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Chris Thurman and Sandra Young (eds.), *Global Shakespeare and Social Injustice. Towards a Transformative Encounter. The Arden Shakespeare.* London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2023. Pp. 269.

Reviewed by *Coen Heijes**

One of the latest publications diving into the relationship between Shakespeare and the topic of social (in)justice, bears as its subtitle “towards a transformative encounter.” It is an intriguing subtitle as it indicates on the one hand a process, a movement towards an encounter which has perhaps not yet fully materialized, if ever it will. Although we’re not there yet, the subtitle also suggests that the transformative encounter seems a possibility and that this publication may open up vistas of a fruitful encounter between Shakespeare and social injustice. This encounter then may somehow result in a transformation of Shakespeare theatre, pedagogy and scholarship. It is an ambitious subtitle and it most definitely wettened my appetite for a transformative encounter with the publication itself.

The publication had its roots in the eleventh Triennial Congress of the Shakespeare Society of Southern Africa, which took place in Cape Town in May 2019 and which included the academic conference, “Shakespeare and Social Justice: Scholarship and Performance in an Unequal World.” The two editors are likewise South African based, Chris Thurman at the University of the Witwatersrand and Sandra Young at the University of Cape Town. While the publication aims to address Global Shakespeare, the risk of basing oneself on post-conference essays inevitably means limiting oneself, which the editors also gracefully acknowledge. The authors of the eleven chapters comprising the volume are based at institutions in respectively South Africa (1), Canada (1), the United States (6), the United Kingdom (2) and Germany (1), which means that the traditional dominance of Anglophone academic institutions is, unfortunately, perpetuated in a volume dedicated to “Global” Shakespeare.

Through the essay in the volume, the editors aim at demonstrating “the potential for radically transformative work that more recent trends in Shakespeare studies and innovative theatre-making invite and enable” (p. 5). After a general introduction, the editors have organised the eleven essays in four different sections. The first part is titled “Scholarship and social justice. Questions for the field” and it comprises three essays, the first of which is by

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Susan Bennett (Rethinking “Global Shakespeare” for social justice). In it, she criticizes the Anglocentric approach to Global Shakespeare and its almost consumerist approach to non-English Shakespeare activities and challenges Shakespeareans to become more inclusive in confronting the challenges of our times. One of these challenges, the increased displacement of persons on account of climate change, war, persecution or poverty, is explored in the second chapter, in an essay by Linda Gregerson (Caliban in an era of mass migration). Gregerson explores the theme of Caliban, Sycorax, migration, postcolonialism, ownership and resistance by way of two twentieth-century novels which build upon *The Tempest: Water with Berries* by George Lamming (1971) and *Indigo* by Marina Warner (1992). Gregerson argues that Lamming’s novel replicates and intensifies the racial anxieties, the paranoia and brutality of colonized and colonizers and after the experience there is no way back to the previous “state of innocence or origin” (p. 46). In *Indigo*, where Warner changes the scene between the sixteenth and seventeenth century fictional Caribbean island of Liamuiga and twentieth century London, the tone is slightly more optimistic, Gregerson argues, although the themes of coming to terms with the disruptive and oppressive effects of colonial settlement and postcolonial sentiment are strongly felt. For Gregerson, the strength of these novels lies in moving beyond “polemically driven analysis [which] is unlikely to capture the full critical or contestatory powers of novels, plays and other literary form or performative modes of engagement” (p. 55). The essay by Alexa Alice Joubin (What makes Global Shakespeare an exercise in ethics) rounds off the first section by providing a wide overview of Shakespearean productions and arguing the necessity of context-based cultural meaning. Joubin rightfully argues against the problematic notion that the “global is imagined to be whatever the United States and the United Kingdom is not” (p. 71), a statement which gains even more strength in a volume dominated by academic institutions from these two countries.

The next three sections of the volume each engage with Shakespeare within a specific context related to social (in)justice. Part two is called “resisting racial logics” part three “imagining freedom with Shakespeare” and part four bears the title “scrutinizing gender and sexual violence.” Part two kicks off with an essay by Dyese Elliott-Newton, “Making whiteness out of ‘nothing’: The recurring comedic torture of (pregnant) Black women from medieval to modern.” The starting point of her essay lies in the treatment of a Black woman, eight months pregnant, who was arrested in 2015 in a parking lot after bringing her second grader to school. The officer forced her to the concrete, stomach first, ignoring her screams that she was pregnant. It’s a horrific image and Elliott-Newton draws upon medieval texts, in particular *Morkinskinna* (1220) as the birthplace of these stories and early modern texts as instruments of their propagation. Basing herself largely on Ben Jonson’s *Masque of Blackness* and

Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, in particular Act 3, scene 5, where Lancelot is accused of making a Black woman pregnant, Elliott-Newton argues how the Black woman's body "functions as a safe and useful space to bury the various social anxieties that challenge the 'perfection' and 'supremacy' of whiteness" (p. 83). The next two chapters in this section likewise build upon *Merchant of Venice* and link its characters and themes with present-day events to argue how and why the play still resonates so much across time and audiences. In chapter five (Feeling in justice. Racecraft and *The Merchant of Venice*), Derrick Higginbotham focuses in particular on the generally underexplored characters of Antonio and Gratiano to explore the topic of white fragility and white rage in their treatment of Shylock. In the final chapter of this section (Marking Muslims. The Prince of Morocco and the racialization of Islam in *The Merchant of Venice*) Hassana Moosa aims at demonstrating how Shakespeare racializes Islam by replacing the "theological essence with a series of cultural non-religious characteristics to produce the image of a 'Muslim'" (p. 121). In doing so, Moosa traces present-day Islamophobia back to Shakespeare's representation on the early modern stage of the Prince of Morocco. While one might argue that other Shakespeare plays should have been included as well in a section on racial logics, the bundling of the analysis around *The Merchant of Venice* does provide a clear focus and allows for cross-comparison, which helps tighten the argument.

Part three of the volume, engaging with imprisonment and Shakespeare, starts with an essay by Kai Wiegandt (Shakespeare in and on exile. Politicized reading and performative writing in the Robben Island Shakespeare) which discusses a series of markings made by the political prisoners on Robben Island to the secretly circulated copy of Shakespeare's works which was smuggled into the prison. Highlighting marked passages from *The Tempest*, *As You Like It*, *King Lear*, *Henry V* and *Hamlet* Wiegandt explores the interaction between exile, banishment, nationalism and colonization within the context of apartheid and South Africa. In the second essay of part three ("Men at some time are masters of their fates." The Gallowfield Players perform *Julius Caesar*) Rowan Mackenzie reveals the potential for healing and moving beyond the designated prisoner role that acting can have on inmates, in this specific case by zooming in on the production by a prison-group company in 2019 of *Julius Caesar*. While fully aware that Shakespeare is far from a panacea, Mackenzie highlights the joy and pride the production brought to actors and audiences.

The final part of the volume, engaging with gender and sexual violence in relation to Shakespeare's plays, starts with an essay by Kirsten Dey (The "sign and semblance of her honour." Petrarchan slander and gender-based violence in three Shakespearean plays) which discusses the potential for destructiveness in Petrarchan rhetoric and gendered romantic idealization. In doing so, Dey bases herself on *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Cymbeline* and *Othello*. In this comedy, romance and tragedy, Dey argues, Shakespeare created

disenchanted and (potentially) violent Petrarchan lovers and ultimately “makes a case for justice for women, thereby calling upon the audience—then and now—to take urgent action” (p. 190). In chapter 10 (Open-gendered casting in Shakespeare performance), Abraham Stoll explores the increasing normalization of open-gendered casting by discussing two productions of the University of San Diego Shiley Graduate Theatre Program, *Julius Caesar* in 2018 and *Twelfth Night* in 2019. In a detailed case-study, he discusses the casting, dramaturgical and acting choices and how they worked at being more than “mere commentaries on gender politics but as productions that engaged with the full gamut of emotions and ideas that are to be found in such great plays” (p. 220). In the final chapter of the volume (Teaching *Titus Andronicus* and Ovidian myth when sexual violence is on the public stage) Wendy Beth Hyman explores another case study, this time that of a classroom working on *Titus Andronicus* at the time when the controversial Brett Kavanaugh hearings for the Supreme Court took place. It is an impressive essay, in which the voices of students themselves are also heard, that touches upon tough questions revolving around whether or not we ought to teach works of art that dramatize rape and brutality, and if so, how. Hyman offers her essay as an encouragement to her “fellow teacher-scholars who are never sure whether to avoid or dive into these really tough issues—the deaths, the national tragedies, the scandals, the crises on-campus and off” (p. 245). Her answer to the question is an unequivocal yes and it is fitting that a volume dedicated to social (in)justice should end with this essay. If there’s any place in which we, as Shakespearean scholars, can make a difference, it would be in the intimacy of the classroom tackling beauty and ugliness head-on. And while I might argue this volume as a whole has caveats, such as the lack of non-Anglophone institutions, most of these caveats are unavoidable in publications on Shakespeare and social (in)justice. The terrain covered is so wide and diverse that it is virtually impossible to be complete and coherent. Having said that, this is a vibrant, relevant and thoughtful selection of essays which highlight both the potential and the pitfalls in working with Shakespeare to address the challenges that face us today. We need many more of these books.