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## Violence of and for the Child in Child and Adolescent Adaptations of *Macbeth*

Laura Bjankini, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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### ABSTRACT

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Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is one of the least frequently adapted Shakespeare plays for children and young adults and for good reason. The play relies on real and imagined violence about and against children to advance the plot. *Macbeth* also contains traditionally problematic topics such as childbirth, sex, sexism, suicide, execution, and most notably, murder. Despite this, adaptations of *Macbeth* continue to circulate in child and adolescent libraries. Each adaptation examined in this paper, including Ian Lendler and Zack Giallongo's *Stratford Zoo Midnight Revue Presents: Macbeth*, Tina Packer and Barry Moser's *Tales from Shakespeare*, and Gareth Hinds' *Macbeth*, however, heavily relies on censorship, be it through moralizing unjust moments of violence, oversimplifying language, or lacking graphic detail in order to accomplish their purpose: communicate the plot and supposed moral lessons of *Macbeth* to young people. In this paper, I argue that regardless of its problematic themes, there seems to be something inherently worthwhile in *Macbeth* to teach our children despite its violence and problematic themes.

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### KEYWORDS

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Macbeth, Shakespeare, Adaptation, Children's Literature, Censorship

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“There are plenty of reasons that *Macbeth* is not suitable for children” - Marina Gerzić

## Introduction

*Macbeth* is one of the least frequently adapted Shakespeare plays for children and young adults for good reason. Much of the plot hinges on real and imagined violence against children, both in language and in onstage and offstage action. It also contains traditionally problematic topics for young audiences including childbirth, sex, sexism, suicide, execution, and murder. Despite the ever-changing and increasingly problematic contexts, child and adolescent adaptations of Shakespeare’s most violent plays (like *Macbeth*) prevail, albeit with significant censorship, seeming to argue that regardless of problematic themes, there is something inherently worthwhile in Shakespeare to teach our children.

In November of 2018, parents and pastors in Mitchell County, North Carolina, led a prayer meeting for high school students following Parkway Playhouse’s performance of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, Abridged* at the local high school. In the apology letter from the Toe River Arts Council who took part in producing the play, the Council said their intent was for the play to be funny, educational, appropriate, and to replicate how Shakespeare’s plays were performed. An executive director from the school district shut down the play mid-performance, citing that it depicted characters drinking from a flask, and suicide (WLOS). Although this play was not specifically about *Macbeth* but Shakespeare generally, this incident suggests that elements within *Macbeth*, such as drinking and suicide, are intensely controversial for young, modern audiences, warranting censorship, suppression, and sometimes prayer. Many of the controversial topics in adaptations of *Macbeth* for young audiences are not only instrumental to the play’s plot but aimed towards real and imagined children, further complicating adaptation for young audiences. Addressing the play’s unsuitability head-on, critic Laura Tosi concludes that “the implied child reader of this play is therefore confronted with a text that problematizes childhood is perhaps an understatement” (73). Child and adolescent adaptations of *Macbeth* must directly engage with topics historically problematic for young audiences, often amidst backlash and controversy.

In addition to its problematic themes, *Macbeth*’s content is generally unfamiliar to young audiences. Unlike young, star-crossed love and teenage rebellion in *Romeo and Juliet*, children and young adults cannot easily relate to the subject matter of *Macbeth*. The younger the

audience, the more adaptations adapt in order to appeal to a young readership, using familiar themes, images, and mediums while censoring potentially problematic content. Adaptations often flatten the major issues, oversimplify conflict to a relationship between good and evil, clearly define characters' motivations, and ignore, gloss over, or completely omit images and language that could potentially be deemed inappropriate for young audiences – especially real and imagined violence against children. *Macbeth* is a seemingly unlikely play to adapt for children and adolescents based on its complexities, problematic themes, and violence directed towards children. Therefore, it elicits the question of why adapt such a violent and unfamiliar play for children in the first place?

The violence in *Macbeth* not only centers around the murder of real and hypothetical children but is persistent and striking. The play begins with a bloody soldier who states that Macbeth acted with “bloody execution” until “he unseamed [Macdonwald] from the nave to th’ chops” and ends with the presentation of Macbeth’s severed head (1.2.20-24, 5.8.66). In between, the plot fixates on children: born and unborn, dead and alive, and subject to fantasies of infanticide and murder. Vocabulary often associated with childhood and motherhood describe violent acts and thoughts, such as when Lady Macbeth criticizes Macbeth’s lack of ambition, saying he “is too full o’ th’ milk of human kindness” (Shakespeare 1.5.17-33). In order to overcome any possible remorse, Lady Macbeth says, “make thick my blood... Come to my woman’s breasts / And take my milk for gall” (1.5.47-55). Lady Macbeth continues, actively convincing Macbeth to kill Duncan using language associated with motherhood, pressuring him to uphold his promise, for if she promised to act, she would. She states, “how tender ‘tis to love the babe that milks me. / I would, while it was smiling in my face, / Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums / And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you / Have done to this” (1.7.61-67). Although the Macbeths are said to be heirless in the prophecy and implied to be childless at the time through metaphorical language (“barren scepter in my grip” and “I have given suck” (1.5.47, 3.1.67)), Lady Macbeth speaks of infanticide by means of suffocation with her breast. Although violence against children is imaginary in this instance, characters consistently speak of violence in terms of children and motherhood. Compounded with the fact that the plot’s progression depends upon the continuation of a familial line of heirs resulting in the murder of Banquo and attempted murder of Fleance, *Macbeth* becomes a tale of and about the killing of children.

Implied violence against children continues beyond the final act. With Banquo's dying breath, he calls out to his young son, Fleance, for revenge (3.3.26). This revenge would prevent any of Malcom's heirs (or Malcom himself) from becoming king – a direct request for a child to commit murder. Fleance would take the throne, fulfilling Banquo's part of the prophecy. In other words, "blood will have blood" (3.4.152). Arguably, the most significant moment of violence of or against children within the play's action is when Macbeth murders the Macduff family, including his only son. Not only is violence against children discussed hypothetically with Lady Macbeth and attempted with Fleance, but it occurs during the play with the Macduff family and is implied in the future with Banquo's call for revenge. Violence is often framed within terms of childhood; much of the action depends on the spilling of children's blood during the events of the play and afterwards.

And yet *Macbeth* has been adapted for children in a range of genres throughout history,<sup>1</sup> indicating that audiences and authors believe that there is something inherently valuable in the play to teach to young people. However, children receive adapted versions in which violence is censored, omitted, or altered. This suggests that although *Macbeth* is deemed worthwhile for young audiences, the amount of child brutality is problematic enough to warrant censorship – either by way of simplified vernacular, lack of or cartooning of images, and altering of the plot, etc. Although individuals have recirculated *Macbeth* throughout history, including within children's and young adult libraries, the primary plot device of violence against children is censored frequently, implying that there is something beyond the violence that is valuable for young audiences.

Examining why a play like *Macbeth* is adapted in the first place and how Shakespeare is generally adapted for young people provides an opportunity to better understand what stories we want children and young adults to consume, through what mediums, and using what language, thereby informing us about what we believe is important to teach our children. Although adaptations of Shakespeare are not a new phenomenon, authors are adapting Shakespeare's works for a new generation of children and young adults in new mediums and contexts. It is worth considering how and why they are reproduced to better understand what we value enough to keep retelling and reproducing Shakespeare stories in these new mediums to our youngest and

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<sup>1</sup> Beginning with Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*, written in 1807.

most impressionable of audiences.

To answer these questions, I plan to examine three adaptations' form and content, focusing on their representation (or lack thereof) of violence against children. This essay focuses on three separate adaptations: Ian Lendler and Zack Giallongo's *Stratford Zoo Midnight Revue Presents Macbeth*, Tina Packer and Barry Moser's *Tales from Shakespeare, Macbeth*, and Gareth Hinds' graphic novel adaptation of *Macbeth*. Each adaptation grapples with the issue of violence in novel ways, and when examined together, are helpful for understanding how *Macbeth* is being repackaged for young audiences. This essay exclusively examines textual adaptation not because stage adaptation is unworthy of consideration but because children rarely encounter Shakespeare for the first time as a member of an audience at a stage production. Even though others are interested in similar questions regarding adaptation of Shakespeare for young audiences, few examine *Macbeth* specifically or through these selected primary texts. Fewer examine the issue of violence against children in a children's retelling. Reading adaptations alongside critical scholarship on the subject of child and adolescent adaptation of Shakespeare will inform the extent to which violence is censored in these adaptations and for what purpose.

Numerous scholars have contributed to the discourse surrounding Shakespearean adaptation throughout history, including within the last two decades.<sup>2</sup> Douglas Lanier outlines the major terminology of Shakespearean adaptation and its existence within a larger socioeconomic context and popular cultural consciousness in *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture*. Amongst an extensive discussion of Shakespeare adaptations, Lanier explores terminology of adaptation generally. He claims that the very language used to describe an adaptation significantly influences how we read, watch, and consume it. Therefore, we should be cognizant of terminology, including the terminology used in this essay. He notes that words carry connotations and histories and speak to the consumer's perception of a particular retelling. In this paper, I primarily utilize 'adaptation' as it implies that only some aspects of "setting, idiom, plot, or character have been altered and that the essence of the original remains intact" (Lanier 4). This most closely describes the child and adolescent adaptations to be analyzed in this essay in that they make an effort to tell the major plot points of *Macbeth* with (mostly) minor adjustments in form and setting. Retellings maintain an aspect of authenticity of the source material – a close-

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<sup>2</sup> Including (but not limited to) Douglas Lanier, Mark Thornton Burnett et. al., Diana E. Henderson, and Naomi Miller.

to-source-text reproduction. Reinventions speak to a shift between cultural statures, or a complete overhaul of contexts and thought processes. Lanier situates reinvention historically, emphasizing the ‘re’ of “*re-invention*” (5). Reinventions refer to alterations made depending on contexts and audiences. Appropriation, however, privileges the original as correct, framing Shakespeare as immobile, intellectual property (5). As Shakespeare’s stories recirculate in new forms and mediums, appropriation is becoming increasingly harder to justify – not to mention that Shakespeare himself lifted ideas from other source texts to use for his commercial purposes. Lanier describes this as “textual poaching” (52). Even the word “Shakespeare” now encompasses anything from the bard himself to children’s books to stage performances; anything that is somewhat related to Shakespeare is contained within that term (8). Shakespeare has become popularized, appropriated, adapted, and reinvented, and the array of language used to describe these processes hint at the frequency and prevalence of such processes. The discourse and vocabulary surrounding Shakespearean adaptation are clearly complicated and depend largely on context, including socioeconomic conditions and audience considerations which Lanier and other authors, including Diana E. Henderson and Amy Scott-Douglass, consider.

In Henderson’s “From Popular Entertainment to Literature,” Henderson outlines the relationship between popular culture, high culture, and profit regarding Shakespearean adaptation. She considers how and why Shakespeare was adapted in the first place, focusing both on the economic situation of the theater and its place between high and popular culture. Other scholars explore adaptations of Shakespeare for young audiences, including Amy Scott-Douglass in her essay, “Shakespeare for Children” and Kevin J. Wetmore in his article “Shakespeare and Teenagers.” Prior to examining the specifics of Shakespearean adaptation for young audiences and closely reading primary material, it is necessary to understand how and why Shakespeare emerged in popular culture, eventually landing in children’s books. I will use the terms outlined in the following secondary material, particularly Lanier, Scott-Douglass, and Wetmore, to read and situate the primary sources.

## Shakespeare in Popular Culture

Although Shakespeare has thoroughly permeated contemporary popular culture, Lanier states that the public still primarily perceives Shakespeare as “*the icon of high or ‘proper’ culture*” (3). However, Shakespeare neither originated within high culture nor currently exists primarily in

genres and contexts of high culture. This tension between how we view Shakespeare as exemplary of high culture and how it actually exists in popular culture illustrates how Shakespeare simultaneously represents and undermines high society (Lanier 4). Henderson situates this concept historically, noting how the plays were performed “alongside whorehouses and animal-baiting arenas but also before queens and kings at court” (7-9). People of all levels of social status attended Shakespeare’s plays and were represented on stage. The plays represented what common folk wanted to see while challenging the rigidity of socioeconomic class experience. Any actor could portray anyone – from a king to a porter, and as Shakespeare emerged in new mediums, his work only appealed to a wider audience, including children and young adults.

Although Shakespeare has always appealed to a popular audience, his work has also generated controversy and conflict between upper and lower classes. Lanier considers how popular culture is representative of what a majority of people consume while exemplifying what a higher class (the producer of the content) deems popular, stemming from what he calls the “culture industry,” a form of business elite who determines and profits from what people consume (5). Henderson, like Lanier, stresses that theater existed primarily to make money. And to make money, it had to appeal to what people wanted to see. Questions of profit therefore drive decisions about media. What is popular is determined both by the general public and by the elite. For this reason, determining whether or not something is “popular” culture is complicated and based heavily on systems of socioeconomic status and consumerism. Both consumers and producers contribute to this process, ultimately collaboratively determining what is appropriate to produce and for what audiences.

Because of this phenomenon of needing to appeal to the general population to sell tickets, theater “encouraged representations of ‘lower class’ experiences and opinions... [and] provided an adaptable occasion to defend the common people’s perspective” (Henderson 13). Shakespeare only became synonymous with the high class experience with the publishing of the (rather expensive) First Folio. Prior, Shakespeare represented what the people wanted to see at the time – a spectacle of violence, humor, or love. Shakespeare negotiated what the people wanted and what the elite produced (or could produce) within their given confines. Working within the sphere of popular culture did not come without consequences; for example, English theatres were periodically shut down for a range of reasons, one justification made in 1612 arguing that

“unruliness onstage is held responsible for unruliness beyond it” (Henderson 10). Fear of the transfer of “unruliness” remains true for children and young adult adaptation; laws, rating systems, and parental limitations restrict what children can consume for fear of them replicating observed behaviors – the very same concern in the 1600s. This undoubtedly contributes to the censorship in textual adaptations for young audiences to this day, especially in the context of violence.

Although adaptation of Shakespeare is widespread and not a historical oddity, it is not necessarily widely accepted. This applies to both Shakespeare purists and a general audience. Lanier describes the source of this unacceptance, stating that popular culture Shakespeare, or “Shakespop,” is “relatively unburdened with worries about historical accuracy, interpretive precision, or faithfulness to the letter of Shakespeare’s scripts . . . [and] is at best an amusing form of kitsch and at worst a travesty that threatens to displace the real thing” (9). Shakespop departs from the folioed, high-brow Shakespeare. Adaptations for young people certainly undermine “the very principles of aesthetic and moral cultivation for which Shakespeare is symbol and vehicle,” focusing instead on “what is titillating, violent, archaic, banal, or silly” (Lanier 100). Through this process of adaptation, Shakespeare further enters the realm of popular culture. Rather than consider child and adolescent adaptations of Shakespeare travesty, adaptations are particularly worthwhile because of precisely this insight into the relationship between high and low. Modern adaptations are situated in the space between high and popular culture and when examined, provide an opportunity for careful analysis of what is valued by either group. In the case of the representation or censorship of violence within child and adolescent adaptation, it informs us of what values we wish to instill in our children, particularly how violence should or should not be taught and read by our children for fear of reproducing said “unruliness.”

### **Shakespeare in Print**

Shakespeare’s shift from the stage to the page was a result of much of the above discussion on its place among individuals of varying socioeconomic status and the stigma of the playhouse as a purveyor of unruliness. Lanier claims that putting a play to print creates a permanent literary quality that simply cannot emerge from a performance alone (24). As opposed to experiencing Shakespeare in the theater, audiences began engaging with his plays in new ways: first in folios



and quartos and eventually in film, fanfiction, self-help books, fiction novels, insult books, picture books, storybooks, graphic novels, etc. Although Shakespeare is widely available now in a plethora of forms, its initial publishing largely contributed to its solidification in the literary canon as exemplary of high culture. The act of printing the plays opened the door for Shakespeare's place within the literary canon, simultaneously creating and upholding its status. Only after Shakespeare emerged in new mediums did he once again converge with popular culture and make adaptation and criticism permissible once again.

Despite modern Shakespeare having exited the stage and settling between high and pop culture, readers tend to first experience Shakespeare within institutions and spaces that uphold the notion of Shakespeare as exemplary of high culture and teach it for its perceived literary value (Lanier 51). However, schools are increasingly leaning on texts such as *No Fear Shakespeare* and *OMG Shakespeare* in conjunction with the source text, slowly departing from the notion that Shakespeare is the height of culture. Despite Shakespeare being firmly embedded in the literary canon, young people are now experiencing Shakespeare in its unruliness and debauchery through new mediums, new interpretations, and new contexts. They are just now interacting with Shakespeare as Shakespop. Although this process of reproducing and adapting Shakespeare within new mediums and for younger audiences is not new, expectations of audience appropriateness and patterns of revision have changed. Several authors are interested in the choices that modern storytellers make while adapting Shakespeare for children and adolescents.

### **Adaptations of Shakespeare for Young Audiences**

Amy Scott-Douglass, for example, offers a history of Shakespeare adaptation for children since 1807; her insights are also applicable to very recent adaptations, however. Scott-Douglass argues for the adaptation of Shakespeare for children for their lessons and social commentary. At the same time, she, as well as Tosi, realize that there are issues with oversimplification, including flattening violence, simplifying characters' motivations, and streamlining moral lessons into a debate of good vs. evil (Scott-Douglass 350-51; Tosi 76). The source of Macbeth's desires is unclear, and therefore the violence that ensues has imprecise origins. To combat this, authors turn the story into a prose narrative in which moments of potential uncertainty are explained away, moralizing to make Shakespeare more appropriate for children (Tosi 74). Scott-Douglass

writes that “few early children’s adaptors have a problem with violence per se. Instead, they are opposed to violence that is not justified or punished, violence that does not fit into a larger moral framework” (352). *Macbeth* certainly fits this description, particularly with the murder of the Macduff family. To justify unjust violence, authors add a narrator and use simplified language, explaining away any questionable decisions. In “Just Shakespeare! Adapting *Macbeth* for Children’s Literature,” Marina Gerzic considers exactly how adaptations change to appeal to and censor for young readers. She claims that adaptations often utilize narration and directly explain characters’ motivations, unfamiliar language, and theatrical conventions. Using these methods, adaptations flatten and justify much of the potentially problematic moments while retelling main plot points and maintaining aspects of traditional theater such as dialogue and audience interaction. The issue, according to Scott-Douglass, Tosi, and Gerzic, is not that violence exists in the source text but how violence is rationalized within adaptations. Ambiguity and moral uncertainty are central to Shakespeare’s plays, but they seem unacceptable for young audiences based on how they are adapted. It seems that unjustified violence is vastly different from rationalized violence when adapting for a young audience. Glib moralizing, then, appears to be the agenda of adaptations for young audiences. This will only become clearer through close reading primary texts, particularly *Stratford Zoo Macbeth* and *Tales from Shakespeare Macbeth*.

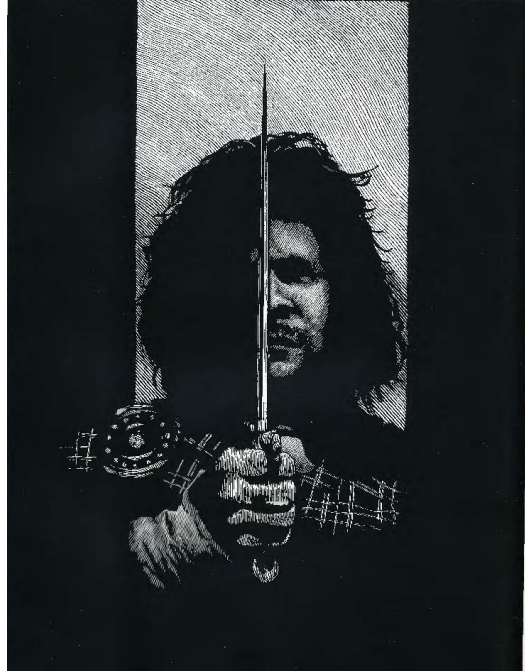
Despite seeing value in repackaging Shakespeare’s moral lessons to children, Scott-Douglass criticizes the long-held belief that “all Shakespeare is inherently worthwhile and needs to be adapted no matter what... the outline of the story *must* be presented, to our young readers” (354). She argues the difference between early and modern children’s Shakespeare adaptations is that early adapters were conscious that they were shaping children, but now, many “disavow the part they might play in using Shakespeare to inculcate good morals or to ‘correct’ behavior” (374). Because of this, she argues that censorship is prevalent in twenty-first-century children’s Shakespeare and particularly problematic plays are avoided so that Shakespeare can still be advertised as being inherently ‘good’ for children (374). Nobody would adapt Shakespeare for children or buy those adaptations if they didn’t believe that something in Shakespeare was worthwhile to teach despite the violence. Scott-Douglass makes her uneasiness with this sentiment evident, likely because the cultural and literary authority of Shakespeare is so socially and historically situated within the canon by institutions and economic systems that uphold its literary value.

Kevin J. Wetmore advances the discussion to teenagers in his article “Shakespeare and Teenagers.” Rather than oversimplification, he states that the primary areas of interest in young adult adaptation are in relatability and accessibility, particularly in the context of education (Wetmore 379). Relevancy is achieved “by focusing on the teenage elements present within Shakespeare’s work, or translating Shakespeare’s work into something recognizably ‘teen,’ something recognizably ‘cool’” (379). By translating original text into modern language and/or slang and by reducing the amount of text while clinging to relatable themes, Shakespeare becomes accessible (379). Without doing so, Wetmore claims writers worry teenagers will fear Shakespeare or find it boring (379). To achieve readability and relatability, some adaptations borrow from popular in teen culture “just as popular culture has appropriated Shakespeare” (381). *Macbeth* presents singular difficulties for teen adaptation, then, due to a lack of relatable themes and an unfamiliar language. Shannon R. Mortimore-Smith also considers the benefits of utilizing aspects of teen culture to teach Shakespeare in her essay, “Shakespeare Gets Graphic: Reinventing Shakespeare Through Comics, Graphic Novels, and Manga.” She identifies that what makes Shakespeare worthwhile is also what makes it complex – the words (Mortimore-Smith 82). She suggests that graphic novel adaptations of Shakespeare offer more than just a gateway into Shakespeare; rather, they are worthy of consideration in their own right. Gareth Hinds’ graphic novel adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* exemplifies Wetmore and Mortimore-Smith’s statements on how Shakespeare is made accessible to adolescents in its inclusion of images to aid in reading the text and its more familiar (and “cool”) form.

### **Macbeth in Children’s Adaptation**

Tina Packer’s *Tales from Shakespeare* is a storybook anthology of adapted Shakespeare retellings. Her adaptation of *Macbeth* retells the entire plot; it contains every major point of conflict, includes internal struggle, maintains a theme of violence against children, and utilizes several of the more famous quotes. Packer communicates the plot of *Macbeth* by limiting details in both images and text, favoring plain, prose narration, allowing her to convey all aspects of the plot while omitting or glossing over problematic themes. This version is told in a total of thirteen pages, containing only two black and white images – one that depicts Macbeth and one that depicts a serpent encircling a sword (Moser 66, 83). The text contains few descriptive details but clearly explains characters’ motivations. Matter-of-fact language and prose narration almost

entirely deliver the plot and state moments of violence, except for the occasional direct quote from the source material. In this version, not a single moment of violence is cut from the play, but every instance of violence lacks description. This version communicates the entire plot to readers, leaving nothing to the imagination but manages to censor nearly every problematic moment by failing to describe it or provide images. As a result, this adaptation simultaneously includes and avoids all violence. This could be attributed to the limitations of the form of the storybook in that each story is short, containing few images by definition. But, regardless,



Packer's adaptation is unique in its ability to include everything without actually giving readers the time or description to visualize or think about what is happening in the text.

The play begins, retelling the story of a “bloody rebellion” where Macbeth had “slain the revolt’s leader,” quickly introducing the witches as “three grotesque, rag-clad figures” (Packer 69). These sentiments are exemplary of how violence is characterized in this adaptation; it is briefly but frequently mentioned. The revolt was bloody, the leader was slain, and the witches were grotesque. Also, rather than relying on names or costumes to designate characters, a narrator directly communicates characters’ relationships and actions.

For example, when the story introduces Banquo, he is called “Banquo, the Scottish general who rode alongside [Macbeth]” (69). The narrator also explicitly defines motivations. For example, after having heard the prophecy, the narrator speaks: “one had now come true...Would the other? Would Macbeth someday take Duncan’s place? And how might that come to pass? He wondered...[Duncan] had two healthy sons, both in line for the throne” (71). While this still implies violence by mentioning Duncan’s sons and violent language (the words “blood” and “bloody” are used repeatedly throughout this adaptation), it lacks further description or

explanation. Violence is present but not dwelled upon. The most graphic moments come from direct quotation from the source text and include but are not limited to the “milk of human kindness” and “is this a dagger” speeches (72, 73).

In addition, *Tales from Shakespeare's Macbeth* uses children to advance the plot in alignment with the source text. Duncan's sons are mentioned on the first page, the Macbeths are described as having no children, and much of the text involves discussion of Fleance as heir to the throne: “and the witches had said nothing about *their* heirs,” “if it be so, for Banquo's children have I defiled my soul,” “Fleance was young. There was still time to take care of him” (Packer 75, 76). During the cauldron scene, a bloody infant emerges and tells Macbeth that none of woman born shall harm him. The child is described as a “blood-covered infant” (78). The third apparition was also a child, telling Macbeth about Birnam Wood and Dunsinane (78). Immediately following the new prophecy, Macbeth decides to kill Macduff's family to make him “wish himself dead” (79). The text does not describe the Macduff murders nor what the bloody infant looks like in detail. However, the text does include each significant plot point, including those involving children but lacks description or images to aid in a reader's understanding or analysis. These moments are neither ignored nor fully recognized.

The most significant censorship aside from a general omission of violent details and images is Lady Macbeth's suicide. The only mention of her suicide is that she “is dead by her own hand.” Macbeth briefly mourns her and states the “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing” line (Packer 80-81). This omission avoids the topic almost entirely. Because so many of the play's events are explained in a matter-of-fact tone, much of the emotional effect and moral ambiguity disappear. Although the adaptation includes Lady Macbeth's suicide similarly to how it appears in the original text (it occurs offstage and without much grief), this moment departs from Packer's established conventions of explaining confusing or violent moments but doing so plainly. Lady Macbeth's suicide seems easy to miss due to a lack of matter-of-fact explanation. In contrast, when Macduff confronts Macbeth, the line, “Macduff was from his mother's womb untimely ripped” remains intact, and the narrator explains that “Macduff had had a cesarean birth. In this narrow sense, he was not of woman born” (82). Here, the narrator fully explains the nuances of this aspect of the prophecy and explicitly discusses what not being born of woman means to an audience that had likely not yet been taught where babies come from. Suicide is included but glossed over whereas a cesarean section birth is explained fully and literally spelled

out – the author opting for “cesarean birth” rather than “c-section.” All aspects of violence against children (as well as general talk of parenthood, motherhood, and suicide) are maintained, albeit dampened through vague prose.

In *Stratford Zoo Midnight Revue Presents Macbeth* by Ian Lendler and Zack Giallongo, Shakespeare’s tragedy takes the form of a children’s picture book in which zoo animals escape their cages to stage performances of Shakespeare’s plays at night. It is the first book in a series of two that retells Shakespearean tragedy through this method. Although a children’s picture book, it frames the story as if it were a live stage performance, complete with an audience and reactions. It maintains some aspects of stage performance that are frequently lost in textual adaptation such as audience interaction and awareness, intermission, and the use of fake blood (ketchup). The majority of the plot is prose dialogue or narration, containing only small excerpts of famous lines or vocabulary of tragedy throughout. Of the three adaptations explored in this paper, the plot of *Macbeth* is most altered in this version. This text censors murder, suicide, the origin of children, and implies only one death. The book opens with a comical misspelling of “written by Willy Shakespeer,” corrected to read “Willy Shakespeare” (Lendler and Giallongo, 1). If the premise of the book did not do enough to set the tone, this misspelling does; this book is not meant to be a true-to-text retelling of *Macbeth* but a comical version friendly to children with some jokes only parents would catch.

The book first features a scene of animals like a giraffe, a skunk, and a seagull as groundlings near a stage. Some are selling items such as peanuts, earthworms and “rotting carrion” (Lendler and Giallongo, 2-3). The *OED* defines carrion as “a dead body; a corpse or carcass,” cited as “obsolete” (sense 1). Here, gore and censorship first appear in the play. It is doubtful that children (and many adults) would know the meaning of carrion. This shows the book’s self-awareness of the reality of what animals eat but does so in a way that most children would not understand, thereby censoring it. The inclusion of an interactive audience in the pit of the playhouse is true to original practices, but as the story continues, sections of the book change perspective to include just the action on stage, shifting the audience to the background until the audience makes further comments. Including an audience in a textual adaptation of *Macbeth* is uncommon, particularly with children and young adult adaptation. Including an audience, combined with comic-book-like panels and vivid images produces an immersive, play-like experience. However, this version departs from the original in its retelling of the story, especially

in how violence is represented – or not represented.

Macbeth, played by a lion, is the hero at the beginning of the story. He is said to fight battles heroically, dress heroically, eat breakfast heroically, and kiss Lady Macbeth (a cheetah) heroically (Lendler and Giallongo 5). He is even offered a “hero gyro” (full of ketchup) from a street vendor (6). A narrator presents this information to readers, clearly defining him as the hero. This moment is one example of how *Stratford Zoo* clearly explains characters and how they should be understood by readers. In addition to narrating potential ambiguities, adaptations of Shakespeare for children and young adults also simplify Shakespearean language to a modern vernacular and eliminate poetic meter. This book is no exception; unfamiliar concepts and words are translated into a form and vocabulary that are accessible without footnotes or further explanation. *Stratford Zoo’s Midnight Revue Macbeth* mimics a graphic novel: it has panels, speech bubbles, clear and colorful images, and narrations that make it easy to understand. Despite the book’s physical form and narration, it most closely resembles a stage performance, implying that the author and publisher found it important to reproduce qualities of stage performance in a picture book.

The first major intervention in plot is that the king, an owl, rewards Macbeth’s success in battle by giving him “the world’s largest hot dog.” Macbeth claims to be bored with the same food - he is hungry for something else (Lendler and Giallongo 7). He follows a smell, drawn by a line of purple smoke, with his friend Banksy, a hyena, to a swamp where he meets the witches (8-9). The witches’ prophecy begins “double, double, toil and trouble, fire burn and cauldron bubble,” borrowing directly from Shakespeare, diverging with the next lines, “eat the king, the plot will thicken, go on Macbeth, he tastes like chicken,” referencing the king as an owl (10). On the next page, Macbeth makes the realization that he is “hungry for... POWER” (11). “Power” is capitalized and placed within a red speech bubble, signaling the turn of the plot to violent events. The story utilizes hunger as a primary motivating desire in conjunction with power. Hunger is explained as a metaphor for power. Macbeth returns to his wife and tells her of the prophecy. She is intrigued by the thought of giving orders, wearing a crown, and sitting atop a throne, simplifying her motivations. In this version of the play, Lady Macbeth convinces her husband by making him read a book entitled “100 Ways to Cook a King” and constant nagging rather than giving the milk of human kindness and dash’d the brains out speech (14-15).

Although the imagined dagger scene is present, it is censored. Rather than a dagger,

Macbeth sees a set of silverware above the door of an imagined diner. The narrator then says, “what followed was horrible and gruesome and definitely the best scene of the whole play” (Lendler and Giallongo 19). However, to the frustration of the audience, when the page is flipped, an elephant blocks the stage, looking for his seat, red splatter behind him. An animal in the audience asks their mother what the “red stuff” is, and she says that it is “just ketchup” (21). This is confirmed on the next page when Macbeth says he had to use ketchup because the king tasted poorly. Lady Macbeth is later tasked with getting the ketchup stains out (the spot) of Macbeth’s clothes . Meanwhile, detective Macduff, a stork (not born from a mother), further confirms that the ‘blood’ was ketchup (24). Macduff immediately suspects Macbeth, and Banksy remembers that the witches said this would happen (27). Macbeth eats Banksy, fearing his suspicion.

As opposed to ghosts emerging during the banquet, Macbeth’s stomach begins to talk, signaling to readers that neither the king nor Banksy are really dead. Here, potential moments of violence are retracted by signaling that the characters are actually alive and well inside of Macbeth. To combat her husband talking to his stomach, Lady Macbeth offers him ketchup, but he responds by banning it from the castle (Lendler and Giallongo 36). It could be inferred that Macbeth feels overwhelming guilt because of what he has done, and ketchup is a reminder of that violence. Feeling his guilt, the narrator tells the audience that Macbeth is going to begin a long, dramatic, and important speech. However, the zookeeper returning to the zoo to clean interrupts Macbeth (39-41). He skips the rest of the soliloquy per the requests of the audience to “get to the good part” (42). Macbeth travels to the Macduffs, when a truck of ketchup arrives (53). He proceeds to eat the Macduff family, but again the violence is shown off page, represented by red splatter.

Lady Macbeth has since locked herself in her room, desperately scrubbing her permanent spots (Lendler and Giallongo 58). Failing, she eventually disappears in a cloud of bubbles. The notion of suicide as well as infanticide are all but ignored in this adaptation as is any discussion of childbirth. The final fight scene censored as well; Macbeth uses a brush to fight instead of a sword, and Macduff wins the fight, rescuing everyone from Macbeth’s stomach (67-71). The narrator claims that Macbeth “paid the price for his greedy appetite” but specifies nothing and implies nothing about what happens to him afterwards (71). The last we see of Macbeth is his open mouth and all of the animals emerging from it. It is unclear if Macbeth is killed during this



process, and he is most definitely not beheaded during the fight. In this adaptation, Macbeth suffered no tangible consequences. Although readers are told he “paid the price” for his unjust actions through moralizing – a primary marker of a children’s adaptation – it is unclear whether or not Macbeth died.

## A Graphic Retelling

As opposed to children’s adaptations of *Macbeth*, Gareth Hinds’ graphic novel adaptation is aimed at adolescents due to the length, the visual and textual descriptions of graphic violence, and the inclusion of mostly original text. It is significantly longer, grapples with much of the original text in meter, and contains graphic images of violence. This version is organized by scenes and utilizes characterization through visuals on an illustrated page. It uses color (red) to symbolically show violence. Even the cover of the book, and the shiny, fresh-blood-red text of the title hint at how color and images convey the sense of violence in this adaptation. Hinds’ *Macbeth* maintains nearly every scene from the original. Departures occur, however, in how those scenes are illustrated.

This play, like the original text, opens with soldiers returning from war, wrapped in bloody rags, retelling Macbeth’s actions in battle (Hinds 3). Deep red surrounds the panels that depict action from the war (4-5). Like the original text, the opening of the play sets the tone for the violence that is to come later. Shakespeare’s language fills the speech bubbles in these first few pages. Hinds writes, “for brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name – distaining Fortune with his brandished steel, unseamed him from the nave to the chops, and fixed his head upon our battlements” (4). Although there are some changes made from the original text, including eliminating strict line breaks, removing contractions (th’ becomes the), and substituting the occasional Shakespearean word for a modern one, Hinds mostly maintains an iambic rhythm and much of the original text. Despite the maintaining of a majority of the original text, Hinds recommends reading the unabridged play in his “Notes on the Text” section because he admits making cuts and edits to the original (137).

Hinds’ *Macbeth* includes all moments that are potentially problematic for a young readership, including the “milk of human kindness line,” the “unsex me here” speech, the “dashed the brains out” speech, images of bloodied hands and daggers after killing Duncan, a bloody and pale Duncan, the murder of Banquo and attack of Fleance, the return of Banquo’s

ghost at the banquet, an imagined sea of blood at the banquet, a bloody infant and child from the witches' cauldron, the murder of the Macduff family, the incessant washing of Lady Macbeth's hands, Lady Macbeth's suicide, and the beheading of Macbeth. In this version, censorship does not come from the omission of scenes or plot points within the text but from how they are represented. Because the story is shown through graphic panels, the author had the choice of what part of the scene to show. For example, during the murder of Banquo, the viewpoint of the panel is from afar, so readers are unable to see defined blood and wounds (Hinds 75). With the Macduff murders, readers see the murderers entering the home and a knife being pointed at the son, but the panels are then made small and elongated, only showing a sliver of action – a bloody knife, a knife pointed at Lady Macduff's back, and the murderers themselves (99). That said, the text departs from the two other adaptations examined in this essay as Hinds' *Macbeth* censors very little, and he depicts much of the violence as it is described in the text in color and with relative realism. For this reason, this adaptation is more clearly for an older audience.

This adaptation includes several moments of explicit violence against children, and the way they are presented greatly influence this adaptation's reading. For example, most of the text is presented within white speech bubbles, but Lady Macbeth's "dashed the brains out" speech is presented within black speech bubbles and surrounded by red (Hinds 31). There is no setting. Rather, red lines extend outwards from her, signaling violence and anger. When looking at this image, the violence in her speech is read as violent and unjustified – Macbeth's face is one of fear and worry, signaling to the reader how to interpret her speech and the implied violence against a nonexistent child. This adaptation both censors and represents violence through images. Like Packer, Hinds' *Macbeth* includes every major plot point, but the way they are shown to the reader in both speech and text limit the readers' access to violence. Due to the inclusion of images, readers are not dependent upon the text for comprehension. This adaptation is most visually striking, reads very quickly, and preserves every violent moment, making it attractive to adolescent audiences.

## Conclusion

Clearly, a multitude of approaches for adapting violent moments in the play exist, each adaptation approaching violence against children in nuanced ways. Packer includes every major event in the play and several direct quotations, but she does so quickly and without much space

devoted to conveying violence or violence against children. Of the three adaptations examined, Lendler most alters the plot and most obviously censors violence, using ketchup rather than blood, skirting the issue of childbirth by including storks, framing Lady Macbeth's suicide as a glorified bubble bath, and by making clear nobody (except maybe Macbeth) dies. Both Lendler and Packer utilize a narrator to talk readers through potentially confusing ambiguity, such as Macbeth's status as hero or villain or what "none of woman born" means. Although Hinds includes much of the original text, his choices in assigning viewpoint and framing panels successfully censor the most violent moments, directing readers towards a particular interpretation. Macbeth's and Banquo's horrified expressions towards imaginary or real violence against children are shared by the reader. Violence, although shown and glorified in the context of war, becomes a topic of horror and disgust when against or about children. Regardless of child or adolescent adaptation, authors censor violence, particularly when children, real or imaginary, are involved. The amount and method of censorship differ significantly between the child adaptations and adolescent adaptation, but it is present nonetheless. Although authors deem it necessary to retell Shakespeare's *Macbeth* for young audiences, they also reshape it in new mediums through various filters. Crafting children's renditions of *Macbeth* in this way, utilizing varied methods of censorship and alteration, allows authors to communicate any desired aspect of Shakespeare and/or *Macbeth*.

All examined adaptations retell or recreate some aspect from Shakespeare's work, finding something within it important enough to tell young audiences, often forgoing accuracy when it comes to representing issues surrounding violence of and against children but maintaining accuracy through direct quotes or aspects of Shakespeare's theater. It seems as though these three adaptations, especially Packer's and Lendler's, see something in *Macbeth* worthwhile to reproduce for a young audience *despite* the violence. They treat violence as something to overcome and as a means to an end for teaching morality and the inherent importance of Shakespeare. They retell *Macbeth* generally, using varied strategies to censor potentially problematic moments. Packer includes every major plot point, and censorship comes primarily from a lack of images and narration, indicating that to her, the important information to convey to children is the plot. Lendler greatly alters the plot but conveyed aspects of stage performance such as audience intervention and intermission while teaching vocabulary of tragedy. Through illustration, Hinds acts like a director, choosing how to interpret and represent scenes visually.

His primary goal seems as though it were to reproduce *Macbeth* in a form that appeals to teenage readers, preserving enough violence while sparing readers the goriest of details related to violence against children. Packer's *Macbeth* is for the parents who cannot bear to read their children Lendler's *Macbeth*, and Hinds' *Macbeth* is for the teenagers who do not want to read it in the first place. In some way, each adaptation made *Macbeth* "appropriate" for the selected audience, implying that regardless of age, there is something worthwhile in *Macbeth* that warrants retelling but requires (sometimes significant) adaptation and censorship. In Packer's, that something is the plot, Lendler's is stage production, and Hinds' is staying true to source. In all three, however, the obvious teaching of morality is central, disallowing youth the option to explore the moral ambiguities inherent to Shakespeare, suggesting that the obligation of adapters is to teach the importance of Shakespeare to young audiences through any adaptation necessary.

The end goal for adapting "this most bloody piece of work" for young audiences remains relatively unclear (Shakespeare 2.3.150). Each adaptation explored in this essay focused on conveying a different aspect of Shakespeare. And in the case of *Macbeth*, a story in which the entirety of the plot, motivations, and action rests upon violence against children, it seems that adaptations can include or ignore as much as necessary to communicate their point (be it plot, elements of stage production, relatability, inherent importance of Shakespeare, etc.), ultimately telling us that almost anything in Shakespeare can justify adaptation. In this process of adapting for young audiences, a central focus of *Macbeth* – violence of or against children – is often lost. The nuances of how violence against children functions to advance the plot is all but ignored, and not a single adaptation explored in this essay implies that violence, namely Fleance's revenge, continues beyond the final page. Each adaptation teaches something different and censors violence differently, but at the same time, each relies heavily on the implied importance of Shakespeare as a subject to justify adaptation. In the case of Packer, Lendler, and Hinds' *Macbeth*, each author decided to reproduce the play but censored violence against children, signaling that there is something inherently worthwhile to reproduce, but it could not possibly be reproduced for young audiences without significant alteration. It can be argued that even the simplified and censored versions of *Macbeth* affect children by exposing them to a violent narrative and mature themes. Even censored *Macbeth* is still *Macbeth*, and although the most inappropriate content is frequently censored in child and adolescent adaptation (violence of and towards children), the play is violent enough to make one question what in it is truly that

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valuable that it cannot be taught through other means. Shakespeare's violence is simultaneously fascinating and frustrating, particularly when thinking about adaptation for young audiences, and that combined with the fact that today's children are flooded with violence in all aspects of media might inform how we adapt and teach Shakespeare to our kids today and in the future.

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December 2018.