

**Worksheet 6 – Women**

**Review: Lecture Religion**

**Can you answer these questions, which are based on the previous lecture from Professor Hopkins about Othello?**

- A. Who said of Othello, "He comes before us, dark and grand, with a light upon him from the sun where he was born."?
- B. Who described Othello as stupid and self-deceiving?
- C. Who described Othello as heroic and principled: a noble character?

**Recall: Lecture Race**

**Answer these questions after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember.**

1. What does Desdemona's name mean? (Time 0.29)
  - a) Ill fated, unlucky
  - b) A maiden never bold
  - c) My soul's joy
  - d) An obedient lady
2. Who said that "Othello is concerned in action and in theme with men's misunderstandings of women."?  
(Time 2.23)
  - a) Gayle Green's (1979)
  - b) Karen Newman (1991)
  - c) Carol Thomas Neel (2005)
  - d) Marjorie Garber (2005)
3. Who said "much of the disgust ... critics betray comes not from the fact of Othello's blackness but from the relation of that blackness to Desdemona's fair purity" (Time 3:50)
  - a) Gayle Green's (1979)
  - b) Karen Newman (1991)
  - c) Carol Thomas Neel (2005)
  - d) Marjorie Garber (2005)
3. Who said the female roles in the play are crucially important in the ways of understanding the male characters? (Time 4.53)
  - a) Gayle Green's (1979)
  - b) Karen Newman (1991)
  - c) Carol Thomas Neel (2005)
  - d) Marjorie Garber (2005).
4. Who links Desdemona to Venus, because Venus was born on Cyprus and her lover is the god of war?  
(Time 5.18)
  - a) Gayle Green's (1979)
  - b) Karen Newman (1991)
  - c) Carol Thomas Neel (2005)
  - d) Marjorie Garber (2005)

**Analysis**

**In the lecture Professor Hopkins presents the concept of Othello as a play about conflicting ways of thinking, and especially the idea of Othello as a character with a mythopoeic imagination.** (Time 6:15)

Read through this speech and consider Othello's tendency to think allegorically and symbolically.

**Othello**

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul.  
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars,  
It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood,  
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow  
5 And smooth as monumental alabaster.  
Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.  
Put out the light, and then put out the light.  
If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,  
I can again thy former light restore  
10 Should I repent me. But once put out thy light,  
Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,  
I know not where is that Promethean heat  
That can thy light relume. When I have plucked thy rose  
I cannot give it vital growth again,  
15 It must needs wither. I'll smell thee on the tree.  
Oh, balmy breath, that dost almost persuade  
Justice to break her sword! One more, one more.  
Be thus when thou art dead and I will kill thee  
And love thee after. (kissing her) One more, and that's the last.  
20 So sweet was ne'er so fatal. I must weep,  
But they are cruel tears. This sorrow's heavenly,  
It strikes where it doth love. She wakes.

5. Professor Hopkins talks about Othello presenting the bedside light as symbolic. Do you agree?

Bonus Point: Which Shakespearean King says "Out, out brief candle" when he hears his queen has died?

6. What other metaphor does Othello use as a euphemism for murdering his wife?

7. How is Desdemona presented in this soliloquy?

### Evaluation

**In the lecture, Professor Hopkins presents the importance of the relationships between the three main female characters in the play – Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca. (Time 2:24)**

Read through this extract, which explores the role of Bianca and then answer the following question.

Bianca's is the smallest of the three women's roles in Othello. Small as it is, however, it is nonetheless an indispensable element in the dramatic design. As a prostitute she intensifies our sense of the predominantly sexual nature of this world. As a woman conventionally scorned, desired, used, and abused by men, she underlines the theme of female abuse at the heart of the play. Spoken about by men in terms that deny her humanity—to Iago and Cassio she is strumpet, rogue, monkey, bauble, fitchew, trash—her own speech portrays her as a passionate, spontaneous, and honest human being. (She is not, however, the whore with the heart of gold; she is difficult and tough, and can be unpleasant.) She is able to give concrete, empirical expression to her feelings, as her railing against Cassio's casual absence proves:

What? keep a week away? seven days and nights?

Eightscore eight hours? and lovers' absent hours,

More tedious than the dial eightscore times?

O weary reck'ning!

(III.iv. 173-76)

Whatever its extravagance (tedium multiplies the week of hours by eight score, to make what she will call its "felt absence"), the simple particularity of her speech guarantees the authenticity of her feelings. In everything she says (and in many ways she is the most outspoken character in the play)

her speech rings with this expansive honesty of feeling. When jealous, she speaks her jealousy straight out, as when Cassio gives her the handkerchief: "This is some token from a newer friend; / To the felt absence now I feel a cause" (11. 181-82). Her directness of speech contrasts with Othello's convoluted response to his own jealousy, while her stress on outward-directed feeling (felt absence, felt cause) counterpoints the egocentric, narcissistic Cassio. Far from being the object men have made of her in their speech (IV.i.108), her own verbal energy (IV.i.153) constitutes a danger to men's sense of propriety and order in their world. For this reason Cassio pursues her from the stage after her jealous outburst, his specific aim being to stop her speaking: "she'll rail in the streets else" (1.163)

In her final appearance, the spontaneity and emotional honesty of Bianca's speech are at their most intense. She rushes onstage, flings herself on Cassio's wounded body, and can only wail his name: "O my dear Cassio, my sweet Cassio! / O Cassio, Cassio, Cassio! . . . Alas, he faints! O Cassio, Cassio, Cassio!" (V.i.76-77, 84). But it is just such defenseless speech Iago can manipulate to his advantage. The very emotionalism of Bianca's speech becomes the ground in which he plants suspicion. Led off to be tortured for a confession ("Come, mistress, you must tell's another tale" [1. 125]), her speech is to be twisted against itself and its own truth. Before she is swallowed up in silence, however, she has a memorable assertion of self to make, in a speech that is calm, dignified, and full of feeling. To Emilia's abusive "strumpet!" (1. 121) (subjecting both of them to the values of masculine language) she replies in such a way as to mute suddenly the high-pitched violence of the scene: "I am no strumpet, but of life as honest / As you that thus abuse me" (11. 122-23). In Bianca's passionate speech Shakespeare has embodied a feeling that would give, though the world would smother it, adequate expression to her identity. In its own way her speech is a moral reality that brings into sharper focus the moral deficiencies of the world that would condemn her

Grennan, E. (1987). The Women's Voices in "Othello": Speech, Song, Silence. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 38(3), 275–292

8. Make notes on the key ideas presented about Bianca in this extract. Then consider your own response to this character.

### Glossary

- **Ophelia** - Hamlet's mistreated girlfriend, who goes mad and dies drowning in a river.  
*E.g. Ophelia's father was killed by Hamlet.*
- **Exculpation** - To clear from alleged fault or guilt.  
*E.g. The exculpation saved his reputation.*
- **Misogyny** - Dislike, or distrust of women.  
*E.g. He was a misogynist.*
- **Inadequacy** - Not good enough.  
*E.g. She felt inadequate in the maths classroom.*
- **Doubled** - One actor plays two parts in a play.  
*E.g. The boy actor doubled as Desdemona and Emilia.*
- **Miscegenation** – A racist term, describing marriage between different racial types.  
*E.g. They believe in miscegenation as the answer to world peace.*

- **Apocryphal** - Of doubtful authenticity, although widely circulated as being true.  
*E.g. His alleged description of scientific facts is probably apocryphal.*
- **Feminist** - A person believing in equal rights for men and women.  
*E.g. He was a feminist.*
- **Lameness** - A state of being unable to walk because of leg or foot pain.  
*E.g. She banged her foot and went lame.*
- **Fidelity** - Faithfulness to a person, cause, or belief, demonstrated by continuing loyalty and support.  
*E.g. He sought only the strictest fidelity to justice.*
- **Mythopoeic** - Of or relating to the making of myths; causing, producing, or giving rise to myths.  
*E.g. Mythopoeic literature is where a fictional mythology is created by the writer.*
- **Domestic** - relating to the running of a home or to family relations.  
*E.g. He did the domestic chores.*