

BOOK REVIEW

Savannah Jensen
University of Georgia

Teaching Social Justice Through Shakespeare: Why Renaissance Literature Matters Now. Edited by Hillary Eklund and Wendy Beth Hyman. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019. 271 pp. \$110 (cloth); \$29.95 (paper); \$0 (Ebook-ePub and PDF). ISBN 978-1-4744-5558-9; ISBN 978-1-4744-5559-6; ISBN 978-1-4744-5561-9; ISBN 978-1-4744-5560-2.

Hillary Eklund and Wendy Beth Hyman's edited collection *Teaching Social Justice Through Shakespeare: Why Renaissance Literature Matters Now* asks two ambitious questions: how can we make Shakespeare relevant to the lives of our students, and how can we use his works as a tool for social change? The collection provides no single answer but instead offers many avenues for addressing these concerns.

The collection is separated into five sections; in each, the contributors reflect on their approaches to using Shakespeare for social change. The sections "Defamiliarizing Shakespeare" and "Decolonizing Shakespeare" focus on how Shakespeare's canonical status has often prevented students from fully engaging with his works. Some essays reflect on attempts to undermine this reverence, thereby helping student engagement. In others, authors consider experiences working in environments where they did not have to contend with Shakespeare's status, such as in Allison P. Hobgood's essay on teaching Shakespeare in Japan. She writes, "For nearly all of [my students], Shakespeare never mattered" (49). These chapters give insight into what teaching Shakespeare can look like when his status is removed as a barrier to student participation. Underpinning the sections "Ethical Queries and Practices" and "Revitalizing the Archive and Remixing Traditional Approaches" are questions about how Shakespeare's works can help us examine justice, who or what justice is for, and what this means in practice. The collection ends with "Shakespeare, Service, and Community," which asks how we can make Shakespeare relevant outside of the classroom and serve our wider communities.

By bringing a wide range of voices together, the collection normalizes having a socially just imperative among a class's learning goals and supports instructors who may at first find resistance to incorporating social justice within a Shakespeare or Renaissance class. I'd even argue that many of the chapters provide approaches to social justice that can be used beyond a class on Shakespeare. Debapriya Sarkar's contribu-

tion asks how conceptions of early modern worlds in Shakespearean drama, utopias, and romances can be linked to our own conceptions of just futures. Rachel Holmes's "Teaching *Serial* with Shakespeare: Using Rhetoric to Resist" provides strategies to help students analyze the rhetoric of the podcast *Serial* alongside *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*. She asks students, "[h]ow do we decide whom and what to believe? What factors are most influential in forming our opinion?" (151). These questions are powerful and applicable to texts beyond Shakespeare's. This collection is well worth sharing with colleagues who study different periods or work in different disciplines.

One of the strengths of the collection is that it provides easy-to-implement approaches to working through problems of social justice with students. Some chapters, such as Mary Jannell Metzger's "Shakespeare Tragedy, Ethics, and Social Justice," come close to providing a full outline of a course and teaching practices. Other chapters, such as Sawyer Kemp's "Shakespeare in Transition" and Kristen N. Mendoza's "Sexual Violence, Trigger Warnings, and the Early Modern Classroom," provide concrete ways of developing our pedagogy to be more mindful of the experiences of our students. Kemp's chapter acknowledges the limitations of reading transness into Shakespeare's crossdressing heroines. Kemp instead suggests reading Shakespeare's crossdressing heroines with texts that describe the realities of transition. This kind of textual pairing can help students both better understand the limitations of seeing gender as primarily indicated by clothing while also helping them to become better educated allies. Mendoza's chapter advocates for the use of trigger warnings to provide an equitable learning environment and shows how she uses trigger warnings to frame a lesson plan. This technique can prepare students for emotionally draining content. Such practices make incorporating social justice into the classroom more accessible for instructors who are just beginning to think about how to turn research about social justice into praxis.

But the authors in this collection share more than just their successes; they share their struggles as teachers as well. Jason M. Demeter candidly describes his experience teaching "African American Shakespeares": "despite the many fruitful conversations and moments of real insight that occurred throughout the semester, I cannot deem that class an outright success" (67). Demeter discusses his struggle to have his students decenter Shakespeare and see African American writing as legitimate responses to Shakespeare's work, not just as a derivative of it. Demeter's chapter serves as an important reminder that while there's much we can do as instructors to undermine the social hierarchies in which Shakespeare's work is deeply entrenched, doing so may be neither as easy nor as successful as we'd like. In a similar vein, Hillary Eklund's chapter "Shakespeare, Service Learning, and the Embattled Humanities," warns readers that "[t]here is a danger in assuming that anything happens suddenly in service learning, or that any insights occur without guided reflection. The benefits of service learning do not map easily onto rubrics with measurable outcomes" (192). Both these chapters, and others within the collection, serve as reminders that, while we don't always know what our students will take away from our courses, it remains within our purview to give them the time, space, and resources to work through the problems of injustice posed in Shakespeare's texts and in our lives.

My one critique of the book is the same that Ayanna Thompson raises in the epilogue: by providing a multitude of ways that individual instructors can use Shakespeare for social justice in their classrooms (the area where instructors have the most individual control), we risk forgetting that most social justice issues are systemic in nature. We cannot limit our thinking to our classrooms alone. If we want to effect change, we will need to collaborate beyond the classroom to call for more equitable departments, research institutions, universities, and communities.

With its focus on classroom instruction, I recommend this collection for high school teachers and college instructors who want their students to see Shakespeare as both relevant and as a tool for social change. Edinburgh University Press's decision to make this groundbreaking collection available for free as an eBook demonstrates the press's commitment to making sure that teaching social justice is not limited by an individual's financial means. What we do in the classroom matters, and *Teaching Social Justice Through Shakespeare* offers multiple ways to show students how the past is ever present while asking them to imagine more just futures.