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Financial Education, Literary Fiction, and Corporate Social Responsibility

Maria Teresa Bosch Badia, Joan Montllor-Serrats
and Maria-Antonia Tarrazon-Rodon

7.1 Introduction: Decisions, Value, and Feelings

Corporate management has become increasingly sophisticated in a world aware of the challenges of sustainability where the claims of all stakeholders, their different interests, and their sensitivities influence any course of action. Corporate decisions are assumed to be taken with the traditional goal of financial value maximization in mind. Nevertheless, the strength of corporate value needs to make shareholders' wealth compatible with environmental and social requirements over the long term. The corporate social responsibility (CSR) challenge consists of making corporations environmentally, socially, and financially sustainable in order to achieve a satisfactory

M. T. Bosch Badia (✉)
Universitat de Girona, Girona, Spain
e-mail: mariateresa.bosch@udg.edu

J. Montllor-Serrats · M.-A. Tarrazon-Rodon
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Bellaterra, Spain

triple bottom line of profits, people, and planet, as defined by Elkington (1994). Managers need to be prepared to face sustainability challenges with a strong sense of responsibility and sensitivity to deal with the human feelings of the different stakeholders involved in the complexity of this scenario. Additionally, shareholders, the managers of their portfolios, and stakeholders must share this sense of responsibility and sensitivity. Thus, CSR education has become a central need for business studies. However, it cannot be exclusively centered on acquiring knowledge. The modern educational goal of preparing students to “learn how to learn” must include to the development of the capacity to update knowledge, the even more important skill to be permanently sensitive to society and to the environment, i.e., to life in a single word.

This changing backdrop and set of expectations pose a challenge to managerial education. Often, business syllabuses are dominated by subjects where the goal is to prepare students for designing strategies, analyzing financial decisions, preparing marketing campaigns, managing human resources, and other topics with the focus on financial value creation. In short, the goal is to prepare them for a world of facts, which recalls the opening of Dickens’ *Hard Times*, “Now, what I want is Facts...Plant nothing else and root out everything else” (Dickens 1995, p. 9). Although it is obvious that modern teaching is far from that of Mr. Gradgrind’s school in *Hard Times*, there is also substantial evidence about the predominance of facts in business teaching.

However, the focus on business ethics and CSR, which is generally included in syllabuses today, may help to enlighten the nature of the world in which value creation takes place and help open students’ minds beyond facts. Nevertheless, CSR is often addressed with respect to its contributions to corporate value because it is also a source of innovation, as pointed out by Porter and Kramer (2006), or because corporate stability requires a reasonable understanding between shareholders and stakeholders. As A. Rappaport (2012, p. 50) writes, “while there is no doubt that executives face difficult trade-offs, one point is clear: a company will not maximize shareholder value through the systematic exploitation of its stakeholders”. The goal and the constraint are expressed very clearly in this statement. The problem is not only to teach ethics and CSR but also to teach them effectively in such a

way that students make them part of their emotional intelligence, i.e., to their understanding and management of emotions. In this respect, business education should foster the development of students' empathy and emotional intelligence. Ioannidou and Konstantikaki (2008) stress the relevance of emotional training in general education. Its application to teaching CSR posits the following questions: How can one stimulate the development of emotional intelligence in a business classroom? Which case studies could be used? This chapter holds that a productive answer to these questions can be found in literary fiction and proposes to use literary works as case studies on CSR. The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. Section 7.2 discusses the value of literature for management learning. Section 7.3 analyzes the connections among behavioral finance, CSR, and literary fiction. Section 7.4 analyzes *The Merchant of Venice* and Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* from the perspective of CSR. Section 7.5 discusses the capacity of literature to foster emotional intelligence in the classroom and its contributions to making students more empathetic and mature.

7.2 Literature and Management Learning

Art and literature convey human emotions and feelings, leading the reader to witness a myriad of different situations and to become aware of the behaviors of very different characters. Barter and Tregidga (2014) present a panorama on the capacity of fiction, art, and literary techniques to communicate business situations. They stress the capacity of storytelling and its analysis for advancing the knowledge of complex situations that cannot be accessed through conventional research. Younkings (2014, p. ix), in the preface of his book about capitalist fiction, holds that "reading novels and plays, and watching films are excellent ways to develop critical thinking, to learn about character, and to instill moral values". Kidd and Castano (2013), in an article published in *Science*, provide experimental evidence on the positive impacts of reading literary fiction on the capacity for understanding other people's beliefs and desires. Bal and Veltkamp (2013) develop an experimental study in which they find evidence for the positive effect of fiction

reading on empathy under the condition that the reader becomes emotionally transported into the story. Their results are entirely in line with Younkins' arguments.

Harold Bloom (2001, p. 4), in an interview published in the *Harvard Business Review*, states that "by reading great imaginative literature, you can prepare yourself for surprise and even get a kind of strength that welcomes and exploits the unexpected". In this interview, Prof. Bloom insists on the fact that literature prepares readers for facing the unexpected. Guber (2007), in turn, praises the capacity of storytelling for corporate communication. According to this author, to be effective, storytelling must convey truth to the teller, to the audience, to the moment, and to the mission. In a nutshell, it must be credible. These requirements fit with scholarship on CSR (Wagner et al. 2009) that point out that marketing campaigns on CSR, if not credible, can be perceived by consumers as corporate hypocrisy and have adverse effects on sales. Badaracco (2006a) expresses the capacity of literary fiction to educate future leaders in ethics and applies literature to the analysis of leadership skills by emphasizing the challenges that leaders face (Badaracco 2006b).

Egan (2000) studies different Shakespearian characters, mainly the kings in historical plays, and analyzes their strong and weak points together with their achievements and mistakes from the perspective of modern management theories. Jennings (2013) analyzes how a background in reading the classics may help corporate leaders to become aware of the ethical dangers involved in their jobs. He stresses the relevance of the Bathsheba Syndrome, identified by Ludwig and Longenecher (1993). It consists of the ethical failures that originate from not being able to cope with success and, also, from the isolation that power brings. Jennings parallels Ishmael in *Moby Dick* ("I said nothing and tried to think nothing") with Enron's managers, who were both victims of the self-deception of Bathsheba Syndrome. He points out that the knowledge of literary stories can help to prevent these kinds of failures. Desai (2017) explores the connections between finance and literature, philosophy, and the arts in general. Among other topics, Desai relates literature to risk management, leverage, and competing obligations. Jane Austen's Lizzy Bennet (*Pride and Prejudice*) and

Anthony Trollope's Violet Effingham (*Phileas Finn*) are studied as risk managers. On the challenges that competing obligations pose to managers, Desai shows how the work by the philosopher Marta Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986), enlightens these conflicts and takes Agamemnon sacrificing Iphigenia as an example.

Morson and Schapiro (2017) analyze the capacity of humanities to improve the understanding of economic phenomena. They counter the abstraction of economic mathematical models with the complexity of literature. Economics focuses on the analysis of evidence with the aim of generalizing it through theoretical models. Conversely, literature goes in-depth into complex, although specific, situations: "the novel... instead of showing the essential simplicity of things, it shows their complexity and teaches us to reason appropriately" (Morson and Schapiro 2017, p. 211). These authors stress the importance of taking culture into account to analyze economic scenarios. Ultimately, they advocate for a dialogue among disciplines to achieve a greater understanding of society. The implementation of CSR policies requires leadership to be able to analyze very complicated settings and the capacity to communicate to investors how essential sustainability is in the long run. Individual, corporate, and social ethics are central to this issue. In this respect, it is also relevant to the interaction among behavioral finance, CSR, and literary fiction. The next section centers on this interaction.

7.3 Marketing, Behavioral Finance, Literary Fiction, and CSR

The productive interaction between psychology and economics that has created the discipline of behavioral economics enlightens the analysis of CSR decisions and investors' decisions. The contribution of literary fiction to psychological analysis is well documented in several papers. Oatley (1999) argues that the separation between literature and psychology has impaired both. He underlines the creative facet of reading fiction by comparing literary works with simulations that lead their readers to explore emotions. In this line, Mar and Oatley (2008) consider narrative fiction as a simulation of life. They argue that literary

stories arouse thoughts and emotions in their readers, and furthermore, they abstract life in order to facilitate its comprehension. Beckett (2013) develops the concept of *fictional expectations*, which consists of structured narratives about the future states of the world through which individuals deal with uncertainty. Roy and Zeckhauser (2017) study the contributions of literature to the understanding of human behaviors and ignorance (scope, induction, cultural learning, anticipation, and insights into behavioral decision-making).

Marketing is a field in which studying literature can be highly productive. Understanding human emotions and persuasion is central to successful marketing. Bagozzi et al. (1999) explore the role of emotions in marketing. Virginia Woolf (1922, p. 126) masterly depicted the centrality of emotions in fiction signaling that “emotion is our material”. Nünning (2017) studies the capacity of fiction for fostering the readers’ empathy. Murphy (1999) identifies empathy among the core virtues for marketing. Stafford (1999) points out that “persuasion goes to the very heart of marketing as a technology and science”. Works on fiction and rhetoric constitute an excellent basis for empowering persuasion, as Heinrichs (2017) argues drawing on Cicero and Shakespeare.

Behavioral finance contributes to explaining market bubbles and irrational behaviors, but it also contributes to a better understanding of ethical behaviors, beyond the supposed rational investors whose decisions are systematically made to maximize their profits. In the real world, many decisions are driven by the “spontaneous urge to action” that John M. Keynes labeled *animal spirits*. Akerlof and Shiller (2009, p. 3) enlarge this definition by signaling that the idea of animal spirits “refers to a peculiar relationship with ambiguity and uncertainty. Sometimes we are paralyzed by it. Yet at other times it refreshes and energizes us, overcoming our fears and indecisions”. In fact, the concept of *animal spirits* encapsulates the irrational and impulsive behaviors observed during financial bubbles. Malkiel (2015, Chap. 10) explains the primary drivers of irrational behaviors as follows: overconfidence, biased judgments, herd mentality, and loss aversion. Nofsinger (2016) studies the psychology of investing by analyzing the impact of emotions on investment decisions and pointing out how psychologists and economists have shown that feelings and emotions condition

decision-making. Shiller (2017) points out the relevance of popular narratives for the analysis of economic fluctuations. Explicitly, he defines narratives as “human constructs that are mixtures of fact and emotion and human interest and other extraneous detail that form an impression on the human mind” (Shiller 2017, p. 973). We learn from this article the crucial importance for any decision-maker to become aware and analyze popular narratives that influence social behaviors at every moment. The knowledge of literature can be regarded as a useful background for the understanding of the generation and development of popular narratives and even how to generate counter messages. Shiller (2012, p. 106) also stresses the need for teaching ethics and facilitating a broad understanding of the complexity of the world among students. Literary fiction can contribute to this goal. In the next section, we explore how *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Wild Duck* can be respectively studied from the points of view of social and environmental sustainability.

7.4 CSR and Human Feelings Through *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Wild Duck*

Among the three pillars of sustainability, i.e., financial, environmental, and social, CSR aims to foster the environmental and social pillars. In fact, the ultimate goal of CSR is to improve human life and all forms of life on the planet as well. However, sustainable business strategies only can be fully implemented inside a society that is aware of the centrality of social and environmental sustainability for progressing toward an ethical world. The interaction among social rules, business decisions, and their impacts on human life can be explored through the analysis of literary fiction. This section analyzes *The Merchant of Venice* (Shakespeare 1955) and *The Wild Duck* (Ibsen 1980) from a CSR perspective. Business decisions that are linked with social and environmental sustainability play a central role in triggering their dramatic situations. Through both plays, the audience becomes aware of the fragility of human interactions and the tragic consequences that may follow from failing to act in a responsible manner.

7.4.1 *The Merchant of Venice* and Social Sustainability

The Merchant places the audience in front of a social setting that utterly lacks social sustainability. Shylock's attempt to enact revenge for the racial abuse he has suffered is at the center of the dramatic action. The leading causes of the social sustainability flaws in *The Merchant* stem from the political-economic system and social, racial, and religious discrimination at different levels. The system aims to promote the safety of mercantile contracts before human rights. In other words, we can say that it is centered on profit maximization. Venice is presented as a wealthy society that enjoys the prosperity of the commercial capitalism of its time, where human relations and money become inextricably intertwined. Dunne (2014) analyzes the connections between money and love in *The Merchant*. The legal system is designed to protect this prosperity, which is clearly put before human rights and prevents Antonio from being freed of his bond with Shylock, even by paying the debt several times over. Salanio stresses that the Duke only can save Antonio by asking Shylock to have mercy on him¹ ("none can drive him from the envious plea", Salanio, III.II.281). Antonio is perfectly aware of this fact ("the duke cannot deny the course of law", III.III.26). Shylock, in turn, reminds the Venetian establishment that their prosperity depends on the strict fulfillment of the law when claiming Antonio's flesh (the bond):

If you deny it, let the danger light
Upon your charter and your city's freedom. (IV.I.38–39)

Literary criticism has dealt with the legal and economic aspects of *The Merchant*. Harp (2010, p. 43) addresses the priority for businesses in Venetian society. Trepanier (2014, p. 209) concludes his study on the contracts, friendship, and love in *The Merchant* stating that this play "reveals the moral limitations of a commercial regime based on contract and the corrosive effects it has on noncontractual relationships like friendship, love, and marriage".

¹All the quotations from *The Merchant of Venice* have been taken from the Arden Edition (Shakespeare 1955).

Discrimination, the other central feature of *Merchant's* society, not only adds more hindrances to noncontractual relationships but also has a perverse influence on business decisions. In this respect, we find three lines: race, homosexuality, and gender. Shylock is discriminated against for his race, Antonio is forced to hide his homosexuality, and Portia and Jessica, in different ways, are subjected to the limitations imposed on women. As stated, we consider the case of gender in Sect. 4.3. Discrimination leads Antonio and Shylock to make highly flawed decisions based on overconfidence (Antonio) and pride (Shylock), two of the drivers of irrational financial behaviors identified by behavioral finance.

Three traits define Antonio, namely, being a member of the Venetian upper class, his antagonism with Shylock, and his hidden homosexuality, although the latter is not universally accepted in Shakespearian criticism. As a ship owner and trader, Antonio manages a big business subjected to high risks, as stressed by Shylock (I.III.15–24). His decision to borrow money from Shylock to help Bassanio in courting Portia constitutes a case of overconfidence. By increasing the leverage, Antonio adds more risk to his risky business without changing its expected return. That is, he endangers its financial sustainability. Of course, this decision is based on the love that Antonio feels for Bassanio:

My purse, my person, my extremest means
Lie all unlock'd to your occasions. (I.I.138–139)

Bloom (1999, p. 185) stresses the two dominant traits of Shylock's character: hatred and intelligence. Both are widely displayed in his scheming against Antonio, who strongly scorns him in Act I ("to spit on thee again, to spurn thee too...", I.III.125–126). Shylock, in his famous moving soliloquy in Act III ("I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes?" III.I.52–54), expresses the grief he feels for being an outcast due to his Jewish race while concurrently unveiling his wish for revenge ("If you prick us do we not bleed?...and if you wrong us shall we not revenge?" ... III.1.58 and 60). Shylock and Antonio have in common that they make business decisions based on feelings instead of rationality. Their feelings are, of course, opposite: Antonio is guided by his love for Bassanio, while hatred for Antonio guides Shylock. Both are victims of the imperfections of Venetian society but, at the same time, they are

also unable to undertake any initiative to correct them. Antonio feels trapped in his sadness while Shylock remains a prisoner of his pride. Neither of them can think of changing society nor can they conceive that society may change. Instead of regarding Venice as a society, they view the city as a conglomerate of individuals.

Let us consider Antonio and Shylock from the viewpoint of CSR. When business decisions inside a society are not made with CSR in mind, it is practically impossible that a single firm or an individual becomes aware of the need for CSR. Antonio is a victim of Shylock but a victim that agrees on discriminating against Shylock because he is a Jew. Social sustainability neither exists in Antonio's mind nor is it present in his business decisions. Shylock does not claim the bond for discrimination but for revenge. Thus, he is unable to conceive that morally positive attitudes, as the ones required by CSR, could improve human relations. Antonio's donation to Bassanio raises the question of whether philanthropy is appropriate for business. This is a case of uncontrolled philanthropy that endangers financial sustainability. Feelings dominate the financial decisions made by Antonio and Shylock. Thus, they belong to System 1 thinking (intuition, thinking fast), as defined by Kahneman (2011). Analyzing decisions from the perspective of CSR leads to switching to System 2 thinking (considering issues in-depth and thinking slow). CSR focuses on the long-term impacts of business decisions by considering their effects on society and the environment. Thus, it makes strategic thinking absolutely necessary by analyzing the corporate future from the triple perspective of finance, environment, and society.

7.4.2 *The Wild Duck* and Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability and the effects on human beings of business decisions that do not respect nature are at the center of *The Wild Duck*. The illegal felling of trees in the Hoydal Forest that triggers the tragedy shows two different negative attitudes to the environment. These attitudes are explored through the businessman Werle, whose central aim is making money, and Lieutenant Ekdal, whose central aim is dominating nature, even at

the price of destroying it. Werle embodies the spirit of financialization. For him, the World is a market in which anything and anyone can be bought and sold. He bought the Hoydal Forest together with Ekdal but managed not to be involved in the illegal cut. In this respect, a question remains open: is Werle's help to Ekdal the outcome of his generosity or is it the way of purchasing his silence? When his relationship with Gina arrived at a point of no return due to her pregnancy, Werle managed to arrange her marriage with Hjalmar. His gift to Hedvig awakens the suspicion that he is her biological father. His announced marriage with Mrs. Sørby is also presented as a fair transaction: Werle sells welfare and buys love and care² ("I don't think that I'm taking more than I shall be able to give him", Mrs. Sørby to Gregers in Act IV, p. 189). Summarizing, for Werle anything is a trade. In his world, love does not exist, but hate does not exist either. Ekdal is the character who better encapsulates the lack of respect for nature. His loft at Hjalmar's home shows the miserable evolution of this wretched character: from a bear hunter in the forest to hunting domestic animals enclosed in the loft. Goldman (1994) highlights the self-deceiving function that the loft has for Ekdal, as it is also a metaphor for his decadence. Ekdal never shows any emotion; for him, any calamity remains explained by the revenge of the forest ("You see, the forest-the forest... the forest will have its revenge", Act II, p. 148). By cutting the forest, he has also cut his capacity for emotion.

The setting of *The Wild Duck* shows how the destruction of nature also destroys society. This connection constitutes an implicit message about the interrelated nature of life. Gregers substitutes his father's materialism for a fanatical idealism, "the claim of the ideal" (as doctor Relling defines it in Act III, p. 171), that combines the purity and the wilderness of nature. His pressure on Hjalmar to assume that Gina was Werle's lover and Hedvig was probably Werle's biological daughter introduces the wilderness of nature into the, until then, happy family of Hjalmar and Gina. After Gregers' revelations, Hjalmar opts for placing biology in front of love ("then I'd have known what a kind of woman you were", Act IV, p. 182). Indifferent to Gina's pleas and disregarding Gregers' advice of forgiving her ("nothing in the world can be compared

²All the quotations from *The Wild Duck* have been taken from the Methuen World Classics Edition (Ibsen 1980).

with the joy of forgiving”, Act IV, p. 184), Hjalmar breaks off the family. At this point, Hjalmar becomes dominated by primitive feelings, even preferring revenge to reconciliation. Gregers shows his inner cruelty by proposing that Hedvig kills the wild duck. This is the start of family reconciliation through an act similar to an ancestral sacrifice (“suppose you sacrificed for him the most precious of your possessions - the thing that you love most dearly?” Act IV, p. 197) that would once more break the harmony of nature. Hedvig’s suicide that follows can be regarded as the last link of the chain of negative human reactions that started after the cut of the forest. In Ekdal’s words, it is the revenge of the forest. In summary, *The Wild Duck* represents a society unable to live in harmony with nature. Men’s aggressiveness to nature is, inevitably, transmitted to human relations.

7.4.3 Gender in *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Wild Duck*

Gender inequality is central in both plays. We limit our analysis to Portia and Gina. The effects of gender discrimination on Antonio that have been considered in 7.4.1 rely on his central role in social discrimination. Portia and Gina have not been free to choose their husbands. Portia’s father and Mr. Werle have imposed conditions (Portia’s father) or manipulated the marriage (Werle). From Portia’s point of view, *The Merchant* relates to the audience her struggle to achieve equality. The caskets scenes could be presented as a tragic situation in other circumstances. At this moment, Portia is a creature fettered to the will of her father. The excellent capacity she exhibits for managing complex situations proves the absurdity of her father’s decision of limiting her freedom to select a husband. Korda (2009) studies Portia’s language by showing that she often uses terms related to business and comparing her with the British women who, in early modern England, were money lenders at interest. This language suggests that Portia has remarkable expertise in managing her husbandry, which makes her capacity for defending Antonio against Shylock less surprising. In her exchange

with Bassanio at Belmont, Portia shows the strictest determination of not enabling her future husband to manage her inheritance: *though yours, not yours*³ (III.II.20). From the gender perspective, the trial scene constitutes a vindication of women's intelligence. Until Portia's arrival, the court (only integrated by men) has failed in its attempts to release Antonio from Shylock's bond. Portia, disguised as a man, enlightens the confused court by providing a deeper interpretation of the law. Antonio becomes free from the bond, and Portia demonstrates to the court how a woman can deal with legal affairs even better than men. Benston (1979, p. 379) stresses Portia's strategic skills that reach their peak when she defeats Shylock by turning the law against him and in the harmony that she creates for herself, Bassanio, and Antonio. In the ring scene that follows (Act V), Portia and Nerissa make Bassanio and Gratiano aware of the fact that they are their husbands but not their masters. The shared happiness that this scene conveys can be regarded as an implicit message on the value of equality over discrimination.

Conversely, in *The Wild Duck*, Gina remains continuously submissive to men, from Werle to Hjalmar. A central difference between Portia and Gina is that Gina is entirely alone. Her pathetic struggle to retain her husband ("what would have become of you if you hadn't had a wife like me?" Act IV, p. 183), the insensitive and proud Hjalmar, reveals a character full of inner sadness that only yearns for having some peace in her life. Her final words answer Hjalmar's despair after the suicide of Hedvig ("we must help each other. Now she belongs to both of us, you know", Act V, p. 215) again shows a sensitive woman who pleads not to be alone. In conclusion, the need to put environmental and social sustainability into practice becomes evident after the reading of both plays. Sustainability will not maximize the wealth of Shylock and Werle but will help to maximize harmony and contribute to a stable society. Table 7.1 summarizes the main issues on CSR that can be found in *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Wild Duck*.

³Interpreted in the Arden Edition as "yours de jure, not de facto" (p. 77, footnote 20).

Table 7.1 CSR in *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Wild Duck*

Issues on CSR	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	<i>The Wild Duck</i>
Environmental sustainability		(-) Tree felling in Hoydal Forest
Social sustainability	(-) Racism (anti-Semitic discrimination) (-) Gender discrimination (-) Homosexual's discrimination (implicit) (-) Financial decisions based on revenge feelings (Shylock) (-) Financial decisions based on overconfidence (Antonio) (-) Business-focused society (-) Shylock (-) Antonio (+) Portia (+) Gratiano	(-) Gender discrimination (-) Business management only based on profit maximization (Werle)
Financial sustainability		
Ethics		(-) Werle, Ekdal, Gregers, and Hjalmar (+) Gina (+) Society: reacting against the cut of Hoydal Forest
Philanthropy	(-) Antonio (excess of philanthropy; focused only in his own social class)	(-) Werle (hypocritical use of philanthropy)
Reputation	Shylock's revenge is part based on how Antonio has publicly traduced his honor and reputation in the market: Also noteworthy that Shylock protests he is not interested in Antonio's good character, but only his financial status, Act I Scene 3: 'Oh, no, no, no, no: my meaning in saying he is a good man is to have you understand me that he is sufficient'	(-) Werle: philanthropic strategies to control his reputation

7.5 Discussion

The value of literary fiction for business studies is currently widely accredited. Comparing the contributions of mathematics and literary fiction to the understanding of economics and business enlightens this issue. Mathematics has the power to summarize in equations the stable relationships among relevant variables. It contributes to modeling the logical connections that we may find in the complexity of the world of economics. Conversely, literary fiction does not simplify the complexity. Instead, it embeds economic decisions in a context that goes further than economics. The effects of feelings on decisions are depicted, and, by involving the reader in the story, she becomes aware of how unexpected outcomes may become real. In brief, it enlightens the relevant features of social scenarios that remain in the shadows when they are exclusively addressed using quantitative models. The discussions in the classroom focused on the links between CSR situations depicted in the literature are central to benefitting from this approach. Seeing the literary pieces under analysis performed on the stage or the screen stimulates the study and adds vividness to the discussions.

We have argued in this chapter that literary fiction can be applied explicitly to the analysis of CSR by approaching literary works as case studies. Social conflicts are one of the most common themes in literary fiction. Often, corporations, businesspeople, and bankers are involved in them. Politics and the social organization establish the context that frames the troubles experienced by the fictional characters. The relationship between men and nature is also a frequent topic in literary works. Reading fiction with CSR in mind helps to understand the roots of unsustainable scenarios, including how self-interest generates them and how indifference paves the way for environmental and social conflicts. Interweaving the central knowledge of business studies with the analysis of the complex situations presented in the literature creates an intellectual synergy that widens the skills for understanding the world and makes students more mature.

Focusing specifically on *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Wild Duck*, we corroborate the usefulness of literary fiction to the study of CSR.

In both plays, we realize how unethical behavior hinders individual and social harmony. Social discrimination pervades Venetian Society in *The Merchant*. Shylock is a victim of it. However, through his attempted revenge on Antonio, he argues against the need for empathy or compassion and, thus, seals his own fate. Antonio feels forced to hide his homosexuality while he simultaneously discriminates against Shylock. On the other hand, Portia successfully fights against gender discrimination and allows us to glimpse another possible world where women and men have equal power. *The Wild Duck* masterfully conveys to the audience how the lack of respect for nature cannot be dissociated from self-centered human tendencies and frivolous feelings that, not surprisingly, are a source of suffering and even of tragedy for the weakest characters of the play. The contribution of both plays to the understanding of the connection between human feelings and sustainability shows the power of literary fiction for enlightening the study of social and environmental issues. In conclusion, the analysis of literary pieces from the point of view of CSR constitutes an excellent pedagogical instrument for conveying to students that a fair and sustainable world can be constructed and maintained only by people who make responsible decisions in both personal and business matters.

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