

## Abstract

### Writing/Righting Wrongs: Social Justice through YA Shakespearean Adaptation

As the most renowned author within the literary canon, Shakespeare is an educational priority for most American high schools, prompting many educationally-focused YA adaptations throughout the twentieth century. In the last three years, however, YA authors have begun to turn to Shakespeare to inspire and empower their teenage readers. Retelling Shakespeare's stories through the eyes and voices of diverse casts that reflect our current society allows teenage readers to see themselves represented in this literature, yet it also allows for this literature to represent our current society and the movements that shape it. This paper examines three recent YA adaptations of Shakespeare that explore themes of social justice and connect to issues dominating our political, societal, and cultural moment. E.K. Johnston's *Exit Pursued by a Bear* (2016) adapts Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and tackles sexual assault and its aftermath, creating space to have important conversations in the #MeToo era. Barbara Dee's *Star-Crossed* (2017) centers on young women confronting their sexualities and understanding their LGBTQ+ identities around the framework of *Romeo and Juliet*. Cat Winterson's *The Steep and Thorny Way* (2016), an adaptation of *Hamlet*, explores racial tensions in 1920s America and reveals the unfortunate similarities between that time and our own. In this climate of fear, conflict, and division, YA authors have turned to Shakespeare not to educate, but to legitimize and speak to the experiences of today's teens.