspire them to put a stop to it altogether. Discrimination is not a singular term; it is the collective name for many various issues that come down to the unequal treatment of a person, because of the group or category they belong to, rather than their personal merit. Discrimination occurs in both *Othello* and *The Taming*, but the types of discrimination that are dealt with are different. The forms of discrimination that are sometimes linked to these plays are racism and sexism, but Othello is treated differently for factors other than just his skin colour, and Katherine is treated differently for reasons other than just being a woman. The types of discrimination in the plays range from racism and sexism to ageism and cultural discrimination. Most people will have to deal with discrimination at one time or another and by studying these plays students will be able to learn about different types of discrimination and how they affects people's lives and society as a whole.

Although not much has been written about the implications of racism in Dutch schools, there is a vast amount of work written about racism in American high schools. Recent data derived from a yearly survey from the U.S. Department of Education shows that racism and discrimination influence the schooling system more than was initially expected (Klein). The survey shows that students who are either not white, whose first language is not English, or who are disabled, are far more likely to face harsh disciplinary measures than their Caucasian classmates (Klein). The survey also showed that schools in which the majority of

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[3] "Plasterk lanceert nieuwe campagne tegen discriminatie". Rijksoverheid. N.p. 2 Sept. 2015. Sec. Nieuws. Web. 23 June 2016.

the student population it either black or Latino, rather than Caucasian, are more likely have a "sworn law enforcement officer" and less likely to have experienced teachers (Klein). There are also plenty of examples of how students discriminate each other. At a recent sporting event, for example, students from a private Catholic high school in Indiana yelled racial slurs as a way to insult and intimidate a rival team from a majority-Latino school (Hanson). In the American schooling system discrimination can be seen on multiple levels, it seems to be a systematically flawed (Klein). Discrimination and racism is an important issue in American high schools and should also be taken seriously in Dutch secondary schools.

Attempting to teach literature that deals with racism can be complicated as it is a topic that could make many people uncomfortable. Journalist Zak Rice writes about these difficulties by using the censorship of the word 'nigger' in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as an example: "instead of meeting the issue head on and using *Huck Finn* as an opportunity to have nuanced discussions about racism's role in shaping and maintaining America, we're left with an implicit denial of the issue's existence." There are also examples in which teachers do use literature as an opportunity to get their students to think about difficult social issues such as racism. Joy Moss, for example, has written numerous texts about how literary discussion can broaden students' horizons. She uses literature as a catalyst for social action by introducing her students to texts that reflect on social issues such as racism.

The basis of discrimination is often found in the 'otherness' of an individual; there is some reason the 'other' does not fit into the established social hierarchy (E. Berry 124). The definition of the 'other' can be done on various grounds like: skin colour, sexuality, cultural heritage or religious beliefs (Loomba 8). It is important to realise that discrimination does not only take place because of external factors but also for other reasons; if a person breaks certain unspoken rules of the established group it can lead to their ostracism from the group

(E. Berry 125). Katherine, for example, is seen as 'other' for many reasons at the start of the play, this has to do with her aggressive behaviour, but also with how she vocalises her desires and how she refuses to comply with the male characters in the play.

Children have to deal with discrimination from an early age. Most people have, at one point or another, been excluded from the games other children play for whatever reason. Exclusion is sometimes the starting point for more serious forms of bullying. Bullies usually start because of the perceived 'otherness' of the victim. Later in life discrimination can occur everywhere: from the workplace to a grocery store. This is why it is important to let students reflect on this difficult issue, in the relative safety of the classroom (Blum 4). It will urge them to think about discrimination (Blum 4). By analysing the discrimination directed towards a character in a play, they will be able to see both the points of view of the discriminator and the victim. Literature lessons can provide students with tools that will help them cope in the outside world. They will be able to reflect on situations and draw parallels between the plays and experiences from their own lives.

A London Elizabethan audience had a different view of 'otherness' than contemporary readers. People from a different part of England could already be seen as foreign, and most of their images of foreign people came from exaggerated stereotypes of the stage rather than books or real-life interactions (Loomba 8). Shakespeare sometimes uses 'others' in his plays to provide tension and to help develop the plot, but when teaching the plays it is important to keep in mind that our present interpretation of who is 'other' in the plays does not necessarily reflect the views of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Another important factor to keep in mind while teaching these plays is that Shakespeare's plays were written to be performed and seen, rather than read. There is a certain physical and emotional distance between an audience and actors on a stage that is not present between a text and a reader. When Iago gives his soliloquies about his hatred for Othello, for example, the words probably carry more weight if

expressed aloud on stage than if they were read in the comfort of home. It is also important to keep in mind, whilst reading the plays, that the meaning of words and expressions has changed over the past centuries and that the words used in the plays do not necessarily mean the same things now as they did 450 years ago (Loomba 2). Ania Loomba gives the example of the word 'race': "whereas today the word 'race' carries overwhelming connotations to skin colour, in early modern Europe the bitterest conflicts between European Christians and others had to do with religion. [Words] such as 'race' did not necessarily carry the meanings they now do" (Loomba 2). Definitions change, and the Elizabethan context to these types of words can influence the view students have of the play.

Othello and *The Taming* both deal with different types of discrimination, which is why I shall first explore the issue of discrimination in each play separately. In *The Taming* Katherine is the victim of social exclusion and discrimination based on gender. The difference between men and women can be seen as important in this play, whereas in *Othello*, some of the more prominent forms of discrimination are racism as well as sexism. The plays both reflect on various forms of discrimination but they do so in different ways. At the end of this chapter I shall review some of the similarities and differences between the plays.

<div align="center">

The Taming

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The Taming deals with many social issues that were important in Elizabethan society, but it especially focuses on the effect of social roles on personal happiness (Kingsbury 64). In the play practically all characters are born into their social role; they are also expected to behave a certain way because of the role they have in society. During the course of *The Taming* some characters temporarily change their assigned social role: in the Induction Sly the tinker becomes a lord, and in act 1 Tranio becomes his master Lucentio. These changes in social roles, however, are temporary and at the end of the play most people have returned to their original role (Charney 38). The play shows how important social roles were in the early

modern period, and how a person had to live up to the part they had in society (Charney 38).

Katherine is seen as 'other' because she refuses to behave in the way that is expected of her

because of the social role she is born into. It is not until Petruchio marries her that she starts to

understand the benefits of behaving, or at least appearing to behave, the way society expects

her to.

During the first act of the play it becomes obvious that Katherine has built quite a

reputation for herself. Some of the male characters, such as Bianca's suitors and Katherine's

father, talk about her in a disapproving way, and she uses her sharp tongue to protect herself.

The male characters treat her and her sister differently; it seems that Katherine can do no good

and Bianca can do no wrong. The difference between the sisters is emphasised by the way

others describe each girl. Bianca is seen as good, a treasure or a jewel; the embodiment of

femininity most men would look for in a spouse, her sister Katherine is her polar opposite.

When Hortensio describes Katherine to Petruchio he says:

> I can, Petruchio, help thee to a wife
>
> With wealth enough, and young and beauteous,
>
> Brought up as best becomes a gentlewoman. (1.2.86-8)

Hortensio describes Katherine to be rich, young, and beautiful, and she also had a good

upbringing. In these respects she appears to have several positive traits in common with her

sister. It could be that Hortensio says these things to lure Petruchio into the marriage, but he

follows his praise by harsh critique on Katherine's shrewish and unfavourable behaviour.

Shortly after the introduction of the girls, Katherine proves to live up to her shrewish

reputation; she is verbally abusive to her sister and several male characters, and in later scenes

she ties her sister up and assaults Hortensio with a lute. Katherine is singled out in the play

and discriminated against, because she behaves herself badly and disturbs the established

social order by breaking the unwritten rules of Padua society. It remains unclear how her

behaviour first started exactly, it could have been instigated by numerous factors, but it does become clear that she is miserable in her current position. Katherine does explain why she behaves the way she does:

> What, will you not suffer me? Nay, now I see
>
> She is your treasure, she must have a husband,
>
> I must dance barefoot on her wedding day
>
> And, for your love to her, lead apes in hell.
>
> Talk not to me. I will go sit and weep
>
> Till I can find occasion of revenge. (2.1.34-9)

Katherine is jealous of the attention her sister receives from their father and afraid is that she will become an old maid. Katherine is also intelligent and wants to be independent. These two traits make it nearly impossible to play the role she has in society as an obedient daughter (Schleiner 81). Her independence can be seen, for example, when she leaves Bianca's suitors during the first act:

> Why, and I trust I may go too, may I not?
>
> What, shall I be appointed hours as though, belike,
>
> I knew not what to take and what to leave? Ha! (1.1.104-6)

Whereas her sister was sent inside by Baptista, Katherine makes the decision to go inside herself and almost seems to revel in her independence.

One of the ways Katherine's otherness is asserted is through humorous situations and absurdities that are meant to make the audience laugh. Laughter directed at others is a complicated human reaction to a certain situation in which a person is singled out because they are perceived as different by the social majority. Edward Berry asserts that there are several reasons for laughter at others: it could be a form of self-assertion and a way of expressing superiority, but it could also be a form of social correction (124). The goal of

laughing at people and mocking them for their failure to fit into society, could be to create self-doubt and eventual change in the person the laughter is directed at (E. Berry 125). This is eventually what happens to Katherine in *The Taming*; she decides to change her ways and (at least on the surface) appears to have become the wife society want her to be.

Language also plays an important role in the establishment of Katherine's otherness; some prominent male characters around her call her names and compare her to her sister to mock and chide her. However, it is not solely the male characters who know her that judge her; Tranio has only seen Katherine for a few moments and yet already claims Katherine to be "[…] stark mad or wonderful froward" (1.1.70). This shows that Gremio and Hortensio (Bianca's suitors) are not the only ones who take offense at Katherine's behaviour; it is the entire society. When Hortensio describes Katherine to Petruchio he sums up her faults:

Her only fault, and that is faults enough,

Is that she is intolerable curst,

And shrewd, and froward, so beyond all measure

That, were my state far worser than it is,

I would not wed her for a mine of gold. (1.2.89-93)

Her behaviour is flawed to such an extent that Hortensio could not even consider her to be his wife even if he found himself to be in a desperate situation. Katherine's refusal to comply with the expectations placed upon her make her an outcast from the rest of Padua society. The people of that society are not hesitant to point out her flaws. When the male characters talk about Katherine's faults they sometimes appeal to a higher power such as god or the devil to describe them; which perhaps implies that her shrewishness has an inhuman reason behind it (Marcus 223). Hortensio and Gremio both ask the lord to deliver them from Katherine (1.1.57-8), and only a few lines later Gremio tells Katherine to "[...] go to the Devil's dam!" (1.1.107). Hortensio also accuses her of having a "devilish spirit"(2.1.158). She is also likened

to fierce natural phenomena; for example, she is called a "wildcat"(1.2.98) and Tranio later summarises her behaviour as follows: "[she] began to scold and raise up such a storm/ That mortal ears might hardly endure the din" (1.1.174-5). The characters often talk about Katherine and her faults but rarely listen to her when she explains her motivations for acting the way she does; when she, for example, explains to her father that she tied up her sister because she is jealous of her and afraid to remain a spinster for the rest of her life (2.1.34-9) he simply says, "Was ever gentleman thus grieved as I?" (2.1.40). She is either mocked, compared to her sister, or ignored, but hardly ever treated as if her opinions or feelings matter.

Throughout the play Katherine is discriminated against and treated as a lesser human being because she does not conform to the expectations placed upon her by society and the shrewish way in which she behaves herself. Petruchio also breaks several social rules, however, he is not ostracised in the way Katherine is (Traub 132). When he arrives in Padua he is already at a disadvantage because he grew up in Verona; he has a different cultural heritage from those around him. He also agrees to marry someone for her wealth without even seeing her, despite several warnings about her flaws. Bianca's suitors, at least, all claim to be madly in love with her for her virtues rather than her fortune, but Petruchio makes it clear that he has come to "wive it wealthily in Padua" (1.2.76). He breaks the convention but is not scolded for it in the way Katherine would be. He treats his servants in a horrible way, has a bad temper, and wears a ridiculous outfit to his wedding, and yet he is not ostracised from society; he is welcomed in it. Perhaps this is because, unlike Katherine, Petruchio has the means and social position to be independent. Petruchio also presents an opportunity to solve the problem of Katherine's shrewish behaviour which is could be another reason why he is welcomed in Padua. It could also be that perhaps Petruchio is accepted because of conventions regarding the folktale origin of the story (Charney 32). The difference in

treatment between Katherine and Petruchio can perhaps also be seen to stem from discrimination based on gender, in the following chapter I shall explore this issue further.

Othello

Racial issues in Elizabethan England were different from the racial issues modern society deals with. Ania Loomba argues that there was a complicated concord of ideas about 'otherness' and race that started in the Middle Ages and eventually evolved into the early modern vision (4). Classical and medieval notions regarding skin colour, religion and community became mixed; these ideas usually originated from the crusaders and other early cross-religious interactions (Loomba 5). These set ideas were then constantly redefined and channelled through newer notions of 'otherness' that were introduced by new encounters with 'others'. The early modern image of Africa is a combination of the medieval notions of blackness and darkness, combined with the newer promise of wealth that was created by colonisation (Loomba 6). There was much prejudice, mostly because there was hardly any personal contact between the general early modern English public and people of colour. Some ambassadors of colour would have come to visit the court in London, but they hardly represent the entire coloured community (Sanders 41). The majority of people would never come closer to a coloured person than the actors in blackface they saw on stage.

Nobody would probably deny that racism plays an important role in *Othello*; the story is about a black man who is rejected by a white society. Even the Venetians who do not hate Othello for his skin colour keep reminding him that he is a noble and skilled man, despite his dark skin. According to Loomba, the people of the early modern period believed that being exposed to a warm climate had influence on certain external and internal features (9). A warm climate was thought to be the cause of a bad temper, lustful feelings, jealousy and black skin (Loomba 9). These things were therefore closely associated with one another. Othello, however, is also misunderstood and discriminated against for reasons other than his skin

colour. One of the reasons is perhaps that he has a different cultural heritage and cultural beliefs from the other characters; this becomes especially apparent in the significance the handkerchief has for him (Loomba 8). Another important reason for Othello's ostracism is that he has gained different life experiences compared to those around him; his awe-inspiring tales about his time in Africa, as both a member of the nobility and as a slave, are what make Desdemona fall in love with him. His perception of the world is probably different because of these experiences, and the lack of a shared history with the Venetians is one of the reasons why he does not completely fit into Venetian society (Sanders 53). The third reason why Othello is perceived as 'other' is that he does not follow the social conventions of Venetian society. He elopes with Desdemona without courting her properly, or asking Brabantio for her hand in marriage, out of fear that Brabantio will not allow him to marry Desdemona. Othello is also several years older than she is, and takes her with him on a military mission, which was not the custom at the time (Hodgdon 186). Actions like these single him out for the rest of the Venetians, and are probably some of the causes for the discrimination he faces throughout the play.

During his monologues, Iago gives several reasons for his hatred of Othello; it starts with a grudge over a missed promotion, but at the end of the play he has given so many reasons that all of them seem to have become insignificant (Sanders 54). Iago appears to have a deep rooted hatred for Othello, but it seems that perhaps even he does not know where this hatred comes from. Othello's eventual downfall occurs because he falls for Iago's manipulations; he eventually starts to believe in his own inferiority. At the beginning of the play, Othello sees himself as a capable general, but in the end his self-image seems to have morphed to little more than that of an animal:

[…] Set you down this:

And say, besides, that in Aleppo once

> Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk
>
> Beat by a Venetian and traduced the state
>
> I took by th'throat the circumcisèd dog
>
> And smote him thus.
>
> *He stabs himself* (5.2.347-52)

In his last words, the man Othello was at the beginning of the play kills the "circumcisèd dog" he became in the end. By comparing himself to a Turk, it becomes clear that he sees himself as racially and religiously other. In the end he sees himself as too different from the society he tries to protect and thinks that the only way to protect it is by killing himself and the 'otherness' he sees in himself. When Othello kills himself he both speaks about it and preforms it on stage; he cannot live with what he has done and his self-esteem is shattered. Iago's manipulations probably had the opportunity to grow because of the insecurities that were already slumbering in Othello's mind.

Language, wordplay, and imagery, play an important role in *Othello*; it is used as a tool to distance him from the other characters, but it also gives the audience clues about other characters. Iago's name is an important example of this. Eric Griffin notes that Iago probably represents Santiago Matamoros, Saint James the Moor killer (179). Iago's name is an indication for the audience that he will lead to Othello's downfall. The imagery used by Iago and other characters, establishes the 'otherness' of Othello; he is given many mocking or offensive names by both others and himself throughout the play. These names can be divided into three main categories: names connected to animals, to monsters and devils, and names connected to racial characteristics. Iago often refers to Othello as some sort of animal; he calls him a "Barbary horse" (1.1.125) an "old black ram" (1.1.95) and says that Othello and Desdemona are making "the beast with two backs" (1.1.117-8). These names attempt to enhance Othello's animalistic qualities and deemphasize the noble intentions he has. Iago also

puts emphasis on Othello's age by calling him an "old black ram". This shows that, although his precise age is not given in the text, Othello's age difference to Desdemona is significant enough to be used as an insult. At the end of the play Othello also refers to himself as an animal; he calls himself a "circumcisèd dog" (5.2.352) in his last speech. He also remarks that "[a] horned man's a monster and a beast" (4.1.59) earlier in the play; he is referring to the metaphorical cuckold horns he would wear if Desdemona were to commit adultery. That Othello refers to himself as an animal, shows that by the end of the play he no longer sees the person he has become as human, and the noble man he used to be steps in to protect society from the animal he has become. Some of the decisions Othello makes seem to be made based on animal instinct, such as murdering Desdemona, but other decisions show that he has not completely left behind his former noble character, such as committing suicide.

The second category of offensive names is that of monsters and devils. Othello is referred to as a devil by Iago (2.1.147) and also several times by Emilia, but only after he has killed Desdemona; Emilia calls him a "blacker devil" (5.2.161) compared to the angel her mistress was. Iago also warns Othello for the "Green-eyed monster" (3.3.170); perhaps this implies that perhaps the monster is already a part of Othello and slumbers within him. These references to devils and monsters could be seen to indicate how grotesque Othello's emotions are becoming during the course of the play.

The third and last category of names is connected to Othello's racial physical characteristics. Othello is often referred to as " the Moor", but there are some instances in which racial features and his skin colour are used as insults. Iago, for example, at one point refers to Othello as "his Moorshi[p]" (1.1.33); this name is a pun on the term of respect "His worship". It mocks Othello's high status by emphasising Othello's skin colour. Roderigo at one point refers to Othello as "Thick-lips" (1.1.72); by doing so he mocks one of the

stereotypes of coloured people. Othello himself also makes the following statement about how his blackness affects Desdemona;

> Her name, that was as fresh
>
> As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black
>
> As mine own face. (3.3.41-3)

It is almost as if he feels his blackness is contagious and has tainted Desdemona. His word choice is interesting; he does not simply say black or coloured but adds the word "begrimed". The idea that his blackness could stain and blemish Desdemona perhaps implies that he believes having a black skin colour is the same as being dirty. This indicates that he is starting to believe in his own inferiority. Words are powerful in this play and show not only what the insiders think of the 'other', but perhaps also what Othello thinks about himself and how his self-image changes.

Conclusion

An important point to stress when teaching *Othello* is how Othello has internalised the sense of difference. Othello's self-image is altered by his role as outsider in Venetian society and presumably his overhearing of racist remarks during the course of his life. Othello's inner voice leads to a sense of inferiority that makes him vulnerable to Iago's manipulations. *Othello* shows how racism can impact society in general and not necessarily just the person discriminated against. This same point can also be made about *The Taming*; Katherine is not made to be an outsider by a select few, but rather by society in general. When she is tamed, and ready to fulfil the role she was meant to have in society, everyone benefits. It could be interesting for students to compare the different outcomes of the plays and why one type of 'otherness' can be altered enough to become, or at least appear to be, acceptable, whereas another type can only be stopped through suicide. It is also important to note the difference between the voices of those discriminated against; Othello often explicitly tells how he feels

and how he sees himself whereas Katherine does not often get the chance to voice her own feelings and opinions. Discrimination has a different role in each play; in *Othello* it is the main source of drama, but in *The Taming* it leads to many situations that were seen as funny by Shakespeare's contemporary audience. It could be an interesting in-class discussion about whether or not different types of discrimination, directed towards people, were equal in Shakespeare's time, and if they are equal now.

Chapter 3: Sexuality and Gender in *Othello* and *The Taming of the Shrew*

Views on sexuality, sex, and gender have changed over the last few years; western society is slowly moving away from the gender binary and opening up to a more flexible and versatile system. Since 2014, for example, American users of the social medium Facebook have the possibility to choose their gender out of a list with over 50 gender options aside from the traditional male and female options; for Facebook users in the UK the list has even been expanded to contain 70 options (Williams). Elizabethan views on sexuality and gender identities were different from contemporary ones, but they were not as straightforward as might be expected.

In the discussion of sexuality, sex and gender in Shakespeare's plays it is important to clearly define these three terms, especially when teaching the plays (Traub 130). The terms can get confusing to students because they are usually closely intertwined; a person's sex usually has a large factor in that person's perceived gender. The term sex usually refers to the distinguishable biological features a person has such as genitalia and hair growth. The term gender refers to the social aspects that are connected to the sex of a person. Being a man, for example, encompasses more features than just the possession of a set of male genitals; it also has to do with a person's clothing, role in society, behaviour, and other non-biological factors. The term sexuality refers to a person's erotic desires and activities. These terms mean different things but often have to be used together when discussing the topic of gender or sexuality.

Boy Actors

Will Fisher argues that Elizabethans subdivided people into one of three main categories: male, female and boy, rather than use a gender binary system (156). According to Fischer's study, Elizabethan scholars saw women as fully developed from the moment they left infancy, but boys and men belonged to two different genders (156). Boys grew into

manhood, which distinguished itself from the former category through both physical and psychological features. This shows that the biological and social aspects of a person's gender were closely intertwined. In this system there were also hybrid genders, which did not fit into any one category, such as: women with beards or hermaphrodites. These hybrids where often ridiculed and rejected by society; they were seen as monsters or freaks of nature (Fischer 159). On the Elizabethan stage female parts were played by, and written for, boy actors; women were not allowed to perform in public theatres. This opened up many opportunities for actors to explore the boundaries of sex and gender identities even further; boy actors played female characters that would sometimes cross-dress and pretend to be men which created complicated positions in between the genders (Hodgdon 181). Boy-actors not only had to fulfil the most obvious signs of a female gender, that of voice and costume, they also had to act like a woman. Barbara Hodgdon asserts that this way of acting shows that to the Elizabethan audience femininity was "susceptible to mimesis; [meaning the] repeating behaviours which re-enact or re-experience a socially established set of meanings" (182). It also opened up the possibility for the boy-actors to be seen as objects of sexual desire for the men in the audience (Fisher 162).

In the Induction of *The Taming* the issues surrounding boy-actors and femininity arise in an interesting way. The lord who tries to trick Sly into believing he is a lord himself, decides that to make the joke more credible Sly needs a wife. He orders his page Bartholomew to dress up as a woman and gives another servant detailed directions that must be passed on to Bartholomew on how to act like a lady:

> With soft low tongue and lowly courtesy,
>
> And say "What is 't your Honor will command,
>
> Wherein your lady and your humble wife
>
> May show her duty and make known her love?"

> And then with kind embracements, tempting kisses,
>
> And with declining head into his bosom,
>
> Bid him shed tears, as being overjoyed
>
> To see her noble lord restored to health,
>
> […]
>
> And if the boy have not a woman's gift
>
> To rain a shower of commanded tears,
>
> An onion will do well for such a shift. (Ind.1.119-31)

When Bartholomew next appears on stage, dressed as a woman, none of the other characters seem to think that the act of cross-dressing is amusing; they mock Sly for immediately falling in love with Bartholomew but not the page himself (Marcus 231). The act of cross-dressing on stage is not seen as humorous, but feeling sexual attraction to a cross-dressed boy is. This example shows that cross-dressing, by men, under certain circumstances, like on stage or to play a joke on someone, was probably considered to be acceptable by Elizabethan society.

<div align="center">The Perfect Woman</div>

In both *Othello* and *The Taming* female characters are put into certain categories of women by the male characters and they are severely judged on how they behave. In *The Taming* Bianca and Katherine are counterparts that show two extremes of the female spectrum. At the beginning of the play Bianca is the embodiment of an unattainable female ideal that most of the eligible male characters would want to marry, and Katherine appears to be her dark counterpart. This tension sparks the developments of the characters throughout the play, and in the end the sisters have traded places, which makes Bianca appear to be a disagreeable wife rather than Katherine. In *Othello* the three female characters represent three different types of women: Desdemona represents the Madonna, the perfect woman, Bianca represents the whore, and Emilia represents the grey area in between the other two categories.

Each of the female characters is dependent on male characters in one way or another; Desdemona and Emilia both have to rely on their husbands and Bianca depends on Cassio for her livelihood. It would seem that out of the three, Bianca appears to have the least desirable fate, but at the end of the play both Desdemona and Emilia have been murdered by their husbands and Bianca is still alive to enjoy her relative freedom. Desdemona is in the best position out of the three female characters at the beginning of the play; she has recently married, and her husband appears to adore her. As the play progresses, however, Othello's adoration turns into loathing when Iago manipulates him into thinking Desdemona has been unfaithful. Desdemona is the ideal of passive femininity and her sweet nature and love for Othello is too absolute for her to able to defend herself against Othello's accusations, which eventually leads to her death (Greene 48-9). The female characters who seem to be at the worst situation in the beginning of each play both enjoy the most preferable situation at the end of the plays. The plays both reflect on how women are perceived by men and society in general, but they also show that being the embodiment of female perfection does not guarantee a happy ending.

Throughout *The Taming* there seems to be a correlation between a female character's desirability for male characters and how obediently they behave themselves (Kingsbury 71). This connection works two ways; if a wife was considered to be obedient, she was also most likely faithful to her husband, but if she were disobedient to her husband's wishes she was more likely to commit adultery (Gowing 2). To the male characters, of both plays, an obedient wife meant a faithful wife which would reflect on their own social status. The importance of obedience is also related to the idea of women as men's property. After his wedding Petruchio says he will "be master of what is mine own" (3.2.235), but he is not able to master Katherine until she is obedient. Obedience is what sets Bianca and Katherine apart both at the beginning and end of the play; in the end it is Katherine who appears most obedient and she is therefore

seen as the better wife. In *Othello* this correlation is also present: Desdemona's disobedience to her father when she marries Othello is the foundation on which Iago builds his accusations of her infidelity. In this play, however, the emphasis lies much more on fidelity specifically rather than on obedience in general. The epitome of femininity had to be both faithful and obedient.

<div align="center">The Imperfect Woman</div>

In Elizabethan England the term 'whore' had a different meaning than it does now. Laura Gowing argues that "[t]he central term of defamation, 'whore', does not necessarily carry the financial implications of prostitution: it can be both vaguer and more specific than this. As the basic insult required to fight a case of sexual defamation, it provides a preamble to further strings of insults, or is incorporated as part of a detailed description" (3-4). The term was seen as applicable to a broad variety of disagreeable women, and did not necessarily mean that they sold their bodies for money or other goods. The term was closely related to the sexual desires of women; when a woman was known to do so little as acknowledge a sexual appetite, she could be considered a whore. There is a vast record of Elizabethan ecclesiastical court cases in which women are accused of behaving themselves in a morally corrupt way; these trials would often be instigated by some accusation towards the person on trial (Gowing 2). The term 'whore' plays an important role in both plays; in *Othello* the word becomes powerful because it is used often and in *The Taming* the word can be seen as important because it is hardly used.

In *The Taming* the term 'whore' is only used in the compound 'whoreson' and it is only uttered by Petruchio towards his servants, when they aggravate him. Katherine is never directly called a whore although Gremio does propose to "cart her" (1.1.55). This refers to a punishment for both whores and shrewish women; the women would be tied behind a cart and were made to walk behind it, thus shaming them throughout the town (Kingsbury 71-2). In

Othello, however, the word plays a much more prominent role. The term 'whore' is uttered thirteen times on stage: once to refer to Emilia, once to refer to Bianca and eleven times the word is used to either directly or indirectly refer to Desdemona. It seems surprising that the woman who is most virtuous throughout the play is also most often referred to as a whore, whereas Bianca, who is the only one to have a relationship out of wedlock and is most likely to be called a whore, is only called a whore once. The term is mostly uttered by male characters; when female characters use it, they usually refer to or repeat what one of the male characters had said, and it carries much weight. The female characters thoroughly discuss Othello's accusations of whoredom towards Desdemona; they can hardly believe that he would use such a harsh term to insult her. The use of the term also tells us much about how the male characters see the female characters; Iago refers to all the prominent female characters as whores at one point or another, even his own wife Emilia. He thinks little of women and expresses this by defaming them and reducing them to simplistic beings that are driven by their sexual desires; he does not appear to value women in any other way. Othello uses the term against Desdemona when he accuses her of adultery, and thus behaving herself in a morally corrupt way. His use of the term 'whore' shows that Desdemona is no longer an image of perfection for him as she was at the beginning of the play.

<div align="center">Neither Good nor Bad</div>

In both *Othello* and *The Taming* most female characters tend to represent extremities of the female spectrum. This type of thinking leaves no grey area; women are, in theory, either Madonnas or whores (Fassinger 493). Shakespeare, however, breaks through this strict theoretical divide with the character of Emilia. She is the grey zone between extremities, faithful and obedient to her husband but also willing to commit adultery if it were to help Iago. She betrays Desdemona by stealing the handkerchief, but redeems herself by standing up for Desdemona's virtue and exposing her husband's wickedness. Emilia is neither

Madonna nor whore, and through her existence Shakespeare shows that women should not be given such simplistic labels as Madonna and whore.

In Othello's perception of Desdemona she starts out as a Madonna, but as soon as Iago insinuates that she has been unfaithful she can no longer be a Madonna and she becomes a whore in Othello's eyes. By deceiving her father, by eloping with Othello, Desdemona has proven that she is not the perfect woman; this is partially why Othello is so easily deceived by Iago (P. Berry 89). Desdemona has set a precedent for possible future behaviour and since she is not a Madonna the only other category of women left is that of whore (P. Berry 88). Othello's self-image is closely intertwined with his image of Desdemona; he saw himself as a knight in shining armour worthy of a perfect princess, but after Desdemona does not live up to his standards his confidence collapses (Greene 58). Desdemona's imperfection mirrors the imperfection Othello sees in himself.

In *The Taming* the Minola sisters are characterised in a similar way; at the start of the play Bianca embodies the Madonna, the perfect girl whom almost everybody would want to marry, and Katherine represents the unacceptable woman whom none of the male characters would consider to be marriage material. Katherine does not represent the whore directly as she is not known to be generous with sexual favours. The audience witnesses Katherine's taming process first-hand and knows that at the end of the play she is no longer the same girl as she was at the start of the play. Bianca's transition, however, is far more subtle; she stands up to her tutors and expresses the desire to be independent (3.1.16-23), she also plots to elope with Lucentio and in doing so she proves not to be the perfect daughter as she defies her father's wishes. Bianca does not scream or resort to violence as her sister does, but she does give clear indications that she is not the sweet innocent girl most characters think her to be. When the male characters test their wives' obedience they expect Lucentio to win. It is not Bianca, however, but Katherine who wins the wager; when Lucentio sends for Bianca she

replies that she is busy and cannot come (5.1.87). When Lucentio chides his wife for her disloyalty, as it has cost him a hundred crowns, Bianca even goes so far to call him a fool for betting on her loyalty (5.1.138-41). Bianca is cross with her husband, whereas Katherine appears to be the perfect example of an obedient wife. They have traded roles; Bianca is no longer the Madonna she is now the cross one of the sisters. This swapping of roles shows that the way the sisters acted before they were married is no guarantee for what they will be like as wives. Perhaps this is one of the lessons of the play; how people have behaved themselves in the past is no guarantee for their future behaviour.

<div align="center">Sexuality on Stage</div>

The plays also deal with sex in a more direct way; although there is no explicit sex on stage some scenes do contain sexual content either through language, subject matter or stage setting. Shakespeare uses puns and references to sex in both plays. In *The Taming* this becomes most obvious in the dialogue between Petruchio and Katherine; especially their first conversation is filled with bawdy puns and wordplay. In *Othello* the subject matter is more often of a sexual nature; there is, for example, the scene in which Iago tries to harden his claim that Desdemona has an affair with Cassio by telling a story of how Cassio hugged Iago in his sleep, thinking he was hugging Desdemona. Iago often uses graphic language in the scenes he evokes. When he, for example, wakes Brabantio with the news of his daughters elopement he uses phrases such as: "making the beast with two backs" (1.1.130-1) and "an old black ram [i]s tupping your white ewe" (1.1.97-8). The imagery he uses is sometimes even seen as pornographic and can perhaps even be seen as a key to Iago's own pornographic mind (Macpherson 79)

When Katherine and Petruchio first meet, their conversation is loaded with sexual puns, innuendos and allusions. Katherine tries to scare Petruchio off, but he is determined to marry her and her fortune, and tame her into the epitome of obedience. Before Petruchio

meets Katherine he shares his plan to tame her with the audience: he will continuously pay her compliments that contradict her behaviour (2.1.169-82). Throughout their repartee Katherine tries to make Petruchio lose his temper and eventually even strikes him to provoke him. Petruchio uses allusions to transform Katherine's insults into sexual puns and turn them back to her. At one point, for example, she says to him: "Asses are made to bear, and so are you" (2.1.210), to which he replies: "Women are made to bear, and so are you" (2.1.211). Katherine says that Petruchio will have to bear a heavy load due to his resemblance to an ass, but he quickly gives the verb "to bear" a double meaning by insinuating that she will bear children, thus sexualising the comment.

During this first meeting Petruchio sets the tone for Katherine's taming process. According to Alexander Leggatt sex plays an important role in this process. He proposes that "[s]ex is a comic threat to characters like Petruchio, who are playing for control" (Legatt 139). Petruchio deprives Katherine of food and sleep but perhaps also of sex; though this is not explicitly mentioned in the text it is hinted at: one of Petruchio's servants tells Grumio that Petruchio is giving Katherine a "sermon of continency" (4.1.183), which makes it unlikely that they consummated the marriage. Leggatt proposes that Petruchio does this because he sees sex as a "leveller of power" (141). Perhaps Petruchio sees sex as having a dangerous potential for equality or even an area in which Katherine could master him, especially at the beginning of the play. Sexual attraction is an important factor to *The Taming*; without it Katherine and Petruchio would probably be the most miserable couple in Italy. It is the sexual tension that allows for the relationship to exist.

Iago often uses descriptive language to manipulate Othello into envisioning the things he is saying. When Iago first tries to convince Othello of Desdemona's adultery, he attempts to discredit Cassio by telling a story about a night when Iago and Cassio shared a bed:

> […] I lay with Cassio lately,
>
> And being troubled with a raging tooth
>
> I could not sleep. There are a kind of men
>
> So loose of soul that in their sleeps will mutter
>
> Their affairs. One of this kind is Cassio.
>
> In sleep I heard him say "Sweet Desdemona,
>
> Let us be wary, let us hide our loves."
>
> And then, sir, would he gripe and wring my hand,
>
> Cry "O sweet creature!" then kiss me hard,
>
> As if he plucked up kisses by the roots
>
> That grew upon my lips; then laid his leg
>
> O'er my thigh, and sighed, and kissed, and then
>
> Cried "Cursèd fate that gave thee to the Moor!" (3.3.470-82)

What Iago says has probably not happened, as Cassio is not in love with Desdemona. Iago, however, uses many details to convince Othello that he is speaking the truth like, for example, mentioning his tooth ache and giving a full account of what Cassio said. Iago goes on to fantasise a mental image of two men who share an intimate moment; Cassio is dreaming of Desdemona and does not intentionally hold Iago, but Iago is awake during the fantasy. It is interesting that in his fantasy Iago does not try to wake Cassio up or stop him from making his advances in another way. The story Iago tells Othello, says more about himself than about Cassio.

Conclusion

The plays share certain similarities in the way they portray gender and sexuality. When it comes to sexual appetite, for example, in both plays the female characters are held to different standards than the male characters. This can lead to interesting class-discussions

about whether or not this double standard is still alive in current western society. It would also be interesting to discuss how female characters are portrayed as either all good or all bad beings. Prejudice of this kind can still be found in pop culture; Latina's, for example, are either portrayed as virtuous or as sensuous (Fassinger and Arseneau 499). It would be interesting to let students discuss why Shakespeare added a character like Emilia when most of the male characters in Othello seem to believe in the Madonna-whore divide. Another interesting topic for discussion could be the matter of obedience within a relationship; the question whether two people in a relationship should be equal to each other, or whether wives should be obedient to their husbands, or the other way around could encourage students to reflect on issues they might take for granted. The plays also open up possibilities to talk about other issues, such as double standards for men and women, prostitution, the difference in gender roles, etc. and this could be the fuel for numerous secondary school assignments and debates.

Chapter 4: Relationships Between Characters

Maintaining relationships is an important aspect to human life; most people have to balance family, friends, peers, and others with whom they interact regularly. For the majority of secondary school students, these relationships play an important role in their adolescent lives; as the students will attempt to discern their place in the social hierarchy. It becomes important for students to fit in with the others, to be accepted by their friends and to make their parents proud. In *Othello* and *The Taming*, a process similar to that of most contemporary adolescents is reflected by the characters of Othello and Katherine, who also appear to struggle to fit into society. In both *Othello* and *The Taming* human interactions and relationships can be seen as the main sources for plot-development; there is no sudden disaster or meddling higher power that helps develop the plot. This why analysing the different relationships in the plays can greatly benefit the students in their understanding of the plays and it can also provide a fresh perspective for their own lives. Rather than analysing all the different types of human interactions in the plays, ranging from professional relationships between servants and employers to the tricking of Sly by an unfamiliar lord, this chapter will reflect on only three different categories of relationships that can be found in both plays: romantic relationships, familial relationships and friendships.

Marriage

In modern western society people base romantic relationships on similar interests and mutual attraction. Most people are free to choose whom they want to be with and whom they want to marry. Marriage is also often a personal choice; couples can choose not to get married for personal reasons and other couples are perhaps not able to get married because the law does not support their union, such as homosexual couples in certain countries and regions for example, but most adults are free to love whomever they want. In early modern England circumstances were different; people did not necessarily base their relationship on mutual

affection: "the factors wealth, position and influence could take precedence over liking, love, or lust, especially amongst the privileged" (Cook 5). In her book *Making a Match: Courtship in Shakespeare and his Society*, Ann Cook analyses the stages of an early modern English courtship from the first introduction up to marriage. She argues that people with a lower social status had more freedom in choosing their partner than people from a higher social class, but at the same time females from a higher social class enjoyed more social and financial security, as they would probably marry at a younger age, than women from a lower class (5). Cook also argues that marital status had an significant influence on the social status of both men and women: "[b]efore wedding, individuals were lesser citizens; afterward, they were incorporated into society at a more responsible level; and in the very act of making a marital choice, they could prove themselves worthy of admiration or contempt" (7). Especially in the higher classes, both unwed men and women remained dependent on the patriarchal power of their father or another head of the family, but when they were married the woman became dependent of her husband rather than her father, and the man would often be able to run his own household as well as be able to enjoy more freedom than before his marriage. In both *Othello* and *The Taming*, courtship and marriage are important themes. It is an important decision for a teacher whether or not to give students some context about early modern conventions regarding matrimony. With context certain aspects become less shocking such as Baptista's ease in betrothing his daughter Katherine to a man he just met, but without context the students will probably have stronger opinions about the play that could help to create interesting developments in in-class discussions.

<div align="center">Marriages in The Taming</div>

Throughout *The Taming* characters provide the audience with plain reasons as to why they want to marry or court someone; though some of these reasons are perhaps expressed more plainly than others. Probably one of the most important reasons provided for marriage in

the play is that of financial stability or an increase of wealth; Petruchio plainly states he came to "wive it wealthily" (1.2.76) in Padua, and after Hortensio realises he has no more chance to marry Bianca he decides to marry a wealthy widow that has been in love with him for some time. The play also shows that the financial implications of marriage do not just affect the married couple; it also affects the people around them: their family, servants and friends. The play can be seen to show marriage to be an economic and social institution rather than a way to celebrate love. A second reason for marriage presented in *The Taming* is that of gaining more personal freedom, or escaping from the demands of a controlling parent. For both Bianca and Katherine their marriages take them away from the influence of their father. Bianca does not wait for Baptista's approval of Lucentio but decides to elope with him, perhaps because she hopes to enjoy more freedom with her husband than she did when she was dependent on her father. The third and perhaps most interesting reason for marriage is love, or rather, strong infatuation; Lucentio instantly falls in love with Bianca when he sees her and eventually marries her. From a contemporary point of view his motives for marriage are perhaps the purest, but at the end of the play his marriage is probably the least successful.

The most important marriage of the play is that of Katherine and Petruchio. The title of the play actually refers to their union; Petruchio tames Katherine's shrewishness. The start of the taming process can be seen as an important reason why their marriage works out at the end of the play; Petruchio helps Katherine to get out of her social situation in which she is either mocked or ignored. Gail Kern Paster argues that during the taming process Petruchio tries to transform Katherine to a better version of herself; he does so by balancing out her humours (69). Early modern medical science still believed in the Medieval idea of bodily fluids having an impact on the personality and welfare of a person; a surplus of a certain fluid could cause an inappropriate demeanour or even disease (Paster 25). According to Paster, Petruchio's taming process is born out of scientific motivations; he thinks she has a surplus of

yellow bile which explains her choleric, aggressive, impulsive attitude (69). By imposing dietary restrictions on Katherine and depriving her of sleep Petruchio turns her into a better version of herself; she is then able to fulfil her role in society. The marriage also benefits Petruchio both financially and socially as he gains a double dowry and an obedient wife, which adds to his status. At the end of the play, Petruchio and Katherine have become a team; they understand the rules of the social game and they are willing to play it together (Charney 36). This is probably why they are able to win the wager and why their relationship works even though it seemed unlikely at first.

Bianca and Lucentio's relationship is the counterpart to Katherine and Petruchio's relationship; whereas the first appears to be filled with potential at the beginning and ends in failure the second seems destined to fail but turns out to be successful in the end. Bianca appears to be a perfect future wife, obedient, demure and chaste, but when Lucentio marries her she turns out to be far from perfect. Katherine, on the other hand, scolds and fights her way down the aisle and is turned into a good obedient wife at the end of the play. Bianca does, however, give her suitors and the audience some clues towards her true nature; she, for example scolds her tutors for fighting over her:

> Why, gentlemen, you do me double wrong
>
> To strive for that which resteth in my choice.
>
> I am no breeching scholar in the schools.
>
> I'll not be tied to hours nor 'pointed times
>
> But learn my lessons as I please myself. (3.1.16-20)

In her scolding she shows that she intends to be her own master rather than be subjected to the will of her tutors. Had Katherine given the same speech under similar circumstances it is probably unlikely that the male characters would have bent to her will the way they do to Bianca's. Lucentio remains oblivious to Bianca's true nature and objectifies her as a treasure,

jewel or prize for him to possess. Although their relationship should work in theory it fails in reality. Shakespeare challenges social convention and shows that a man who marries a shrew knows what he will get, but a man who marries the seemingly perfect girl could be disappointed to find out that she was only deceiving him. This play can also be seen to show that women are not one-dimensional beings: they are not either all good or all bad, but capable of personal growth and manipulation to get what they want. This reading opposes the generally misogynist reading of the play; the play can be seen to showcase the complexity of women rather than glorify supposed male superiority.

At the end of the play there is a third relationship which can be seen as interesting, even though it is addressed only: the marriage between Hortensio and his widow. Hortensio marries her for her fortune after Bianca turns out to be in love with Lucentio. He clearly states that his main motivation for their matrimony is the widow's fortune. The widow is not given a name, she is simply referred to as "widow":

> HORTENSIO *My widow* says, thus she conceives her tale.
>
> PETRUCHIO Very well mended. Kiss him for that, *good widow* (5.1.25-6 emphasis added)

It is noteworthy that even though she has re-married, she is still referred to as a widow. Her lack of a name is perhaps interesting as the other characters who do not have a name are called by their profession: merchant, tailor and haberdasher. This indicates that being a widow was perhaps seen as a profession by Elizabethan society. Widows had the most personal freedom amongst women; they were allowed to own property, act in trade and run businesses (Pennington 659). Out of the three female characters the widow is also the least obedient; this could be because she has already experienced freedom and independence. There was also a certain prejudice against widows that remarry. This issue is portrayed in *Hamlet*, for example; Hamlet is mortified that his mother has decided to remarry even before it becomes clear that

her new husband had killed his father. The convention in Elizabethan society was generally that widows never ought to remarry as that would demonstrate disrespect towards her husband's legacy as well as cuckold him belatedly (Kehler 400). The marriage between Hortensio and his widow does not have a large role in the play, but it could be interesting material when teaching the play nonetheless.

<center>Marriages in Othello</center>

In *Othello* the idea of 'cuckoldry' has a prominent role; especially Othello is afraid that his wife has made him a cuckold. In early modern times, if a wife committed adultery it would damage her husband's reputation much more than it would her own (Foyster 103). The wife is perhaps considered to have loose morals, but the husband could be seen as sexually inadequate and unable to control his wife. Men would not want to be seen as a cuckold as the accusations would imply impotence or at least the inability to satisfy their wives; it would damage their manhood (Foyster 104). Society would often consider the husband to be the cause of his own cuckoldry, and there are many ballads in which the cuckold receives advice to improve his sexual performance in order to satisfy his wife (Foyster 111). After men were cuckolded they would wear metaphorical horns which represent their status. Othello also refers to this image: "A hornèd man's a monster and a beast" (4.1.77). Cuckoldry and infidelity are important issues in the play because the infidelity of a woman has implications for the reputation and self-image of her husband.

Unlike in *The Taming*, the motives for the marriages between characters remain fairly vague in *Othello*. The reason behind Iago and Emilia's marriage, for example, is something that can only be guessed at. Othello and Desdemona, however, say on multiple occasions that they eloped and married out of love. Compared to some of the social and economic motives for marriage given in *The Taming*, Othello and Desdemona's motives seem almost naïve, as Desdemona marries beneath her social status and Othello knows beforehand that Brabantio

will be displeased with their marriage. At the beginning of the play both Othello and Desdemona are optimistic about their marriage; Desdemona even follows her husband to Cyprus where he is stationed to fight against the Turks. Desdemona continuous to stay optimistic about her marriage for a long time; her optimism is put into contrast by Emilia's bitterness about marriage and men in general. Even after Othello smothers her, Desdemona remains faithful to her husband by taking the blame for her own death. When Emilia asks Desdemona who has killed her she replies: "Nobody. I myself. Farewell./ Commend me to my kind lord. Oh, farewell!" (5.2.152-3). She still tries to help her husband. Othello on the other hand loses faith in Desdemona after only one conversation with Iago. Before they talk Othello says of Desdemona:

> Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul
>
> But I do love thee! And when I love thee not
>
> Chaos is come again. (3.3.90-2)

He loves her deeply and has no intention to question her; he even says that the world will fall into chaos when he does not love her anymore. Othello appears to be certain of his love, but after a few moments alone with Iago his opinion has altered completely and he says:

> She's gone, I am abused, and my relief
>
> Must be to loathe her. Oh, curse of marriage
>
> That we can call these delicate creatures ours
>
> And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad
>
> And live upon the vapor of a dungeon
>
> Than keep a corner in the thing I love
>
> For others' uses. (3.3.272-8)

Iago's suggestion that Desdemona has been unfaithful is all Othello needs in order to grow to hate her. He hates the same woman he professed his love for not even 200 lines before. He

searches for reasons possible for Desdemona's unfaithfulness and can only find flaws in himself, such as his skin colour and his age. Desdemona's implied adultery already has an influence on the image Othello has of himself; in a way he cuckolds himself.

Othello and Desdemona's marriage appears to be contrasted by Iago and Emilia's marriage; it remains unclear why these two characters ever decided to get married, but it is clear that they do not love each other as Othello and Desdemona did at the beginning of the play. Emilia constantly tries to win her husband's affections but after years of rejection she has gained some bitter insights on marriage. She says, for example:

> 'Tis not a year or two shows us a man.
>
> They are all but stomachs, and we all but food;
>
> They eat us hungerly, and when they are full
>
> They belch us. (3.4.120-3)

She tells the optimistic Desdemona these bitter insights. Emilia says that men use women and she lets herself be used as a tool in Iago's ploy. She, for example, takes Othello's handkerchief for Iago but is not rewarded with any affection when she delivers it to him. Emilia would even commit adultery if it meant that Iago would have better prospects: "Who/ would not make her husband a cuckold to make/ him a monarch? I should venture purgatory for 't" (4.3.85-7). It is not until the end of the play that Emilia stands up for herself and exposes her husband's wickedness; she redeems her betrayal of Desdemona but has to pay for it with her life when Iago stabs her. Iago appears to care little for his wife, but he does use her as one of the reasons why he hates Othello so much: he claims that there is a rumour that Emilia has slept with Othello (1.3.429-33). It is unlikely that such an event actually took place, but it is another example of how Iago uses Emilia as a tool in his plan, this time to justify his cause. At the end of the play Iago stabs Emilia because she reveals what he has done; it is interesting that while Iago is constantly manipulating and predicting the behaviour

of those around him he appears to underestimate Emilia whom he should have known best of all.

Familial relationships

Early modern England was a patriarchal society; men were considered to be the head of the household and of the family (Foyster 104). Men were in charge of the women in their household and had more freedom and opportunities than women had. A father had the right to do with his daughter what he saw fit; whether this entailed sending her to a nunnery or marrying her off to a wealthy suitor (Foyster 105). Although men did have these rights over women, reality was usually much more nuanced (Foyster 105). Women from lower social classes usually had more freedom and were sent to other households in servitude or apprenticeship; this opened up their circle of acquaintances and allowed for them to marry someone of their own choice while they were away from home (Foyster 106). Women from higher classes, however, were pushed into marriage by their father more often in order for him to strengthen ties with other men, families or business associates (Traub 132). During the first part of their lives, Elizabethan women depended on their fathers and after their marriage they depended of their husbands, but women usually enjoyed some more freedom as wives than they did as daughters (Pennington 669). In both *Othello* and *The Taming* most depicted parent-child relationships are set between father and daughter; the relationship between sons and their parents remain mostly unexplored beyond superficial connections between the two. Petruchio and Tranio, disguised as Lucentio, for example, both tell Baptista who their father is in order to gain credibility and respect. In both plays, however, the female characters experience some hardship as they transfer from daughter to wife. Desdemona, Bianca and Katherine all get married for different reasons, but all three of them go through a similar process in which they change roles from daughter to wife.

At the beginning of the play Brabantio is told the shocking news of his daughter's elopement with Othello. It seems that up until that point Desdemona had been an exemplary daughter; she was obedient and sensitive but when she chose to marry Othello rather than someone her father would approve of she damaged her relationship with her father. Brabantio is so astounded by the news of his daughter's elopement that he believes Desdemona must have been stolen from him by magic (1.2.63-79). Desdemona defends her marriage and explains to Brabantio that she has chosen to shift her allegiance from him to Othello when she married:

> I do perceive here a divided duty.
>
> To you I am bound for life and education.
>
> My life and education both do learn me
>
> How to respect you. You are the lord of duty.
>
> I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my
>
> husband.
>
> And so much duty as my mother showed
>
> To you, preferring you before her father,
>
> So much I challenge that I may profess
>
> Due to the Moor my lord. (1.3.209-18)

She says that she has chosen, like every married woman before her, to be dutiful to her husband over her father. The broken relationship between Brabantio and Desdemona is not mended even after Brabantio has, begrudgingly, resigned the issue of Desdemona's marriage (1.3.222-3). The last thing Brabantio says in the play is directed towards Othello: "Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see./ She has deceived her father, and may thee" (1.3.333-4). Desdemona is not able to redeem herself in Brabantio's opinion, and he even warns Othello that since she has betrayed the man she used to be dependent on she could just as easily betray

him. Iago cleverly uses this warning in his manipulations of Othello; Desdemona has proven

to be capable of betrayal and this eventually leads to her death.

In *The Taming* Baptista has two daughters that represent two extremes of the female

spectrum and as a result he treats them both differentlly. Baptista, for example, urges Bianca

to go inside, away from her arguing suitors, but Katherine can stay if she wants to (1.1.93-

103). Baptista feels the urge to protect Bianca, but allows his other daughter to stay in the

situation he tries to protect Bianca from. Bianca appears to be Baptista's favourite; he treats

her as a delicate treasure that has to be safeguarded from the outside world. Katherine,

however, is seen as a burden, and Baptista tries to find a husband who can take over his

responsibility for her. He does not treat Katherine like a treasure as he does her sister; when

Katherine explains to him why she acts the way she does, he does not listen (2.1.30-38), and

when Petruchio asks Baptista whether he has a fair and virtuous daughter named Katherine,

he replies that he does have a daughter named Katherine, by not repeating Petruchio's praise

he discredits it (2.1.43-4). Baptista even warns Petruchio against marrying Kate (2.1.63).

Baptista is a wealthy merchant and his objective throughout the play is creating the most

profitable marriages for his daughters; he sells Bianca off to the highest bidder (2.1.361-421)

and also negotiates with Petruchio over Katherine's dowry (2.1.121-46). During Baptista's

negotiations for the marriages of both his daughters it appears that he sees Bianca and

Katherine as property with which he can do as he pleases. During the course of the play both

daughters defy their father; Katherine by being shrewish and Bianca by marrying Lucentio

without her father's permission. The relationship between Baptista and both his daughters,

however, is redeemed in the end; Katherine has proven herself to be an obedient wife, which

pleases her father so much that he pays Petruchio a second dowry, and the elopement of

Bianca angers Baptista at first but he is appeased when Lucentio assures him of his wealth. At

the end of the play both daughters appear to have mended their broken relationship with their father.

Another type of familial relationship that can be found in *The Taming* is the sibling rivalry between the Minola sisters. Bianca and Katherine seem to compete with each other for their father's attention. Both female characters struggle for the attention of some of the male characters in different ways; Katherine is loud and shrewish whereas Bianca is demure and sensitive so she stands out next to her sister. In their sibling rivalry both sisters taunt each other, although Katherine's taunts are more obvious. Whereas Katherine ties her sister up and says mean things, Bianca seems to taunt Katherine more subtly by, for example, emphasising Katherine's age and her lack of suitors. Bianca, for example, gives Katherine a back-handed compliment when she says: "Or what you will command me will I do,/ So well I know my duty to my *elders*" (2.1.6-7 emphasis added). She calls Katherine old and after this she goes on to talk about her suitors, which is probably meant to painfully remind Katherine that she has none. Bianca is well aware of Baptista's preference for her and is willing to throw that into her sister's face. Perhaps the intense sibling rivalry is one of the reasons why Katherine acts the way she does. Unlike their relationships to their father, this familial relationship is not mended at the end of the play. In the end Katherine and Bianca have switched roles; Katherine has become the virtuous one so in the end she and Bianca still have nothing in common, nor do they appear to see redeeming qualities in each other.

<div align="center">Friendships</div>

Both *Othello* and *The Taming* explore a broad variety of relationships, but one category of relationships that hardly comes forward is that of friendship; in both plays people interact with others because they are either family, romantically involved or business relations. Especially the female characters in the plays enjoy hardly any friendships; in *The Taming* Bianca and Katherine do not see eye to eye, in *Othello* Bianca hardly interacts with

the other female characters, and the friendly relationship between Desdemona and Emilia is probably influenced by their difference in social rank, Emilia being Desdemona's servant. The interactions between the male characters are, however, shown to a larger extent; male characters appear to be either friends or competitors, but they do interact with one another. Friendships that cross the gender barrier are hardly shown in these plays; when male characters interact with Desdemona it is usually because they want something from her husband and when male characters interact with the Minola sisters they are either mocking or trying to court them. Friendship is born out of mutual interests and is seen to have a direct correlation to a person's happiness; when a person has close friendships they usually feel happier (Lynch 4). For most secondary school students, social circles and friendships are increasingly becoming important; the people students interact with at this stage usually have a great influence on what they decide to do with the rest of their lives (Brown 363). Students might be able to gain some perspective on their own lives and friendships by discussing the mistakes Othello makes by trusting certain people more than others, or how Bianca's suitors manage to remain friendly to each other even though they are competing for her hand.

Othello, Cassio and Iago make up a twisted relationship-triangle. Othello is both Iago's and Cassio's boss; he has the power to either promote or fire them. The characters are not equal to each other, which would make it difficult to maintain a friendship. At the beginning of the play Othello and Cassio have a good relationship with each other and think that they also have an amicable relationship with Iago. Iago, however, is already a sanctimonious friend; he plainly states that he hates Cassio for getting a promotion instead of himself and that he deeply hates Othello as well. The reason for Iago's hatred towards Othello remains unknown; he gives multiple reasons, such as Othello promoting Cassio rather than him, and the rumour that Othello slept with his wife. None of the reasons Iago gives, however, are convincing or appear to be legitimate causes for the excessive amount of hatred

he has for Othello. Iago's true motivations remain unclear for both the audience and the other characters. The relationship between Othello and Iago is complex, and filled with dramatic irony; Othello thinks Iago is an honest friend who would do anything for him, but both Iago and the audience know that he is manipulating Othello. Cassio remains fairly oblivious to Iago's manipulations and Othello's hatred for him throughout the play. Othello's trusting nature seems to work against him as he makes the wrong choice to have faith in Iago rather than Cassio. The play can serve as an example to show students how important communication is; if the characters had communicated directly with each other, rather than believing accusations and gossip, the play would, perhaps, not have had to end in tragedy.

In *The Taming*, Bianca's suitors become an unlikely group of friends that is formed as they make a truce in order to find a husband for Katherine. Hortensio and Gremio compete with each other for the ultimate prize, Bianca's hand in marriage, but rather than behaving like adversaries they aim to be "happy rivals in Bianca's love" (1.1.119). They decide to work together to make Bianca eligible for marriage by finding a husband for Katherine, but even before this moment the male characters already seem to have a certain amicable relationship. Although they both want to court Bianca they appear to work together in order to mock Katherine. When Hortensio makes a remark about Katherine, for example, Gremio quickly joins in:

HORTENSIO

From all such devils, good Lord, deliver us!

GREMIO   And me too, good Lord. (1.1.67-8)

When Tranio, disguised as Lucentio, reveals himself to be another suitor for Bianca, he also becomes one of the happy rivals fairly quickly. The other male characters warm to him, as can be seen in the scene where Tranio talks with Gremio about the strange wedding of Petruchio and Katherine (3.2.151-83); as they exchange gossip they seem to be quite friendly with each

other. Gremio and Tranio are both amused by the way Petruchio takes control over Katherine and they joke about it together. When the suitors Hortensio and Gremio realise that Lucentio has won Bianca's affections, neither of them expresses any anger or contempt towards Lucentio or Bianca. Hortensio decides to marry a widow and Gremio simply joins the others at the feast. The suitors behave amicably towards each other, and do not harbour any resentment over their loss of Bianca. This relationship might not be a particularly close friendship, but it is perhaps the most sincere and healthy friendship that is shown in both *The Taming* and *Othello*.

Conclusion

Many different types of relationships shape a person's outlook on life. When studying these plays, students will perhaps be urged to reflect the importance of relationships. Family, friends and romantic interests are important aspects in the lives of most people, and for secondary school students these aspects start to gain more importance than they had before. The majority of media made for adolescents, ranging from cartoons to books to music, uses different types of relationships as their subject matter. Adolescents have seen many romantic stories unfold in the popular media made for them; it would be interesting for them to see how Shakespeare was already writing about the topics that interest them today, such as love, family etc. 400 years ago. Specifically *The Taming* and *Othello* depict interesting relationships full of mistakes that are to be avoided in real life from which students are able to learn. By studying how Othello isolates himself from the rest of the Venetians by only listening to Iago, students can learn how to recognise false friends and as well as the importance of not taking everything someone says at face value. Another interesting topic to discuss with students is the sibling rivalry between Bianca and Katherine; this situation is perhaps more relatable for some students than for others. It could be interesting to let students discuss why the sisters act the way they do and whether Bianca is as sweet as she pretends to

be. By questioning the possible motivations for the actions of certain characters, the students

have to practice their empathic skills and might also be able to learn how to deal with some of

the problems they have to face themselves.

Conclusion

Shakespeare can be taught in a great variety of ways; teachers might choos to focus on interpretations, theatrical aspects or creating a bridge between Shakespeare and the students. By focussing on social issues, however, the students will learn from the mistakes of the characters and they will perhaps be able to gain more insight into their own lives. Secondary school students are on the verge of experiencing the world for themselves for the first time. Literature, and Shakespeare in particular, can be a useful tool to help students to start thinking about the large issues in life, before they have to deal with them in reality. The students will be able to gain new perspectives for their own lives by studying literature in a way that focusses on the major social issues that also play an important role in their own lives.

During literature lessons, in-class discussions can be extremely advantageous on multiple levels; they can increase understanding of the text, but also help to see other points of view about certain issues (Eddleston 12). When one half of the class, for example, is tasked to defend Katherine's shrewish behaviour and the other half has to condemn it; it can lead to interesting new insights as to why she behaves the way she does. In-class discussions about social issues increase empathy and can perhaps lead to more tolerance and understanding in the future. They can also help to actively involve the students with the text, and help them to create a personal interpretation of the text rather than simply take over their teacher's interpretation (Eddleston 13).

When teaching *Othello* and *The Taming*, the theme of discrimination is important and has to be included in the lessons. Discrimination is an important issue for students as they will have to deal with it throughout their lives; by addressing the discrimination characters have to face in the plays the students will be urged to think about discrimination. In *Othello* and *The Taming*, both the discriminator and the victim express their point of view and give their own motivations for acting the way they do; sometimes this is more explicit than at other times.

When students have to analyse the discrimination directed towards a character in a play, they will be able to see both the points of view of the discriminator and the victim. The plays also show that discrimination does not just affect the person it is directed against; it takes a toll on society as a whole. By studying *Othello* and *The Taming* the students will be able to see how discrimination becomes internalised as the victim starts to believe in his own inferiority. For Othello this process is shown prominently; he starts out as a noble hero, but at the end of the play he does not seem to even recognise himself.

The implications of sexuality and gender are something many secondary school students will have to deal with. Sexuality and gender also play important roles in both *Othello* and *The Taming*; both plays reflect on the differences between men and women and present an image of what the perfect woman should be like. One of the most interesting aspects of the plays is how they present the female ideal at the beginning of the play and how the character that embodies this ideal turns out in the end. Bianca for example seems to be the epitome of femininity at the start of the play, she is obedient and demure, but she does not live up to Lucentio's expectations in the end; she has been hiding her true nature. Desdemona also starts out the epitome of feminine perfection, but after one mistake, disobeying her father, the characteristics that make her a Madonna actually lead to her death as she is unable to defend herself against Othello. Katherine is another interesting female character; she appears to nuance the theoretical one-dimensional image of women as either Madonna's or whores. Katherine is a complex character that has changed from a screaming shrew to a women who is able to appear to be an obedient wife. She shows that women cannot be given simplistic labels, even though society tries to. By studying the aspects of gender and sexuality in Shakespeare's plays the students might start to question what roles these aspects play in their own lives. The plays can help students to question their own opinions about, for example, gender roles and broaden their horizons.

Practically everyone has to interact with others and maintain relationships; by focusing on this aspects of the plays students will possibly gain a new perspective on their own relationships. By studying how Iago manipulates Othello or how Bianca goes through life pretending to be something she is not, students might learn to avoid certain mistakes in their own lives. *Othello* and *The Taming* are filled with interesting examples of relationships that can lead to new insights on the relationships students have to deal with themselves. Although the plays were written nearly 450 years ago, the depicted relationships are still relatable to students. The sibling rivalry between Bianca and Katherine, for example, is something that many secondary school students will have to deal with at home. Other types of relationships, such as romantic interests and friendships also play major roles in the lives of most students; seeing these types of relationships mirrored in the plays will make them even more relatable for students.

Literature lessons can become so much more than just the cramming of useless facts and literary terms that are easily forgotten. Literature can be used as a starting point for studying and understanding other cultures and life in general. Students can become more broadminded by reading Shakespeare's plays not as dated period pieces, but rather as insightful works that reflect on universally relatable themes and issues. Literature lessons that reflect on social issues can perhaps help students to become more open-minded, more understanding towards others and generally help them throughout their lives.

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