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"Woe to That Land That's Govern'd by a Child": Authority,
Canon, and Adolescent Subjectivity in Young Adult Shakespeare
Retellings

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1 Introduction

Few authors embody such a striking paradox as Shakespeare: while celebrated as the pinnacle of literature, his work is also continually rewritten across a range of popular media, including comics, films, and young adult novels. His plays are repeatedly described as the height of high Culture, yet they are also framed as “for everyone” (Stephens and McCallum 257). This duality is not new: in his time, Shakespeare’s plays were both popular entertainment and objects of elite patronage, appealing to a broad and socially diverse audience (Gurr 58). This paradox is central to his endurance: Shakespeare is at once revered as untouchable and continually rewritten to fit new audiences, contexts, and markets. As Sanders observes, “the Shakespearean canon has served as a test bed over many centuries for the processes of adaptation” (51). One of the clearest demonstrations of this is the sheer number of retellings for children and adolescents, which both testify to his continuing popularity (Isaac 3) and raise questions about how these adaptations reshape the plays and their meanings. As Tosi observes, such retellings often convert Shakespeare’s drama into narrative prose, a transformation that “has an enormous impact on plot, time-place coordinates, character/setting presentation, and perspective” (Tosi, “From *Romeo and Juliet*” 17). By translating dialogue into narration, these works inevitably narrow interpretive openness while generating new meanings, especially through backstories, prequels, and expanded points of view designed for adolescent readers.

Adaptations of Shakespeare for younger audiences have a long tradition. As Peter Hunt argues, their persistence reflects a broader confusion between the intrinsic and extrinsic value of literature: Shakespeare is assumed to occupy a privileged position not by inherent worth, but through a cultural and educational system that has elevated him to that status (2). Yet, as Isaac observes, scholars have paid relatively little attention to these editions (1), despite their formative role in shaping how children and adolescents first encounter the plays.

This process has long been contentious. Thomas Bowdler’s *Family Shakespeare* published in 1807 gave its name to the practice of “bowdlerising”, producing expurgated versions of the plays so that children might be protected from sex, violence, and suffering (Müller, “Introduction” 2–3). As Bottoms notes, they introduced children to Shakespeare while teaching inherited hierarchies of taste and virtue (75). Andreas similarly notes that although no organised censorship campaign

existed, community standards in schools and publishing have consistently smoothed over problematic or ambivalent aspects of Shakespeare's works (99).

The publishing industry further illustrates this dynamic. Hutcheon argues that publishers often favour adaptations because they attract a ready-made audience (135). In Shakespeare's case, however, that audience is often not the young readers themselves but the adults such as teachers, parents and publishers who control access to his works (Hutcheon 86). Books are marketed to parents first, who then mediate them to children, meaning that access to the young reader is filtered through adult authority (Cadden x). Retellings therefore perform a double function: they introduce young readers to high Culture and transmit the cultural values associated with the canon, while at the same time "affirm[ing] the status of such classic texts" even as they create opportunities to question them (Stephens and McCallum 8).

Yet Shakespeare is not only preserved but also domesticated and made accessible through retelling. As Marchitello observes, "While iconoclasm might be driving the Bard out of some fanatically revisionist college curricula, it also brings about a certain domestication of Shakespeare, casting his life and times in a light that is more human than divine" (240). For young readers, this domestication operates through simplification, updating, and intertextuality, traits that define children's and young adult (YA) literature more broadly (Stephens and McCallum 3). Retellings do not exist in isolation; they draw on familiar story traditions, selecting, reshaping, and translating Shakespeare's plays through the cultural values of their time (Stephens and McCallum 74). Two recurrent pathways illustrate this: some adaptations are explicitly gendered, continuing a long tradition of reworking Shakespeare into retellings aimed at girls through female heroines (Tosi, "Shakespeare for Girls" 11), and hybrid adaptations that merge Shakespeare with popular culture forms such as comics or manga (Oppermann 107; Müller, "Shakespeare Comic Books" 101). Both approaches illustrate what Sanders describes as the effort to render Shakespeare accessible and relevant for new readers, whether by shifting perspective to marginal voices or by transposing his plays into contemporary cultural forms (18–19).

Scholarship on Shakespeare for young readers is extensive but uneven. While studies by Isaac (2000), Gearhart (2007), N. Miller (2013), and Rokison (2013) have established the field, much of the existing research concentrates on faithful retellings such as Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* (1809) or on picture-book

adaptations¹. Less attention has been paid to contemporary adaptations that transform rather than reproduce Shakespeare's plays. Although some more recent studies do analyse such retellings, they are often framed through specific critical lenses, such as race (Andreas 2003) or gender (Ziegler 2003). What remains underexplored is how these retellings position their readers in relation to the canon itself: how young audiences are encouraged to engage with Shakespeare not only as a cultural icon but as a text open to reinterpretation. It is this overlooked dimension that this thesis seeks to address.

It is also worth noting that Shakespeare himself adapted existing stories into his works. As Marchitello notes, many of his plots were borrowed from earlier sources, so that "the stories are indeed the least part of Shakespeare because they are the least Shakespearean" (182). Retellings for young readers thus continue a process central to his own practice: reworking existing plots for new contexts. This study situates itself within this long tradition of adaptation but turns its focus specifically to retellings for young adult audiences. Following Rokison's observation that such retellings often aim to show the proximity of Shakespeare's themes to contemporary young people's lives (148), I ask how *Storm-Wake*, *Ophelia*, and *Prince of Shadows* transform Shakespeare's plays for YA readers, what ideologies they reproduce or subvert, and what these processes reveal about both adolescence and the canon. The three Anglophone novels re-centre adolescent perspectives on *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet* respectively: Lisa Klein's *Ophelia* (2006) retells *Hamlet* from Ophelia's first-person perspective; Rachel Caine's *Prince of Shadows* (2014) reframes *Romeo and Juliet* through Benvolio; and Lucy Christopher's *Storm-Wake* (2018) reimagines *The Tempest* in a contemporary magical setting.

This thesis is guided by the following overarching question: **How do YA retellings of Shakespeare reshape his plays for adolescent readers, and what does this reveal about both the construction of adolescence and the cultural role of the Shakespearean canon today?** To address this, I ask three sub-questions:

1. How do YA retellings reconfigure their source plays through shifts in focalisation, characterisation, and thematic emphasis?

¹ Following Hutcheon and Sanders, I use adaptation and retelling as umbrella terms for both faithful adaptations and creative appropriations.

2. To what extent do they reproduce, negotiate, or subvert the ideological structures embedded in the originals, particularly in relation to parental authority, the childhood home, and sexual maturation?
3. What do these transformations suggest about the ambivalent representation of adolescence as both resistant and constrained, and about the canon's dual function of being sustained and destabilised through adaptation?

Methodologically, I combine close reading with comparative analysis. Through close reading, I attend to shifts in language, imagery, and perspective to trace how meaning is produced within each retelling. Comparative analysis then identifies recurring strategies of plot structure and thematic emphasis across the corpus, as well as key similarities and differences between the original pre-texts and their adaptations. Together, these approaches reveal how the novels both uphold and interrogate the ideological structures of Shakespeare's texts, portraying adolescence as a space of simultaneous resistance and constraint.

I have structured the thesis as follows. Chapter 2 establishes the theory framework, drawing on adaptation theory, children's and YA literature theory², and cultural theory. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology before turning to close readings of *Storm-Wake*, *Ophelia*, and *Prince of Shadows*, focusing on how each novel reconfigures parental and familial authority, the construction of home, and the negotiation of sexuality. Chapter 4 provides a comparative analysis of the three texts, identifying broader patterns across the corpus. Chapter 5 concludes by considering the broader implications for how YA retellings sustain and challenge the Shakespearean canon. The thesis ultimately argues that such retellings transmit cultural prestige while reframing it through adolescent subjectivity, revealing both the endurance and adaptability of Shakespeare in contemporary culture.

² I want to note that I draw on children's literature and young adult literature theory in tandem, since there is no discrete body of literary theory exclusive to YA literature. As Caroline Hunt notes, children's literature scholarship has long treated age groups flexibly, even though children's and YA texts often serve different functions (4). The novels examined here sit within the typical YA range (12-18), with some at the younger and others at the older end. Throughout, I engage with these frameworks critically, indicating where broad claims about "the child reader" require qualification and specifying which elements are applicable to adolescence.

2 Theory Frameworks

This chapter outlines three strands relevant to the analysis: the role of the canon in children's and YA literature; intertextuality and its relation to retellings; and adaptation theory and how it helps explain the transformation of canonical texts for new audiences. The order moves from cultural frameworks to textual practice and then to the specific processes of adaptation.

2.1 Schooling Taste: Cultural Hierarchy in Children's and YA Literature

Cultural hierarchies, most visible in the literary canon, shape what is produced, circulated, and legitimised for young readers. Gatekeepers, such as publishers, educators, and reviewers, mediate access through paratexts, abridgements, and curricular selection. These mechanisms both transmit cultural capital and set limits on what counts as appropriate or valuable for children and adolescents. This section provides the context for the selected themes and texts .

2.1.1 The Canon as Credential

This section addresses three questions: what the canon is, why it matters, and how it shapes children's literature. I use "canon" to denote a selective, continually negotiated body of works that confers value and organises literary education. For young readers, the canon is almost always mediated through editorial choices, pedagogical framing, and adaptations.

The concept of the canon is complex and widely debated among academics. It refers to a body of literature regarded as culturally significant and of superior quality, often used to define "real literature" and establish a hierarchy of value (Shavit 35). However, Hunt explains that the canon is shaped by cultural power structures rather than inherent literary merit:

The 'literary hierarchy' — indeed, the whole idea of literature — was based on the idea that some texts are intrinsically better than others. This, of course, means that someone has to make a first judgement on this; and so there grew up a kind of literary priesthood, the idea of good and bad readings, better and lesser books. (P. Hunt 2)

Rather than reflecting intrinsic quality, the canon is embedded in social power dynamics, with elite institutions like universities dictating which works are valued or

dismissed for various reasons (P. Hunt 54). O'Sullivan gives a similar definition stating the canon is problematic due to its

principles of selectivity, its elitist nature, its claim to be generally valid, coherent and exemplary, its rigid and prescriptive nature, its ethnocentricity, the way in which it relates solely to the values of a cultural upper class, and its status as a collection of works supposed to be above criticism. (O'Sullivan, *Comparative Children's Literature* [book] 110)

The authority of the canon can be questioned simply by examining public opinion on what constitutes superior literature. When asked to name the best literary works, people provided a wide range of answers, suggesting that their selections were based more on personal reading preferences than on any inherent literary greatness. The variation in responses underscores the subjective value individuals derive from reading, directly challenging the idea of the canon (P. Hunt 13–15). However, P. Hunt argues that some level of literary discrimination is necessary, as it fulfils a fundamental human need:

Unless we are true practisers of Zen, or mystics, we generally need to discriminate. If a culture is to be ordered, it needs power relationships. More practically, if fiction and poetry are to form part of the education system, they need to be assessed in some way. (2)

Thus, to preserve and transmit culturally significant literature, choices must be made, distinguishing which works are deemed worthy of being passed on.

While some level of literary discrimination is necessary to establish a hierarchy of works worth preserving, critics argue that the system of exclusion has historically and presently marginalised works that do not align with its arbitrary standards. Stevenson emphasises that the ideology behind what is considered literature is crucial in determining which works enter the canon, shaping both the past and future of a genre and literature as a whole (179). As a result, excluding works based on ideological, cultural, or institutional biases leaves vast areas of literature unexplored. Consequently, academia is increasingly re-evaluating the canon, recognising its constructed nature and advocating for a more critical and nuanced understanding of its role in shaping literary culture.

However, it remains uncontested that the canon still holds authority, not necessarily over what is universally considered “good” literature, but over what is

deemed noteworthy. As previously discussed, while its position at the top of the literary hierarchy may not be justified by inherent merit, it retains its dominance, nonetheless. This has significant implications for how literature continues to be written, published, and read. This influence is also evident in children's and young adult literature. While the same criticisms levelled at the traditional canon apply to children's literature, the latter faces additional challenges, which I will outline below.

The canon occupies a contested position within children's literature. Historically, the field's complex development has meant that children's literature has neither been fully admitted into the broader literary canon nor succeeded in establishing a stable canon of its own. A central reason for this exclusion lies in the difficulty of defining its audience, raising questions about what constitutes a "child," which age ranges are appropriate, and how parents, educators, and literary historians shape this discourse (Stevenson 179). This has shaped how children's literature is perceived, even now. According to Shavit, most children's literature is not regarded as part of cultural heritage, reinforcing a distinction between 'real' literature and children's literature (35). However, the greater issue is ideological. Since children are the primary (though not exclusive) audience, there is an assumption that the content lacks the sophistication of adult literature. Consequently, including children's literature in the traditional literary canon is often seen as weakening its integrity (Thacker 49).

There are, therefore, strategies that can elevate children's literature to a more recognised status within the same literary framework. According to Peter Hunt, the canon holds a privileged position in society, and for children's literature to rise in the power hierarchy, it must integrate into the existing power structures that sustain the canon (54). This can be achieved in several ways: either by adopting sufficiently literary language or by conveying culturally significant themes and narratives³ (Stephens and McCallum 8). Ewers argues that children's literature can only gain greater cultural recognition by aligning itself more closely with the conventions of literary, adult-oriented texts (91).

P. Hunt reinforces this view, arguing that literary language is "different, in the sense that the discourse to which it belongs is exclusive" (55). Since exclusivity and

³ I distinguish plot/story structure (organisation of events) from narration/discourse (how the story is told), narrator/voice (who speaks), and focalisation/perspective (who perceives/filters knowledge). Narrative or cultural narrative is used to mean an ideological script, not a narratological category.

status are defining features of canonical works, they inevitably shape the discourse around children's literature as well. This also affects its production, as the institutions responsible for publishing have their own interests, one of which is securing a place within the power hierarchy alongside the canon (O'Sullivan, *Comparative Children's Literature* [book] 18).

2.1.2 Didacticism as Governance

As noted earlier, children's and young adult literature is inherently asymmetrical, with didacticism playing a key role both historically and today. By didacticism, I refer to the instructional and moralising aspects of a text, particularly when aimed at children. Waddilove states that "Children's literature has an important role to play in formulating ideas about the world" (156), therefore stressing the importance of cultural messaging inherent within it. In the past literature was not primarily intended as entertainment; rather, it served as a tool to impart lessons and encourage proper behaviour (Russell 27). Didacticism and morality have long underpinned children's literature as historically, literature was used to socialise children, ensuring they grew into respectable, moral, and virtuous citizens, while also introducing them to dominant cultural and moral values (Stephens 8). As a result, overt didacticism and emotional manipulation have often been central features of children's books (Lowry 193).

Even today, the presence of moral instruction is palpable. According to Stevenson, "Didacticism remains a strong element of contemporary children's books ostensibly designed for pleasure" (180). While education has always been an element of children's literature, the tone is equally crucial when writing for children:

The real objection, therefore, isn't so much to books that educate as it is to books that educate in an old-fashioned way. . . . When children's literature scholars and practitioners claim to reject texts that teach, what we actually reject is writing that gets caught at teaching. (Stevenson 181)

Many scholars contend that children's and adolescents' literature is invariably infused with ideology (Seelinger-Trites ix–x). This is especially evident in children's literature, where the ideology of one group is directed toward a relatively powerless audience. The inherent asymmetry between adult writers and child readers creates a didactic dynamic, as adults control every stage of literary production and mediation

and act for children, since “without adult authors, publishers, intermediaries and so forth, there would be no communication; children cannot act independently in the literary market” (O’Sullivan, *Comparative Children’s Literature* [book] 13). Nikolajeva takes a more radical approach, stating:

Nowhere else are power structures as visible as in children’s literature, the refined instrument used for centuries to educate, socialize and oppress a particular social group. In this respect, children’s literature is a unique art and communication form, deliberately created by those in power for the powerless. (8)

Her view exposes how the genre has historically been complicit in sustaining social hierarchies, yet it risks construing children as entirely passive recipients of adult ideology. The very label “children’s literature” carries value judgments about purpose and legitimacy, reflecting the imbalance of power between adult producers, mediators, and commentators on the one hand, and the child readers on the other (Sarland 56).

According to Rose, however, this asymmetry is not an inadvertent structure in which adults merely find themselves:

Children’s fiction sets up a world in which the adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver), but where neither of them enter the space in between. . . . Children’s fiction sets up the child as an outsider to its own process, and then aims, unashamedly, to take the child in. (1–2)

It is thus a deliberate strategy to control the ideological script and shape readers in a way that benefits the adults. She asserts that there is a purposeful dismissal of children’s interests in favour of didacticism to maintain family authority and power over children in Western society (11). Lesnik-Oberstein goes further, contending that, contrary to the belief that children’s literature is moving away from didacticism, it is inherently entwined with it: “based on a hierarchical model of the adult–child relationship, the narratives adults attempt to convey to children are controlled and formed, implicitly and explicitly, by the didactic impulse” (38).

However, other scholars argue that readers actively construct meaning while reading rather than merely absorbing ideological messages. Some argue that the reader is not separate from the text; instead, meaning is co-created alongside the

author, a process that also applies to children. Rudd asserts that the relationship between the child and the book is interactive and reciprocal rather than top-down (37), implying that meaning is dynamically negotiated rather than passively received. Rudd draws on the concept of the border zone, where meaning is created in the space between author and reader:

The key point is that the word is not owned by either party, lodged in neither the child's nor the adult's inner-being. Rather, the word constitutes a 'border zone,' in which the addressees – children, in this case – orient themselves precisely in the way that they 'lay down' their own set of 'answering words'. (Rudd 37)

Thus, when a child reads a book, they are not merely receiving a fixed message but actively negotiating meaning, incorporating their own experiences, emotions, and responses. While the asymmetry might suggest disempowerment, this is not always the case. Rudd argues that even when texts attempt to impose moral and ideological messages, these can be resisted or reinterpreted to suit the child's needs: "The claim that the 'child' has no 'voice' within the hierarchies of our society, because 'adults' either silence or create that voice, actually helps construct the child as a helpless, powerless being" (30).

Therefore, children reshape narratives based on their own experiences and engage with the text on a more equal footing. While some children's literature remains highly didactic, Rudd notes that this very didacticism can offer a glimpse of subversion: "However much such work directs the reader down the path of righteousness, it inevitably sketches in the surrounding landscape, the delights just beyond the path, the grass that must be kept off" (37). Such texts can be seen as spaces where children exercise agency, allowing narratives to be interpreted in ways not necessarily intended by the author. Narrative and stylistic choices in children's texts significantly influence how the story and its message are perceived. For example, the structure of a story alone can convey different messages: circular plot structures, such as the home-away-home pattern, often reinforce the stability and authority of the family and the home to which the character returns (Nodelman 192–193). In contrast, linear and open-ended structures, more common in YA literature, are left open to the reader's interpretation, often prompting the

exploration of moral and ideological presuppositions (Cadden, “Handbook of Research” 307–308).

Nikolajeva states that “the narrative is manipulated through an interaction of the author’s, the narrator’s, the character’s, the narratee’s and the reader’s perspective and subjectivity” (174), a technique used to shape the child’s perception within the unequal dynamic between child-reader and adult-writer. YA fiction frequently develops this dynamic further by employing first-person narration and interior monologue, which create the impression of unmediated access to a character’s private thoughts and thus foster a strong sense of intimacy and identification between reader and protagonist (Gruner 8). Such strategies align the reader closely with the focalising character, encouraging them to “match their own sense of selfhood with ideas of self constructed in and by the text, not principally because of the inherent nature of events and characters described, but through the mode through which these are perceived” (Stephens 68). Such strategies can influence the reader’s perception beyond a natural affinity for the text, potentially steering them towards broader societal ideologies. This is not to suggest that all adults intentionally seek to manipulate child readers, but rather that texts for children do not exist in an ideological vacuum. Thacker states:

By revealing and then overturning these power structures, authors and illustrators of children’s books continually provide evidence that the relationship between children and the books they read is complex and embedded in a web of discourses which surround both the texts and their readers. (Thacker 50)

According to Stephens, ideology in children’s literature can be seen as a means to intervene in children’s lives and socialise them (8). Since children are integral members of society, they are introduced to prevailing values and attitudes through the stories they read. Moreover, a single text may overtly promote one ideology while implicitly embedding others (Stephens 43), thereby creating a layered ideological experience. This interplay of ideologies naturally leads to the issue of censorship in children’s and young adult literature. As adults hold the final authority over what is written, published, and read, the deliberate exclusion of certain themes becomes a tool for guiding young readers towards a preferred ideology. Censorship, in this context, reflects adult anxieties about what is considered appropriate for young,

impressionable minds (Russell 34). Consequently, content in children's literature is often regulated by limiting narratives that are challenging, subversive, or politically sensitive. Adaptations of classic texts are frequently sanitised to remove violent or disturbing material, ensuring they conform to adult expectations of what is appropriate for young readers (Thiel 153). This regulation is further justified by the assumption of inherent childhood innocence. According to Cadden, the publishing industry often adheres to a Romantic view of childhood, a perspective that regards children as pure and in need of protection "from the chaos of nihilism of irony and the sadness of tragedy" ("Handbook of Research" 306). As a result, books that address moral ambiguity or explore harsh themes are frequently altered or excluded from mainstream children's and young adult literature.

According to Caroline Hunt, a perceived moral panic often drives censorship, aiming to "stamp out what he or she sees as irreligion or sex or violence in children's books" (33). This censorship is not only explicit; it also operates subtly within plot structures, for example, through plots where characters engaging in unwanted behaviour inevitably receive appropriate punishment (Russell 27). Furthermore, many books that directly address the adolescent experience employ language that some adults find objectionable, recount experiences (especially sexual ones) that cause discomfort, and even pose serious challenges to authority (C. Hunt 5). Caroline Hunt observes that young adult books, much like children's books, are "censored by publishers, authors, and societal expectations" (6). This suggests that censorship is not solely imposed externally but can also be self-imposed or shaped by market forces and prevailing social norms. For instance, historical texts and adaptations are often retrospectively re-assessed to better align with contemporary social values (Oppermann 156).

2.1.3 Ordering Adolescence: Authority in YA Literature

While children's literature often reinforces a child's sense of self within their immediate environment, young adult literature tends to explore broader social forces and power dynamics. However, Trites argues that despite appearing subversive, YA books are often highly didactic (ix-x). These books frequently manipulate adolescent readers, particularly in their portrayal of the prevalence and importance of social institutions.

According to Seelinger-Trites, there is a distinct difference in how authority is presented in children's and YA literature. In children's books, the story structure often leads the protagonist to accept the confines of family life and home (3). This reinforces an ideal of the "good" child, who ultimately returns to their family and conforms to socially accepted norms. It also subtly embeds the ideology of dependence on the family as an unquestioned structure. In YA fiction, however, the focus shifts toward confronting power structures rather than seeking comfort within them. Authority is no longer portrayed as benevolent; instead, institutions such as family, school, and government become spaces of conflict and control (3). Additionally, Trites argues that while YA novels may not engage in overt political commentary, they inevitably reflect cultural biases, many of which are subtly embedded in ideological discourses that reinforce dominant societal views (27).

Although often perceived as subversive, young adult literature remains deeply entrenched in ideological constraints that reinforce specific power dynamics and authority. Trites argues that writers themselves function as an additional source of authority within the institution of literature, using plot structures to shape the reader's understanding of both empowerment and repression (55). As a result, the portrayal of young adult rebellion can be misleading. While protagonists may challenge authority within the story, their actions ultimately underscore their powerlessness in the larger social framework (83). Seelinger-Trites states that "in communicating such ideologies to adolescent readers, the genre itself becomes an Ideological State Apparatus, an institution that participates in the social construction of the adolescent as someone who must be repressed for the greater good" (83). Rather than encouraging genuine resistance, the genre frames adolescence as a period of struggle in which young readers are expected to accept their subordinate position, further reinforcing the ideology of youth subjugation.

In conclusion, the hierarchy between young readers and adults in literature is shaped by the adult-centric nature of the industry, the pedagogical aims embedded in texts, the way narratives construct youth identity, and the control exerted over content and interpretation. While contemporary theories and some YA works seek to challenge traditional power dynamics and emphasise young readers' agency, the asymmetry persists. Adults remain the primary creators and gatekeepers of both children's and YA literature.

2.2 Reading Between the Lines: The Power of the Intertext

Having explored the position of the child and adolescent reader, I now want to address certain text types that lend themselves to child empowerment, namely, retellings. In order to fully comprehend retellings and adaptations of canonical texts, I will first examine a central concept in literary criticism: intertextuality. While it is a key concept in literary studies, it is also broad and interpreted differently by various scholars. When I refer to intertextuality, I mean the interpretation of one text through its relationship with others, implying that no text exists in isolation but is shaped by preceding works and by the contexts of their production (Allen 1–2). This concept also rests on the presupposition that “meaning lies in the space between the focused text and its intertexts and is the product of their interrelations” (McCallum 14).

The concept of intertextuality is grounded in Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia, the idea that language is always shaped by prior usage and social context, as well as his notion of dialogism, which postulates that no utterance or work exists in isolation but always responds to previous statements while anticipating of future responses. Bakhtin explains:

The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation of any living dialogue. (280)

This inherent responsiveness of language to both prior and anticipated utterances is a central element of intertextuality (Allen 11). Bakhtin also illustrates how a single utterance can carry multiple intentions simultaneously:

Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel (whatever the forms of its incorporation), is another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. (324)

Double-voiced discourse refers to language that contains multiple perspectives within a single utterance. Since language is not a unified system,

double-voiced discourse can be seen as a manifestation of heteroglossia, as it reflects the coexistence of two or more voices within the same statement (McCallum 11). Julia Kristeva builds on Bakhtin's ideas by asserting that texts do not simply reference one another but are always "absorptions and transformations" of other texts (Kristeva 64). This suggests that intertextuality is not just a stylistic feature but a structural condition of all texts, one in which meaning is never fixed but constantly shifting.

The concept of intertextuality has significant implications for how we understand literature. It challenges the notion of the author as the sole originator of ideas, suggesting instead that authors craft stories from pre-existing texts and cultural codes (Allen 35). Furthermore, meaning within a text is constructed through its relationship to earlier texts, implying that meaning does not reside solely within the text itself (Allen 1). Finally, since meaning emerges from the interplay between the audience, the text, other texts, and the socio-cultural contexts that shape interpretation, all texts operate within an intertextual framework (Stephens 115–116).

This leads me to the role of intertextuality in children's and young adult literature. Intertextuality is a widespread and well-established phenomenon in children's literature (Meek 4). O'Sullivan states that intertextuality has been a feature of children's books since their earliest forms, citing examples such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*, originally adult texts later adapted for children ("Comparative Children's Literature" 192). There are several theories attempting to explain this phenomenon. Stephens argues that the absence of a distinct child-specific discourse results in a reliance on intertextuality to generate narratives (86). Additionally, Wilkie-Stibbs suggests that intertextuality in children's literature requires a unique framing due to certain key features: "A theory of intertextuality of children's literature is, therefore, unusually preoccupied with questions about what a piece of writing (for children) presupposes. . . . For these reasons the interrelationship between the components of intertextuality, of writer/text/reader – text/reader/context, are quite special when we are addressing a theory of intertextuality of children's literature" (180). The process of interpreting a text relies on the audience's understanding of literary and semiotic conventions, particularly their familiarity with genres, story structures, and prior works with similar themes or storylines (Stephens 84).

The effects of intertextuality in children's literature are ambivalent. Positively, it can broaden children's engagement with texts and nurture their literary competence (Wilkie-Stibbs 188). O'Sullivan notes that inclusion of intertextual references can act as breaks in the narrative discourse that destabilise the child reader's security. This, in turn, acts "as a challenge to their notions of what constitutes a fictional text, which encourages them to adopt an active, reflective attitude to reading" (O'Sullivan, *Comparative Children's Literature* [book] 28). Thacker states that intertextual texts encourage an open-ended reading experience and subvert dominant adult value systems (51), adding that "the implication that readers can be offered authoritative positions in the texts they read is dependent on intertextuality" (52). Wilkie-Stibbs similarly suggests that young readers assume ownership of a text through intertextual engagement, thereby challenging the authority of both the text and its author, as they actively participate in the construction of meaning (180). Stephens further asserts that the presence of an intertextual pre-text unsettles the assumption of a single, fixed interpretation and prevents readers from passively identifying with the focalising character (70), ultimately leading to a more empowered reading experience. He also contends that intertextuality has the potential to subvert ideology, as it exposes the underlying social values embedded within literary texts (85–86).

However, some aspects of intertextuality can be problematic when present in children's literature. Wilkie-Stibbs argues that although children can take ownership of a text through their own intertextual references and interpretations, the relationship remains asymmetrical since the writer cannot guarantee the child's intersubjective knowledge. This perspective is echoed by Stephens, who states that familiarity with a pre-text or story conventions can pose challenges for intertextual reading (19). Wilkie-Stibbs goes further, suggesting that intertextual reading can sometimes hinder a pleasurable reading experience. Drawing on the concept of the "Circular Memory of Reading", she explains that when readers must consciously recall or refer to an obligatory intertext, it limits their freedom for spontaneous intertextual interplay during reading and "denies readers an opportunity for linear reading as they move in and out of the text to make connections between it and the intertext(s)" (186). Consequently, children's books that deliberately engage with intertextuality may become overly reliant on prior material to ensure that young readers understand the references. Wilkie-Stibbs claims that "the need to fill

intertextual gaps to mobilise a positive reading experience in their young readers . . . may be one of the single distinguishing characteristics of children's literature per se" (187). This poses a problem, as intertextual gaps should instead create space for readers' own textual engagement.

Intertextuality thus highlights both the opportunities and the challenges that arise when children's and YA texts draw on existing stories. Retellings exemplify this dynamic: they depend on prior stories yet reshape them through the cultural and ideological frameworks of their time. To account for these processes more fully, I turn to adaptation theory, which provides tools for analysing not only the intertextual connections but also the transformative choices that position familiar texts for new audiences.

2.3 Adaptation After Authority

Adaptation theory provides the final strand of the framework for this study. While the canon establishes the cultural hierarchies that shape children's and YA literature, and intertextuality highlights the ways texts engage with their predecessors, adaptation theory focuses on the processes through which stories are reshaped for new audiences and contexts. Adaptation is not a simple act of repetition or transfer but a series of choices such as emphasis, omission, transformation, and reorganisation, that reflect cultural values and ideological positions. In the case of Shakespeare, adaptation theory is particularly useful because it clarifies how canonical texts are mediated for adolescent readers: how familiar plots are reconfigured through new perspectives, and how the authority of the original is both sustained and unsettled in the process.

2.3.1 Low Fidelity: How Adaptation Works

I turn to Adaptation Theory as outlined in Linda Hutcheon's seminal 2006 work *A Theory of Adaptation*. Hutcheon conceptualises adaptation in three categories: as a process, a product, and as a form of intertextual engagement (7–8). As a product she defines it as an "announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works" (7). This often involves transcoding, which refers to a shift in medium, genre, or framing and by extension, a shift in context (7–8). As a process, adaptation entails both (re-)interpretation and subsequent (re-)creation of the source material (8). Hutcheon also differentiates between faithful adaptations and

appropriations (18), while adaptations maintain a recognisable connection to the source, appropriations involve a more radical reworking, often serving the new author's own purposes and frequently introducing critique or subversion of the original (Desmet 6–7). Lastly, the intertextual component plays a crucial role in shaping audience reception. Hutcheon argues that we experience adaptations through our memory of other texts; thus, every adaptation exists in a dialogic relationship with its source (8). This threefold framing matters here because it lets me analyse children's retellings not only as outputs but as interpretive acts that necessarily engage prior texts.

It is undeniable that adaptations are extremely popular in contemporary culture. Hutcheon attributes this widespread appeal to the particular kind of pleasure adaptations offer audiences. She suggests that their popularity stems: “simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise. Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change” (4). Therefore the balance between the familiarity with the text is balanced with its novelty retaining an appeal for audiences. In children's contexts, this balance of familiarity and surprise helps reluctant or novice readers approach complex material without losing the thread of the story.

Hutcheon argues that adaptations occupy a complex status in contemporary culture. Although they represent an extremely popular phenomenon, making up a substantial portion of produced media, they are not always culturally valued or appreciated (3–4). Criticism of adaptations often centers on their perceived lack of fidelity to the original and their supposed inferiority in quality (Whelehan 4). According to Hutcheon, this response stems from the assumption that adapters aim to replicate the original (6–7). She states, however, that judging adaptations solely by their closeness to an “original” text, if such a text can even be said to exist, given the intertextual nature of literature, is highly reductive. Instead, adaptation should also be understood as a creative process in its own right (7).

As stated previously, adaptations are multilayered texts that operate intertextually, deriving meaning through the audience's familiarity with the source. Therefore, adaptations can be understood as specific manifestations of intertextuality (Sanders 1). Because adaptations draw on previous works, they create an ongoing dialogue in which readers constantly compare the adaptation with the text they

already know: “For the reader, spectator, or listener, adaptation as adaptation is unavoidably a kind of intertextuality if the receiver is acquainted with the adapted text” (Hutcheon 21). Similarly, Cartmell states that the “reader must be able to participate in the play of similarity and difference perceived between the original, source, or inspiration to appreciate fully the reshaping or rewriting undertaken by the adaptive text” (45). If the source text is unfamiliar, however, the adaptation is more likely to be perceived as a standalone work; recognition of it as an adaptation depends on the reader’s prior knowledge of the source (Hutcheon xv). This has particular implications for child readers, who may recognise cultural references to the original but are unlikely to have encountered the text in its original form, especially at a younger age.

Next, I want to address power and authority in adaptations. If, as Hutcheon suggests, adaptation can unsettle priority and authority, then questions of power are intrinsic to how adaptations are made and received. Adaptations are inherently embedded in various power dynamics both in their production and their reception (Sanders 19). In their work on retellings and ideology, Stephens and McCallum emphasise that adaptations function not only as aesthetic exercises but also as vehicles for transmitting ideologies and cultural metanarratives (253). They argue that, regardless of an author’s intention, adaptations inevitably perpetuate ideologies relevant to the culture in which they are produced (ix). Additionally, they believe that the reader is also not receiving the adaptation in a subjective way as the cultural values which frame the story are already preconditioning the context. They claim that both the creation as well as the reception of the text is dependent on the culture and ideology at the time of adapting (92). This means that due to the context in which texts inadvertently exist they already carry meaning and cannot be considered neutral. Geerts and Bossche agree with this assessment and state that “[t]raditional narratives are seen as a society’s cultural heritage. The process of retelling these stories, however, is inevitably influenced by the ‘attitudes and ideologies’ which characterise the new context. These ideologies are not fixed but rather ever-evolving” (6). Therefore it is important to state that adaptations are always contextual as their meaning is also shaped by the cultural, temporal as well as material context. Hutcheon highlights this specifically:

We engage in time and space, within a particular society and a general culture. The contexts of creation and reception are material, public, and economic as much as they are cultural, personal, and aesthetic. This explains why, even in today's globalized world, major shifts in a story's context . . . can change radically how the transposed story is interpreted, ideologically and literally. (28)

This leads me to the various ways in which adaptations are deeply intertwined with the literary canon, as canonical texts frequently provide the source material on which they are based. Adaptation theory highlights this interdependence, since the canon offers a shared repertoire of stories, themes, characters, and concepts that adaptors can reinterpret and transform (Sanders 45). Additionally, Sanders states that adaptations are often an “attempt to make texts ‘relevant’ or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of proximation and updating. This can be seen as an artistic drive in many adaptations of so-called ‘classic’ novels or drama for television and cinema” (18–19).

Lastly, and as stated previously, the literary canon is not a neutral entity and the very status of a text as canonical, situated within the realm of high Culture, often provides the motivation for repeated adaptations of classical works. Adaptations are both enabled by and reactive to canon formation: they rely on well-known texts, but also critique and transform them. According to Geerts and Bossche this seems to lead to some sort of vicious cycle in which adaptation and canonisation seem to reinforce one another. They state that “adaptation processes play a role in canonisation processes and vice versa. The canonical status of a text may prompt adaptation processes, while adaptations have the potential to perpetuate the status of the work” (3). Sanders adds that regardless of the author's position towards the canon, the status of the pre-text gets reaffirmed as noteworthy solely because it is being continuously (re)adapted and reactivated in the culture's consciousness (Sanders 22). Therefore, even attempts to challenge the canon may ultimately serve to sustain its authority. At the same time, some scholars highlight the destabilising potential of adaptation and the ways in which readers may exercise interpretive agency when engaging with retellings. This recognition sets up the counterpoint that adaptations may also resist or reframe the values they transmit.

Having outlined how adaptations can reinforce dominant frameworks, it is equally important to consider how they may resist them. As already mentioned, adaptations often carry ideological dimensions that can impose particular cultural

values on readers. Yet, they also hold the potential to subvert these very ideologies. According to Hutcheon, adaptations can actually challenge widespread ideologies and cultural power structures as well: “We have seen that adaptations disrupt elements like priority and authority (e.g., if we experience the adapted text after the adaptation). But they can also destabilize both formal and cultural identity and thereby shift power relations. Could that subversive potential also be part of the appeal of adapting for adapters and audiences alike” (174)? Whelehan further highlights the participatory role of audiences, noting that while adapters borrow significant elements from the source, viewers and readers actively re-engage with the original through the adaptation, contributing to its reinterpretation in meaningful ways (15–16). Stephens and McCallum similarly emphasise the potentially subversive function of retellings. They believe that “retold stories have the potential to disclose how old stories suppress the invisible, the untold, and the unspoken. Such a potential will be realized through changing the modes of representation as well as, and more than, changing the content” (22). Strategies such as shifting narrative perspective, granting agency to marginalised characters through focalisation, and employing self-reflexive techniques can encourage readers not only to rethink the adapted text but also to reconsider broader cultural assumptions (22).

2.3.2 “What’s Past Is Prologue”: Shakespeare Retold for Young Readers

Retellings form a central category within children’s literature, providing young readers with opportunities to engage familiar stories through intertextual play. As Stephens and McCallum note, retellings are not simple repetitions but are shaped by and embedded within cultural and ideological frameworks (21). They serve multiple functions: they can transmit knowledge, modes of learning, and forms of authority, but they can also subvert or reconfigure established narratives, producing new textual and ideological arrangements. Among these roles, their educational agenda has been especially significant, particularly in canonical retellings such as those of Shakespeare.

Canonical retellings, and Shakespearean retellings in particular, are closely tied to an educational agenda that links cultural capital with the didactic function of children’s literature. This dynamic is evident in the continued production of Shakespearean adaptations, which demonstrate both the durability of his cultural authority and their persistent framing as educational. Adaptations of Shakespeare’s

works remain highly popular, as reflected in the steady number of publications produced each year (Isaac 3). According to Müller, “Adaptations of originally ‘adult’ texts for children are intended to initiate young readers to a literary canon that is deemed essential for sharing a common cultural heritage. As such, they follow an aesthetic as well as an educational agenda” (“Introduction” 1). Since children’s literature has often been regarded as a lesser form within the literary hierarchy, attaching it to a canonical work not only enhances the status of the adaptation but also elevates the perceived value of the genre itself (Müller, “Introduction” 2).

Adaptations of Shakespeare for children are often justified through their association with cultural authority and educational value. In her work on adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays for young readers, Isaac states that

[o]n one level, Shakespeare's name appears to authenticate a text within a patriarchal culture. These collections or editions introduce young audiences to one of the most admired and respected authors in the Western canon. And, since sophisticated children's literature is always aware of multiple audiences (child readers and adult readers), such texts reward the adult reader with a sense of his or her own sophistication through the recognition and appreciation of Shakespeare. (5–6)

Therefore, educators and parents often advocate early exposure to canonical texts, particularly Shakespeare, as a means of promoting literary education in children. At the same time, this practice affirms the adults’ own cultural identity and sense of sophistication. The didactic impulse behind these adaptations is thus closely tied to emotional and cultural validation, using retellings to bridge generational and cultural authority. Müller reinforces this point, suggesting that these adaptations function as a test case in which works associated with high Culture are transferred into children’s literature, a genre that continues to occupy a contested cultural position. In doing so, they not only encourage young readers toward future engagement with the canon but also contribute to maintaining canonical authors such as Shakespeare as enduring cultural icons (“Introduction” 2).

Alongside this emphasis on cultural legitimation, canonical retellings are also framed as pedagogical tools that prepare young readers for eventual encounters with Shakespeare’s plays. Oppermann notes that “[t]he aim, however, is clearly evaluated: quality lies with the original, and the desirable goal is to educate the young reader to dare a direct encounter with the ‘Bard’ and learn to understand him properly. The

two roads taken here are the text and an interest in historical background and cultural history” (101–102). She further states that such retellings rest on the assumption that they will inspire children to eventually engage with Shakespeare’s original plays, thereby ensuring his continued popularity, despite the challenges posed by archaic language and unfamiliar blank verse (55). This view is shared by Coats who states that young adult literature in educational contexts is often positioned as a gateway to canonical works, functioning as a “gateway drug used to entice readers to try the harder stuff”, meaning original works and more complex texts, such as Shakespeare (316). She believes adaptations can be a valuable aid in order to

work against the foreignness of Shakespearean language, the gaps of history and culture, and the strangeness of distant characters (what the heck is a Moor anyway, or a standard-bearer for that matter?). But if I can introduce them to Tim Blake Nelson’s *O* (2001) first, they can immediately see the relevance of the story to their lives and the conflicts they face on a daily basis. (316)

Therefore, in practice, canonical retellings for young readers transfer cultural authority into child-oriented forms while often narrowing interpretation through simplification and moral framing. Some works, however, re-open ambiguity by shifting perspective or mode, inviting alternative readings of the pre-text (Stephens and McCallum 22).

Nonetheless, cultural legitimization and pedagogical framing are further complicated by concerns over the perceived suitability of Shakespeare’s works for young readers. Rokison observes a shift from didactic to more entertaining adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays, however, she also points out that this shift does not eliminate censorship; morally complex and sexually explicit elements continue to be removed in recent editions to align with perceived standards of suitability for young readers (Rokison 7). As a result, these retellings eliminate much of the ambiguity that characterises the original plays, leading young readers toward predetermined and appropriate interpretations instead of encouraging them to engage critically with the text (Gearhart 64). This dynamic illustrates how canonical texts are reshaped within children’s literature to preserve cultural authority while simultaneously controlling how young audiences are permitted to encounter them. Similarly, Andreas notes that although there has been no formal or bureaucratic

effort to censor Shakespeare for younger audiences, his more challenging plays are often softened into child-appropriate stories. He believes this process, shaped partly by market demands, is primarily influenced by prevailing community standards of decency, particularly those enforced by school boards in the selection of educational texts (Andreas 99). Therefore, some readings become limited or even impossible for younger readers.

Retellings of canonical texts for children serve as powerful instruments of cultural transmission, both reinforcing the authority of the literary canon and shaping how young readers engage with social and ideological structures. In doing so, they encode positions on power, hierarchy, gender, class, and race within accessible narratives. Because the canon itself functions to construct and sustain specific forms of cultural knowledge, adaptations that draw on canonical texts inevitably participate in reinforcing those frameworks (Stephens and McCallum 21).

If the purpose of a canon is to construct, preserve, and perpetuate particular forms of cultural knowledge, then the assumptions and reassertions of canonicity found in adaptations are deeply implicated in this process. This aligns with the view of the literary canon as a mechanism for transmitting shared knowledge and ideological consensus (Stephens and McCallum 9). By adapting canonical texts for children, retellings become instruments of cultural continuity: they reinforce the authority and relevance of the canon while often limiting alternative interpretations. In this context, retellings are not merely derivative but function as active tools of cultural and ideological formation, a role made especially significant by the impressionable nature of their young audiences.

According to Stephens and McCallum, one key function of rewriting high Culture texts, such as Shakespeare's plays, for children is to make the values they embody more accessible and appealing. These works represent cultural capital, and their retellings play a significant role in initiating young readers into high Culture (254). Retellings of Shakespeare's works for children fulfil three interconnected cultural roles: they increase the accessibility and popularity of his plays, sustain the ongoing canonisation of Shakespeare, including the creation of a distinct canon for younger audiences, and serve as tools for transmitting core cultural values and ideologies to children (255–256).

Canonical retellings are not only instruments of cultural transmission but can also contain subversive potential. For Coats, the subversive element lies in the genre

of retellings itself. Unlike childhood, which is often idealised, adolescence is remembered as a liminal state marked by anxiety and impermanence (325). Within this context young readers seek repetition in media as that “may facilitate the working through of some personal and cultural traumas, it also seems to create a perceived need for more repetition—the comforting buzz of the same” as “contemporary teen readers are increasingly more likely to seek out sequels, series, parodies, and books with familiar plot lines to meet their media-saturated libidinal needs” (323–324). Repetition can therefore provide safety and familiarity, offering a space in which the reader is empowered. Isaac states:

Recognizing intertextuality helps readers perceive literature not only as an artistic phenomenon, but also as a mode of history and an approach to understanding social and cultural changes and continuities—especially in arenas of immediate significance to young readers, like parental relationships, romantic experiences, and violent confrontations. (xiii)

Retellings thus empower readers by offering both continuity and the possibility of critical engagement.

Retellings also open space for resistance by shifting focalisation and thereby reframing ideological structures. Geerts and Bossche write, “any text – including adaptations – has the potential to offer several possible subject positions, all of which adopt their own specific stance with respect to the pre-text. The individual child reader, then, can either accept or resist the ideologies inherent in any particular text” (8). One of the most significant strategies for enabling such resistance is a shift in narratorial voice and focalisation. By giving voice to marginal characters, adaptations can expose or unsettle the assumptions of the original. Sanders observes that “[m]any appropriations have a joint political and literary investment in giving voice to those characters or subject-positions they perceive to have been oppressed or repressed in the original” (98) and further notes that “[t]he retrieval of lost or repressed voices is a motif we have identified as being common to many of the appropriations we have considered thus far” (140). Tosi similarly points out that refocusing Shakespeare’s plays on female protagonists alters how young female readers engage with both Shakespeare and the canon, since such shifts “inevitably change the reader’s perception of the heroines’ contributions to the original plays” (“Shakespeare for Girls” 11). Instead of encountering Shakespeare as a distant and

patriarchal authority, girls are offered protagonists with whom they can identify, reshaping how they perceive themselves within the narrative framework of the canon.

Adaptations can also reshape how young readers perceive the authority of the canonical text itself. In her study of an adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice*, Wilkie-Stibbs argues that overt intertextual references in children's texts raise important questions about the status of the so-called original or "ur-text," as well as how such references shape readers' understanding and reception of both the adaptation and the source. She observes that children often encounter adaptations before engaging with the original play, which can lead them to view the retelling as the primary version through which they interpret the canonical text (185). In this way, cultural values can be reframed to offer alternative perspectives that empower readers in ways the canon itself does not. Geerts and Bossche similarly note that "contemporary adaptations propose ambivalent positions for child readers of canonical narratives. To a certain extent, iconoclastic adaptations question not only the meta-ethics underlying their pre-texts, but also the meta-ethics of culture as a whole" (16). Such observations highlight how adaptations do not simply mediate canonical works but actively shape the frameworks through which young readers encounter and interpret them.

In conclusion, canonical retellings can also carry subversive potential, offering young readers both familiarity and opportunities for critical engagement. Through repetition and intertextual recognition, they provide spaces of safety while reframing dominant ideologies, particularly by shifting narratorial voice and focalisation toward marginalised figures. In this way, retellings allow child readers to accept or resist the values of the pre-text and may even become the primary framework through which the canon is interpreted. Thus, adaptations not only transmit cultural values but also challenge and destabilise them, positioning young readers as active participants in meaning-making.

3 Close Reading

In this part of the thesis, I use close reading as the central method of analysis. By close reading, I mean a detailed examination of selected passages that focuses on how language, imagery, narration, and focalisation construct meaning. Building on the theoretical framework of the previous chapter, this approach allows me to trace

how retellings operate simultaneously as acts of cultural transmission and sites of subversion. To structure the readings, I have chosen three thematic lenses: authority, home, and sexuality, that recur in both Shakespeare and YA fiction and illuminate how the retellings negotiate power, belonging, and desire within their new contexts.

3.1 Corpus and Methodology

The three novels chosen for this study: *Storm-Wake* (Christopher 2018), *Ophelia* (Klein 2006), and *Prince of Shadows* (Caine 2014), were selected because they represent distinct approaches to retelling Shakespeare for young adult readers. Each rework a different play, engaging with *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet* respectively, and each recentres a side character. Additionally, they all feature elements and themes which are sometimes seen as inappropriate for children's consumption such as sexual themes, violence and complex political plots. Examining how these themes are retold and whether they are highlighted or downplayed reveals much about the adaptation process and the motivations guiding it. Together, these texts provide a diverse yet comparable corpus: all three adapt canonical material into YA fiction, but they do so through different strategies, genres, and emphases. Analysing them side by side makes it possible to identify broader patterns in how Shakespeare is mediated for adolescent readers while also highlighting the particularities of each retelling.

The first novel under analysis is Lucy Christopher's *Storm-Wake* (2018), a young adult fantasy inspired by Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The story follows Moss, a girl who has spent her entire life on an isolated island with her father, Pa. He tells her that floods have destroyed the rest of the world and insists that the island is the only safe place left. Moss accepts this explanation as she grows up, knowing nothing else. The island is shaped by magical stormflowers that influence memory and perception, and it is regularly disturbed by violent storms and volcanic activity. Moss's life changes when Callan, often called Cal, a boy swept in from the sea, washes up on the island. He and Moss become close and Pa initially treats him as part of the family. Pa also suffers from a recurring illness termed "the Blackness," which he attempts to manage by consuming stormflowers. As time passes, Moss learns more about the truth of her situation. Her relationship with Pa deteriorates as she discovers his stories about the outside world are false. The tension escalates when Moss and Callan attempt to leave the island, leading to open conflict and Pa

separates the two. In the end Moss, in reality called Miranda, learns that Pa is not her biological father but a man she ran away with to escape her abusive family. The novel concludes with Pa remaining behind while Moss leaves the island with Callan in search of a new life.

Next, Rachel Caine's *Prince of Shadows* (2014) retells *Romeo and Juliet* from the perspective of Benvolio Montague, who secretly leads a double life as the masked thief known as the "Prince of Shadows". Set in Renaissance Verona, the novel revisits the deadly feud between the Montagues and Capulets but shifts its focus from the lovers, Romeo and Juliet, to Benvolio, Romeo's cousin, and his relationship with both Romeo and their friend Mercutio. Narrated in the first person, the story reveals Benvolio's life within the restrictive Montague household, dominated by his cold mother and tyrannical grandmother, the Iron Lady. At night, he seeks freedom as a thief, targeting the corrupt and powerful. His closest relationships are with Mercutio, whose homosexuality places him in direct conflict with his abusive father, and with Rosaline Capulet, Juliet's cousin, who is kept hidden and silenced within her family's palazzo. The novel frames Romeo and Juliet's passion as the result of a supernatural curse unleashed by Mercutio's dying words, which inadvertently targets the houses of Montague as well as Capulet. The curse was designed to inflict upon the guilty party who had betrayed Mercutio and his lover the pain of destructive, ill-fated love and subsequent loss thereby leading to a series of catastrophic events in the two families due to their involvement. The manifestation of the curse in Benvolio is compulsive and irresistible love. Ultimately, he confronts the curse by destroying the cursed rosary and saving his love interest Rosaline and the remaining family members in the process.

Lisa Klein's *Ophelia* (2006) retells *Hamlet* from Ophelia's perspective, expanding her story beyond the limited role she occupies in Shakespeare's play. The novel begins with Ophelia's childhood, where she lives with her father, Polonius, and brother, Laertes, before being brought to Elsinore Castle to serve as a lady-in-waiting to Queen Gertrude. At court, she is educated in reading and healing, while also navigating the strict expectations of obedience and chastity placed upon her by her family and society. Ophelia and Hamlet develop a romance, which leads to a secret marriage and Ophelia ultimately becoming pregnant. After Hamlet kills Polonius and descends into apparent madness, she grows disillusioned with him and is left vulnerable in the increasingly dangerous court. To escape, she fakes her death and

flees to a convent in St. Emilion, France, where she gives birth to a son named Hamlet. There she finds purpose through her knowledge of herbs, serving as the convent's physician and gaining acceptance from Mother Ermentrude and the sisters. In the end Horatio finds Ophelia and her son, and they both confess their love for each other. She resolves to remain in exile to protect her son from the new king of Denmark, Fortinbras.

Next, I turn to my method of analysis: To analyse how the novels adapt Shakespeare for young readers, I take authority as a central framework, since it not only structures relations of power but also shapes how home is imagined and how adolescent desire is regulated within the stories. This power can appear overtly, in the form of command, prohibition, surveillance, and sanction, or covertly, through the language of care, teaching and protection. My analysis thus builds on theory that conceptualises adolescent literature as centrally concerned with power and authority, particularly the regulation of young people's agency by institutions and adults, and on theory of focalisation in children's and YA texts as a means of positioning readers in relation to adult control. In practice, I attend to authority along several dimensions:

- (a) relational dynamics: who authorises, who consents, who resists
- (b) plot mechanisms: guardianship, arranged alliances, curfews, exile/grounding, economic dependency
- (d) institutional mediations: home/household, family, church, court
- (e) focalisation: whether the perspective aligns us with the adolescent's interiority against, with, or ambivalently toward adult authority.

This approach lends itself well to adaptation, as retellings often adjust the ways coercion is presented in the source text. Acts of control may be reframed in more sympathetic terms, or redirected into forms of guidance that appear less restrictive. In doing so, adaptations can redistribute authority within the stories' world and grant adolescent characters a degree of agency not available to them in the original plays.

3.2 “Shall We Not Revenge”: Family Authority and Adolescent Resistance

Now, I want to move onto family relationships as they are central to children’s and young adult literature, shaping how issues of authority, identity, and autonomy are negotiated. Adolescence is often represented through crises in relation to parents (Seelinger-Trites 55–56). As Stringer notes, young people face many challenges such as psychological abandonment, parental loss, and intimidation, which therefore become recurring themes in texts for young readers (3). These conflicts establish the family as a key site within the story in which power struggles unfold. Parental figures, and fathers in particular, frequently embody the primary site of authority in these texts (Alston 9).

Children’s literature often reflects how the domestic sphere functions as a reflection of wider social hierarchies. Alston argues that the family cannot be regarded as an innocent or private institution but as an ideological system in which “issues of power and control are embedded” (9). Bradford et al., likewise stress that families in literature are not static but constantly reconstructed in response to shifting cultural and political discourses. They describe the family as both problematic and idealised: fragile due to its instability, yet invested with “the burden of the utopian promises of a better future” (130). This duality often shapes how families are represented in children’s and YA texts: as a source of security and belonging, but also as a site of repression.

These perspectives highlight that parental figures in children’s and young adult literature are rarely neutral or just supportive. They embody authority, oppression, or absence, creating the plot conditions in which adolescent characters negotiate independence and self-definition. Therefore, these texts showcase the universal tension between dependence and autonomy, while at the same time reflecting cultural ideologies that position adolescence as a stage of rebellion and the family as a site of embedded power.

3.2.1 The Calm Before the Storm: Rejection of Paternal Authority and Control in *Storm-Wake*

In the following chapter I want to explore the relationship between Pa, Moss and Cal and the authoritarian dynamic which ultimately fractures their relationship. Moss grows up in complete isolation, with her father as her only companion. As Charlesworth observes, fathers in children’s and YA literature are often depicted as

stoic and emotionally distant, rarely shown in a care-taking role (34). Pa differs from this pattern: he is an extremely loving and nurturing father, however it is also marked by intensely controlling behaviour: Pa insists the outside world is dangerous, forbids her to leave, and silences questions about their exile. He refuses to discuss her past and, when pressed, becomes evasive or angry. This controlling behaviour leaves Moss profoundly lonely. Although she longs to explore beyond the island, Pa convinces her that civilisation has been destroyed by catastrophic floods.

In *Storm-Wake*, the arrival of Callan, a boy who seems half human and half fish, reconfigures the father-child dynamic by disrupting the closed world Moss shares with Pa. His presence marks a decisive turning point: for the first time, Moss encounters someone her own age rather than relying solely on her father's company. Callan brings new stories of the outside world, directly undermining Pa's account of destruction. For Moss, he represents freedom, possibility, and alternative perspectives. According to Spencer and Dillon Craig, the absence of parents is a narratological imperative, since stories aimed at children and adolescents often require parents to be either physically absent or emotionally distant in order to allow the protagonists to act independently (5). While Pa is physically present, his inability to communicate with his daughter truthfully or to deal with her emerging autonomy makes him effectively absent as a nurturing figure. Callan, who respects her as an individual, fills this gap and ends up providing to Moss what she desperately needs: equality and knowledge, things Pa has denied her, and in doing so destabilises Pa's authority.

As Moss's bond with Callan deepens, she begins to define herself less as her father's child and more as an independent subject. Together, the two even glimpse a flickering island in the distance, fuelling hope that life beyond their own world might exist. Pa, however, becomes increasingly volatile and controlling as Moss asserts independence. He tries to reassert authority by emphasising the dangers of the outside world and by tightening restrictions. The family dynamic thus becomes dominated by suspicion: Pa doubts the children's words, while they in turn doubt his judgment. Moss tests boundaries, especially under Callan's influence, and their attempt to leave on a self-made raft ends in shipwreck. Pa responds with manipulation, declaring, "It's not time to leave the island, Moss . . . Maybe it will never be safe now. Never be time" (Christopher, act 2, sc. 4). His words expose both his fear and his desire to keep Moss dependent. Pa's language positions him as the

repressive authority and Moss's growing defiance of him exemplifies how rebellion can be framed as a redemptive act.

Initially, Pa welcomes Callan into their home, but when the boy threatens his authority, Pa lashes out: "‘We’ll build another shelter,’ Pa said to Cal. ‘A hut only for you. Maybe it’s time you slept away from us, no longer in the same bed’" (Christopher, act 2, sc. 4). Pa escalates the conflict into actual violence when Cal insists he sees land: "‘Land,’ he said, pointing firm at the ocean. ‘It’s there. Maybe you’re too sick to see.’ . . . Pa raised his arm and hit Cal in the face. It happened so fast Moss did not see it coming" (Christopher, act 3, sc. 3).

The attempted escape irreparably fractures the relationship between Pa and Cal, casting Pa as a rival rather than a guardian. Pa views Cal as a threat to his authority, while Cal feels so trapped he contemplates killing him. Moss, too, feels violent impulses toward her father: "A part of her wanted to smash her fists hard against Pa too—make him talk, hit him like he had hit Cal on the beach" (Christopher, act 4, sc. 15). Such moments reveal that the children's identities are shaped less through parental support than through acts of resistance. As Trites argues, YA novels reflect and reinforce the cultural expectation that adolescence is defined by resistance, situating the parent-child relationship as "always already one of contested authority" (69). Pa's authority becomes the reason why Moss and Callan develop resilience, moral clarity, and autonomy. Their rebellion is painful but necessary, illustrating how adolescence is often portrayed in literature as an emergence through struggle.

Pa's authority is ultimately undermined by his own psychological and physical instability. The "Blackness" that consumes him, makes him at once the victim of his own emotions and a dangerous figure whose volatility directly impacts Moss and Cal. By the end of the story, it is revealed that "The Blackness" Pa suffers from is an unspecified depression-like brain illness, which he believes he must cure by ingesting the flowers which grow on the island. Although the illness is never fully defined, his temperamental outbursts are shown to be one of its symptoms. This framing casts him as less accountable for his actions, since he is often portrayed as remorseful after moments of anger. As the illness advances, it becomes evident that his authority has little foundation and is steadily collapsing, exposing the fragility of the power he once had over his family.

The island setting functions as an externalisation of the family dynamic, reflecting Pa's waning authority. Its storms and volcanic eruptions symbolise the instability that underlies Pa's control, dramatising Bradford et al.'s claim that the family is burdened with the expectation of providing an idealised life while remaining fragile and unpredictable (130). Pa clings to the illusion that isolation guarantees safety, yet the island itself erupts and floods, demonstrating that such permanence is impossible. Just as the island must ultimately be abandoned for Bird Island, the land flickering in the distance, Moss must relinquish the security and control of her father's world. She recognises that, although she loves Pa, she cannot save him from his destructive nature. His refusal to confront the truth about himself and the world renders him powerless, and his selfish attachment to the island, rooted in fear of imprisonment and of his own pain, exposes the limits of paternal authority when it is bound up with self-preservation rather than genuine care.

In the end, Moss chooses independence over imprisonment. It is revealed that Pa is not her biological father but a man she trusted and ran away with from her abusive and violent real father, only to end up in a similarly controlling dynamic. His determination to stay on the island is revealed as selfish, driven by the belief that he could cure his illness and by fear of imprisonment for kidnapping if he returned. Moss comes to see that Pa is responsible for his own choices and that she cannot mature while confined within his world. She retains affectionate memories of her home and Pa without succumbing to mistreatment, ultimately embracing their separation:

"Maybe you should stay..." she said, releasing his hand, "like you want. Keep the island hidden like that. Stay with Aster. Keep it for us." It hurt knife-sharp to say. It felt right too. . . . Besides, without Pa, she was brand new. No one would know her history. It would hurt, but it was clean-hurt. Knife-sharp-clean. (Christopher, act 4, sc. 24)

Although Pa is the only parental figure Moss has known, she turns to Cal for emotional support: "'See it all?' she asked. 'The whole world?' Cal nodded. 'We find your home and mine'" (Christopher, act 4, sc. 24). In choosing Cal, Moss seeks a relationship grounded in security and equality rather than authority and control. This development draws on the found-family trope, in which characters locate familial love and belonging among peers rather than through biological ties. Moss's

decision also marks her emergence from the constraints of the “family home”, echoing the earlier break with her biological father when she first fled to the island with Pa.

This dynamic exemplifies Alston’s observation that the father’s authority mirrors that of a king, each sustained through systems of power and control designed to enforce obedience (9). As the only authority figure on the island, Pa functions as a king within the domestic sphere, constructing a reality in which Moss has no choice but to submit. He constructs and maintains an absolute version of reality for her. The outside world has been destroyed and escape is impossible. In the end, everyone’s survival depends on their obedience to him. The storms and eruptions that force Moss to leave the island symbolise the disruption that is part of adolescence. They show the harsh break from parental control that makes space for independence. As the volcanic activity grows more violent, Pa’s authority also weakens, linking the natural world with the collapse of his control. Out of this conflict, Moss becomes resilient, morally aware, and able to act on her own. *Storm-Wake* therefore presents the family as a place of love, repression, absence, and rebellion. Pa represents paternal authority turned into tyranny, while Callan offers the chance for connection with an equal. Together, these dynamics highlight a common theme in YA literature: the struggle between dependence and autonomy, and the way identity is shaped less in the safety of family than in the act of breaking away from it.

3.2.2 Absent Without Leave: Failing Parents and Failed Resistance in *Prince of Shadows*

In *Prince of Shadows*, parental relationships are marked by conflict, absence, and repression, shaping every aspect of the young characters’ lives. As in *Storm-Wake*, the authority of parents, especially fathers, remains pervasive, yet here it takes different forms. Whereas Moss struggles against her father’s protective tyranny, the characters in *Prince of Shadows* confront parental absence and detachment, or violent control, each of which profoundly influences their emotional and moral development.

The protagonist Ben exemplifies these dynamics in his relationship with his mother. Having lost his father at a young age, she becomes his primary parent, yet their bond is defined by distance rather than intimacy. She is depicted as unapproachable and demanding, more concerned with obedience than nurture:

“Bring food for him,” she said. “He’s of no great use to anyone in this condition.” She dismissed him with a firm nod, and he scurried to do her bidding. My rooms were, I thought, one of the few places in Verona where my mother could be assured that she’d be obeyed without question; even within the Montague halls she was still the excess widow, the foreign flower dragged into the toxic hothouse of one of the richest, most ambitious families of the city. Grandmother did not approve, and God knew, what Grandmother disapproved would never find much favor within these walls, or without. (Caine, Quarto 2)

Ben’s mother expects obedience, yet her authority proves fragile and conditional: it is limited to private spaces and undermined by her low status within the wider Montague hierarchy. This creates a contradictory image: she is authoritative in private but powerless in public. While she also subscribes to the wider understanding that unquestioned authority is something to be desired, she is simultaneously a victim of it in her own family.

Ben responds to his mother’s emotional distance by striving to please her, though she remains stoic and guarded in his eyes:

I didn’t think she would—my mother rarely lowered her guard, even with me—but after a stiff moment she sighed and reached for one of the goblets on the tray. . . . Life for my mother, in this house, was a lifetime of living under siege. . . . To me, as a child, she had been as beautiful and unapproachable as the marble Madonna on her fountain—an icon of love, but not love itself. (Caine, Quarto 2)

Their relationship is characterised by formality, distance, and at times a reversal of roles. While Ben outwardly performs obedience, he often acts independently of her wishes and assumes responsibility for her well-being rather than the other way around. His mother aspires to exert authority over those she considers beneath her in rank, including her son, but Ben responds not with outright rebellion but with a more quiet and patient resistance. He recognises her preoccupation with survival in a hostile household and understands why she cannot provide him and his sister with emotional warmth. This dynamic drives Ben to seek intimacy and support beyond the family, particularly in his friendships and romantic relationships.

Mercutio’s relationship with his father offers a stark contrast, as here violence itself becomes the instrument of authority. Trites argues that YA literature consistently dramatises how “social power is deployed during the course of the

narrative" (2), and Mercutio's father embodies this principle in its most destructive form: "They were having a good deal more trouble with Mercutio. . . . Even enraged, Mercutio could not wound his father. He dropped the point of his sword, and his father took it from him and flung it viciously away, then followed that with a closed-fisted blow so mighty it laid Mercutio in the dirt" (Caine, Quarto 2). The relationship is defined here by brute force, with paternal authority expressed through physical domination. Although Mercutio is more than capable of defending himself, he refuses to wound his father, suggesting that the struggle is not only physical but also psychological. As it is stated in the dialogue, he could not wound his father, even in the appropriate circumstance. This complicates Seelinger-Trites' assessment that in YA literature the "rebellions against repression frequently prove to be redemptive for adolescents" (54). This suggests that the authority Mercutio is experiencing is more than societal but internalised, as technically he does have the means to resist. Therefore, when social power is too pervasive it seems as though resistance is impossible.

Another source of conflict between Mercutio and his father is the fact he is homosexual, something his father cannot accept. As opposed to Pa, Lord Ordelaffi does not seem to show any regret in his treatment of his son, but additionally taunts him:

And Lord Ordelaffi finally said, "You live to see the dawn, then. It is a sign from God that even He does not want you."

Mercutio's voice came thready and weak, muffled by the swelling of his nose and mouth. "And no credit to the love of my father."

"You brought this horror on yourself, with your filthy ways". (Caine, Quarto 2)

This exchange reflects a wider trend in YA literature to present family not only as flawed but at times as outright dangerous. A consistent pattern in adolescent literature is the portrayal of parents as repressive figures. Seelinger-Trites observes that adolescent characters frequently imagine their parents as dominating forces and that rebellion against this domination becomes a crucial means of developing their own power (54). Yet Mercutio's struggle demonstrates the limits of this model: resistance is possible, but not always survivable. When "his father ordered a belt passed around his throat, and had him choked just enough to silence him," (Caine, Quarto 2) Mercutio's voice, both literally and metaphorically, is taken from him. His

eventual physical and mental deterioration shows that rebellion, while common in YA storylines, does not always lead to liberation; it can also reveal the pervasive force of parental tyranny. After the murder of his lover at the hands of his father, Mercutio becomes, according to Ben, “whole without, and ruined within, twisted and burned and blackened, and I mourned for him, because the Mercutio I had loved died on a rope months ago” (Caine, Quarto 3). His father’s cruelty alters him irreparably. Unlike Moss, whose defiance enables her to leave and grow, Mercutio is broken by authority that allows no space for resistance. Even when he turns the other cheek in the face of his father’s violence, Ordelaffi cannot be changed. This dynamic illustrates the structural and pre-emptive powerlessness often described in YA literature, where oppression is so pervasive that resistance becomes futile.

Ben’s and Mercutio’s parental relationships together illustrate the spectrum of authority in *Prince of Shadows*. Ben’s mother embodies absence and cold detachment, pushing him to seek intimacy elsewhere, while Mercutio’s father enforces violent repression that destroys him. In both cases, the family is not portrayed as a space of unconditional care but as a contested ideological arena in which power is imposed and identity is shaped through struggle. In contrast to *Storm-Wake*, where Moss’s defiance ultimately frees her, *Prince of Shadows* presents two divergent responses to authority: Benvolio cultivates autonomy through quiet resistance and strategic rebellion, while Mercutio is crushed by the violence of paternal control.

3.2.3 Water Under the Bridge: Absence and Found Kinship in *Ophelia*

In *Ophelia*, parental relationships are defined less by overt repression than by neglect and absence, particularly in Ophelia’s early life. Her mother dies in childbirth, leaving her without maternal affection and instilling in her a lasting sense of rejection: she feels unwanted from the moment of birth. As she recalls in the novel’s opening line:

I have always been a motherless girl. The lady Frowendel died giving birth to me, depriving also my brother, Laertes, and father, Polonius, of her care. . . . I was often sad, thinking I had caused her to die and therefore my father could not love me. I tried not to vex or trouble him further, but he never gave me the attention I desired. (Klein ch. 10)

This absence is compounded by Polonius, an emotionally neglectful father whose disinterest hurts both of his children: “Sometimes we would not see him for days and we worried that he had abandoned us, but he always returned” (Klein ch. 11). Ophelia strives to win his approval but is consistently dismissed: “Our father praised Laertes’ schoolwork, but when I showed him my neat rows of numbers, he only patted my head as if I were his dog” (Klein ch. 12). Polonius is thus depicted as a parental failure: career-obsessed, emotionally absent, and dismissive of his daughter’s worth. His neglect shapes Ophelia’s ongoing search for validation and belonging.

When Polonius does pay attention to Ophelia, it is to control her behaviour or to use her as a political instrument in the court. He mocks her chastity, framing her worth in terms of family honour and social capital. In the novel therefore Polonius functions less as a parent and more as a patriarchal warden, reducing Ophelia’s identity to a tool for family advancement. This absence of parental love positions Ophelia as emotionally isolated within her family, fostering independence but also insecurity.

Ophelia’s eventual refusal to obey her father marks an important break from this pattern of submission. When asked to spy on Queen Gertrude, she realises the request violates her moral boundaries:

“You cannot tell?” He said mockingly. “Rather, you must tell me all you know. It is your duty as my daughter.” I was silent. I dared not remind him of his duty as a father to love and protect me. But I could not hide my resentment. “I begin to see that you put me in the queen’s service not for my own benefit,” I said, “but to be your spy.” (Klein ch. 5)

Stringer states that “[y]oung adult literature illustrates how individuals might begin allegiance to a larger community by obeying all forms of authority. Some people may not move past this blind faith. Others can eventually realize the cost for such obedience and are tormented by their actions” (66). While Ophelia has been conditioned to comply with her father’s demands, she resists blind obedience and instead asserts her loyalty to Gertrude. This loyalty is grounded not in submission but in respect and love, signalling her capacity to reject coercive authority.

Ophelia’s turning point comes when Polonius intervenes in her relationship with Hamlet, convinced that she is gullible and naive. In response, she vows a secret rebellion: “I looked down to hide my sadness and my fury. I decided from this

moment on, I would no longer be my father's daughter. Yet I would let him think that he still ruled me" (Klein ch. 14). This rejection of her father's authority marks a decisive moment of growth, as Ophelia begins to resist parental control and move toward independence. Julia Eccleshare observes that literature for young readers often becomes a way of confronting the pain caused by parental failure (548), and Ophelia's story exemplifies this dynamic. Polonius treats her not as a daughter but as a political asset, enforcing chastity and obedience as matters of family honour rather than genuine care. Although she remains emotionally and socially bound to him, Ophelia learns to channel her anger directly at her father and to resist his control. This space of resistance enables her to develop the resilience and moral strength necessary for her independence.

Ophelia compensates for her father's neglect by seeking connection with replacement parental figures, the first of whom is Queen Gertrude. When Gertrude accepts her as a lady-in-waiting, Ophelia's social position improves, but the gesture also functions as an act of care, recognising potential in her that others have overlooked. At first, Ophelia's admiration for the Queen is unreciprocated, but their relationship gradually deepens to her immense joy: "You have the spirit of a lady, Ophelia. Though you were not born to high estate, you will rise to greatness," said Gertrude, kissing my forehead lightly. I almost wept at her touch, which lingered like a memory. Were my mother's lips this soft?" (Klein ch. 5).

Gertrude at first appears to offer Ophelia the maternal recognition denied by Polonius, but she ultimately fails as a substitute parent. After the king's death, Gertrude's behaviour shifts, and Ophelia no longer recognises the independent queen she admired: "Toward her new husband she displayed a tame submission I had not seen before, while Claudius strutted like a proud and possessive cock" (Klein ch. 13). Their bond weakens further once Gertrude suspects Ophelia's secret romance, and Ophelia feels displaced by her rivals at court: "Gertrude knew that I was deceiving her, and she in turn began to hold me at a distance" (Klein ch. 9). The deepest wound comes when Hamlet rejects her in open court and Gertrude does not comfort her: "Nor did Gertrude visit me. Like her son, she remained silent and cold. . . . Still, her abandonment added to my hurt" (Klein ch. 24). Gertrude's withdrawal repeats the pattern of neglect in Ophelia's life, reinforcing her sense of isolation even within chosen bonds.

Unlike Polonius, who never acknowledges Ophelia beyond her utility, Gertrude offers her fleeting recognition as a daughter, but ultimately places court politics, similar to her father, above her wellbeing. Their reunion in the convent is marked by relief and catharsis, as Gertrude apologises and Ophelia embraces her as a substitute mother: “Her words bathed my ears like a soothing balm. Had I not longed for years to embrace Gertrude as my mother? To have her approve my love for her son?” (Klein ch. 33) and “Filled with gratitude and relief, I seized the hem of her skirt, dusty though it was, and buried my face in its folds, crying like a sorry child that I had ever mistrusted her” (Klein ch. 33). When they have to part again Ophelia is speechless at the profound loss she feels seeing Gertrude having to leave again. Ultimately Ophelia has to come to terms with the fact that, similar to her father, the structures of the court and court politics are more influential on their behaviour than anything else. Although Gertrude does want to nurture a connection with Ophelia she seems not to be able to as her priorities lie with the court and Claudius. This can also be seen in her treatment of Hamlet, who, although he is her actual son and heir of the throne she still does not side with in times of conflict, rather remaining on Claudius’ side, whom he considers to be his enemy. Gertrude does not protect Ophelia when Claudius and Polonius use her as a pawn to test Hamlet’s madness. She sympathises with her, but she does not stop the manipulation. In conclusion, Gertrude is the first maternal connection Ophelia has ever had. She embraces her emotionally, confiding in her and offering both the affection and reassurance she has longed for. However, when it becomes clear that Gertrude is complicit in Claudius’ schemes, she becomes very disillusioned with her, shattering Ophelia’s at times idealised version of her, leading her to rely, again, only on herself.

At the convent, Ophelia finally finds the companionship and security missing from her family life, seeing in Mother Ermentrude the maternal figure she has long needed. Ermentrude offers both care and guidance: “Mother is not only virtuous and thrifty, but wise. I marvel how she led me to understand that it was not marriage to Christ that I desired, but sisterhood” (Klein ch. 43). She also supports Ophelia’s intellectual development: “Like a generous patron, Mother Ermentrude has made every book in the convent’s great library open to me” (Klein, Epilogue). Described as “a tower of strength . . . firm and does not yield, except in loving” (Klein ch. 43), Ermentrude represents an authority that is firm but caring. Unlike Polonius’s control and dismissal around her academic pursuits, Mother Ermentrude’s authority allows

Ophelia to grow as both a reader and healer and provides a model of parental guidance she can embrace rather than resist.

When Ophelia delivers her baby she confides in Mother Ermentrude who she can rely on and whom she chooses for guidance:

"I have never known a mother's care," I whisper. "I do not know how to be a mother." Even as I say this, I realize it is no longer true.
 "Do not fear," says Mother Ermentrude. "[T]hink of Our Lady, the mother of beautiful love, greatness, and holy hope."
 "No, I will think of you," I say to this woman who kneels at my bedside as my very own mother would. "You are a kind mother to many daughters. Look how they love you, as I do." (Klein ch. 46)

The conclusion of Ophelia's story shows how parental absence and neglect shape her, while also leaving space for new forms of belonging. Although Polonius fails her as a father, treating her largely as an instrument of political ambition, she still admits to grief at his death: "Though I had felt little love for my father, sadness like the constant tide swept over me, leaving me limp" (Klein ch. 24). This ambivalence demonstrates how authority can leave lasting marks even when resisted, and how the longing for parental recognition endures despite neglect.

The novel resolves this tension not through reconciliation with her family but through the creation of alternative relationships. In the convent, Mother Ermentrude offers the guidance and affection Polonius never provided, combining firm authority with care. At the same time, Ophelia acknowledges that she is severed from her bloodline: "Hamlet is dead, Gertrude and Laertes are slain. I have no husband, mother, brother, or father in the world. I have no home, for I am cut off from Denmark forever. I am like a severed branch flung by a storm from the trunk of a great, dying tree" (Klein ch. 37). Still, she experiences kinship through the nuns and her son: "My Hamlet is a tiny prince in this realm of women. The old nuns laugh and their eyes dance when they bend down to receive a garland of daisies or cowslips from his hand. Isabel loves the boy almost as much as I do, and he binds us like sisters" (Klein, Epilogue). Her new-found kinship is presented in an idyllic way, which contrasts with Bradford et al.'s observation that many authors hesitate to endorse alternatives to conventional family arrangements (153) and challenges what Alston identifies as the dominant literary ideology of devotion to the nuclear family (8).

In conclusion, across the three novels, authority is imagined through different structures of power. *Storm-Wake* presents it as paternal sovereignty where a single figure governs every aspect of the adolescent's world. *Prince of Shadows* shifts authority into the public and institutional sphere, where it is exercised through lineage, honour codes, and sanctioned violence that regulate behaviour within both the household and the city. *Ophelia* shows how authority can take the form of neglect and manipulation, as political use and emotional absence replace open guidance and leave the adolescent longing for recognition. Along one another, these representations suggest that YA retellings do not portray authority as a single, stable force but as varied and unstable, ranging from domination, to surveillance, to neglect. Therefore, they highlight how adolescence is shaped not only by overt repression but also by the failures, distortions, and inconsistencies of parental power.

3.3 Ideas of Home

The idea of “home” in children’s and young adult literature is a complex and layered theme, reflecting wider cultural ideologies, story conventions, and the psychological needs of young readers. It is rarely a neutral space, rather, home functions as both a physical location and a symbolic structure through which issues of belonging, safety, and authority are explored. In much of children’s literature, it is tied closely to the family, serving as the foundation for identity formation and the primary site where authority is exercised and negotiated. According to Alston it is seen as “the haven of the family and, like the family, the ideal of the home remains intrinsic to children’s literature This literature defines what constitutes a good and bad home and judges the family accordingly, dictating a correct mode of behaviour both to its child and adult readers” (Alston 69). In this sense, home is never merely descriptive but prescriptive, shaping how readers are encouraged to view domestic life and their place within it.

At the same time, the home is frequently constructed in opposition to “away,” which Alston describes as “culturally loaded as it invokes a nostalgia for warmth and comfort” (70). This opposition is central to many story structures for young readers, where departure from home, conflict in unfamiliar spaces, and eventual return serve to reaffirm the stability of family and domestic life. Yet in young adult literature, this pattern is often unsettled. Homes can be sites of repression or danger, and protagonists may resist or abandon them altogether in order to claim independence.

In this way, YA texts both reproduce and subvert the ideology of the home as haven, showing how it can function as a prison as well as a place of comfort. Examining how home is represented in the novels under study reveals how YA literature at once sustains and challenges the cultural ideal of the childhood home, exposing its instability and recasting it as a contested space of conflict and transformation.

3.3.1 Home Is Where the Heart Is: Home as Memories of Childhood in *Storm-Wake*

In *Storm-Wake*, the island is the primary representation of home, but it is unstable and shifts meaning throughout the novel. At different moments it is a refuge, a prison, and an illusion, reflecting Moss's growth and her changing relationship with Pa. What begins as a sanctuary becomes a place of confinement and finally turns into an inner sense of belonging that Moss carries with her beyond the island. Home is thus not presented as a fixed place but as something psychological and relational.

At the start of the novel, the island is shown as a safe haven. Pa describes it as the last place protected from the floods that have destroyed the outside world, a story that secures Moss's dependence on him. This reflects Alston's claim that the home is often represented as "a place of security, a haven from the outside world, and a place of constraint" (89). For Moss, it is also the landscape of childhood, familiar and comforting in its beauty: "Moss had gotten used to the full-flower sweetness in the air, and to how it made herlight-stepped as a flutterby. She'd gotten used to seeing dabs of flower-color everywhere: in the dirt and sand, in the rocks and branches" (Christopher, act 2, sc. 2). What might appear strange to others has become ordinary for her, giving shape to daily life and establishing the island as both a playground and a home.

Although the island is presented as home, it is marked by instability and danger, reminding the reader that Moss's childhood world is never entirely secure. Harsh storms and extreme weather disrupt daily life, while dangerous animals threaten the children. Cal describes these conditions as: "Cold and bitey. The weather was gnawing at his skin too, like another pissin' weaselmouse. The recent days been getting colder, colder than Cal had known. . . . Something was turning the place rotten and pinched-tight" (Christopher, act 3, sc. 1). Pa attempts to manage these dangers by dividing the island into safe and unsafe zones, and draws a map for Moss:

As he spoke, she traced a map he'd made of the island: the place for the wild dogs at the top, the long Western Beach stretching down the right side, their cove and hut at the bottom, the rocky coast where their boat had wrecked [...] then, in the middle of the island, the triangle volcano. When her fingers paused over Lizard Rocks, Pa watched her close. "Too much danger there, Moss," he warned. "Never go there alone." (Christopher, act 2, sc. 2)

This scene reflects how the island functions as a child's world, arranged into familiar and unfamiliar spaces that shape Moss's perception of home. Bradford et al. state that "[p]art of the utopian tradition in many stories written for children is that the dichotomy between good and bad is often spatially schematised: internal (good) domestic space versus external (bad) societal space" (136). Pa's map mirrors this model by reducing the island to safe and dangerous zones, offering Moss a simplified and ordered version of her world.

In *Storm-Wake*, the island gradually shifts from being a haven to becoming a prison, reflecting the dual role of home as both protection and constraint. Alston argues that the home in literature often serves as a site of disciplinary control, shaping ideas of what counts as a proper household and prescribing standards of acceptable conduct. Because of this dual role, it can nurture and protect while at the same time constrain the child, functioning both as a refuge and as a space from which the child longs to break free (69–70). Pa's mapping of the island reflects this duality, reducing Moss's home into categories of permission and prohibition rather than a place where she feels secure and free to roam. At the same time, Pa frames the island as a place of isolation and exile, not only for Moss but for himself. Moss reflects: "Moss knew what he wanted. Flower Island was his exile. Away from the bad people in the rest of the world. Away from the mind-illness he'd had proper back there. But she could not let him stay. He might die like that. And besides, she would miss him too much [...] wouldn't she?" (Christopher, act 4, sc. 24). For Pa, the island is a retreat from trauma and a fragile attempt to keep danger at bay. For Moss, however, it is unsustainable: if Pa remains, he risks losing himself entirely. The island as exile therefore functions both as retreat and entrapment, showing how Pa's need for safety has turned home into a form of self-imposed prison.

Pa presents the island as uniquely safe by insisting it cannot be found on maps and that anyone who leaves will forget it ever existed. "This island sits in a kind of bubble," Pa had said. "The stormflowers keep it like that. Here, we are safe. Beyond, I

do not know anymore” (Christopher, act 2, sc. 4). The “bubble” does not simply describe isolation but represents Pa’s belief that Moss can remain in a state of childhood forever if she is kept within the boundaries he enforces. For him, home and childhood are interchangeable, a space where he can protect her and avoid facing the wider world. Yet this idea of home is built on illusion: safety is equated with obedience, and knowledge of the world beyond is withheld. Pa’s paternal authority sustains the illusion that childhood dependence can last indefinitely.

As Moss matures, this illusion collapses. Pa continues to insist that the island is the “last safe space in the world,” but Moss rejects his story: “But the rest of the world hasn’t gone, Pa. There were no floods. No floods are coming here” (Christopher, act 4, sc. 18). Her refusal shows her independence and recognition that the island is not uniquely safe but simply the place Pa has chosen to hide. This realisation destabilises her entire sense of reality: “‘Nothing what seem,’ Cal said. Not even Cal. Not Pa. Maybe not her? Her whole world flown up like ash from a fire. ‘What is real, then?’ she murmured” (Christopher, act 4, sc. 15). Home can no longer be sustained by Pa’s illusions, and in seeing through them Moss steps out of the bubble of childhood and begins to claim her independence.

The collapse of Pa’s stories coincides with the collapse of the island itself, which shifts from sanctuary to threat and is described in anthropomorphic terms: “Behind Cal and Finn, the island was a blur of smoke. Groaning and rumbling. It was a living thing, a monster thing [...] a bright burning thing in the dark” (Christopher, act 4, sc. 24). The island is no longer neutral but acts like a presence expelling its inhabitants. For Moss, however, it remains inseparable from her identity: “The island was part of her: her growing-up. She felt its buzz inside” (Christopher, act 4, sc. 24). Even as she leaves, the island’s influence endures: “The island was letting them all go. Maybe it was. Something inside her still felt tethered though” (Christopher, act 4, sc. 24). Its collapse marks the end of childhood, leaving Moss with an internalised sense of belonging that she carries into adolescence.

By the end of the novel, the representation of home shifts and is redefined by the protagonist. It is no longer tied to the island or Pa’s stories but grounded in relationships and future possibility. With Cal, she imagines home as something created rather than inherited: “‘See it all?’ she asked. ‘The whole world?’ Cal nodded. ‘We find your home and mine’” (Christopher, act 4, sc. 24). She also accepts her past, recognising that all aspects of it, happy and painful, shape her: “She told herself that

she had not forgotten Pa, but she would be more than him, too. . . . Like this, she would be the happy and sad, the light and dark” (Christopher, Epilogue). Pa remains a part of this redefinition, assuring her that the island will remain should she return: “‘I’ll keep it alive,’ he whispered. ‘Ready for when you return’” (Christopher, act 4, sc. 24). While he lets her go, he does not relinquish all hope she might still retain aspects of her childhood within her and return to that state. Therefore, *Storm-Wake* presents home as unstable and multifaceted. For Pa, it is a retreat he tries to preserve; for Moss, it begins as her whole world but becomes something she carries within herself as memory and choice. Growing up means recognising how protection can turn into restriction, and learning to keep what formed you while stepping beyond it. This trajectory reflects a wider pattern in young adult literature, where home is rarely stable but functions as both haven and prison, shaping the adolescent’s move from dependence toward autonomy.

3.3.2 House Rules: Domestic Confinement in *Prince of Shadows*

In *Prince of Shadows* the concept of home is depicted as a complex and often oppressive environment, deeply intertwined with family duty, social standing, and the relentless feud between the Montague and Capulet families. Unlike Flower Island in *Storm-Wake*, which shifts between sanctuary and prison but remains bound to Moss’s inner development, the homes of Verona are explicitly ideological and political spaces. They function less as sanctuaries than as gilded cages, dictating the lives of their inhabitants and suppressing individual desires. Caine also makes the home the main mechanism through which power is exercised in the novel. Rather than treating the feud as background history, she embeds it in domestic routines, access to space, and rules of behaviour. This shift matters because it turns family conflict into a daily structure that shapes adolescent choices. As discussed earlier, the “home” in YA literature is not neutral: it operates as an ideological structure that organises behaviour and naturalises obedience. Alston states that the domestic sphere operates as a site of disciplinary ideology which in turn is internalised by the reader (77). In *Prince of Shadows* the home, whether in the form of the Montague palace, the Capulet palazzo, the Ordelaffi estate, or the city of Verona itself, becomes an extension of the feud and a physical manifestation of family power and discipline. In YA terms, this frames adolescence as a negotiation with institutions. The

characters are formed by the household's expectations, and the reader is encouraged to notice how the home teaches obedience.

The residences of Verona's noble families are grand palaces and symbolise wealth and status which conceals the fact they operate as spaces of surveillance and control. For Benvolio, the Montague palace becomes a site of frustration and constraint that pushes him into criminal behaviour: "Small wonder I took out my frustrations at night, in the dark, by stealing from those I hated. What other outlet could I have?" (Caine, Quarto 1). The question positions his theft as an outlet produced by constraint. The narration invites the reader to connect domestic control to risky behaviour, rather than treating his actions as individual moral failure: "I was a good liar. It was a requirement for living in the palace" (Caine, Quarto 1). Framing lying as a requirement makes dishonesty an expected survival strategy. Benvolio's double life is not just personal choice; it is presented as the logical response to a household that monitors and punishes the truth. His alter ego as "The Prince of Shadows" is thus born out of an environment where truth and autonomy are impossible. The palace is described in suffocating terms: his grandmother's quarters are, "a sweltering furnace" and, "like the bowels of the devil" (Caine, Quarto 3), while his mother's life is described as "a lifetime of living under siege" (Caine, Quarto 2). The Montague house is also ruled by the Iron Lady, who "for too long . . . had terrorized our house; she had ruled with fear and hatred, and driven us all before her like leaves in a storm" (Caine, Quarto 5). The imagery makes the palace feel physically hostile rather than protective. Domestic space here mirrors the weight of expectation and authority, producing secrecy and dishonesty.

Rosaline's experience shows how the Capulet palazzo enforces hierarchy within the family itself, turning the home into a site of marginalisation and abuse. As only a cousin, she is relegated to the far quarters of the house: "She'd have the far rooms, since she was only a cousin, not the lady's own daughter. She was Tybalt's sister, arrived in Verona only a few months before, and kept shut up hard in the palace" (Caine, Prologue). The household hierarchy is shown through spatial allocation. "Far rooms" indicates that status determines where one can exist within the home, thus marginalisation is built into everyday domestic life. Her movements are strictly controlled, and she identifies the home not as a place of safety but of constant threat: women, she says, "live our lives in terror, not in safety—terror of our fathers, who may beat or kill us with any reason or none at all" (Caine, Quarto 4).

Rosaline's statement generalises private violence as a normal condition for women in Verona and directs the reader to treat paternal authority as a threat. Within the supposed shelter of the palazzo, she is beaten by Tybalt and subjected to domestic abuse. The Capulet house makes this hostility explicit in its very architecture. Benvolio notes hidden traps after his visit to Rosaline: "Knives. Blackened ones, deliberately hard to spot. If I had climbed to the top and put my hand out, the flesh would have been shredded and sliced. A dangerously clever trick, especially if, as I thought likely, they had poisoned the blades as well" (Quarto One). The traps make the house itself part of the feud: violence is not only enacted by people but built into the environment. The house itself becomes poisonous, a prison where even the walls wound those who cross them. The Capulets also proudly display their family motto, "We repay all" (Caine, Quarto 3), embroidered on banners, a constant reminder that the home functions as a public emblem of loyalty to bloodline and feud. Because the motto is also displayed inside the home, it works as a constant reminder of what loyalty means in this household. The domestic space therefore reinforces feud ideology at the level of daily life, not just public conflict.

Mercutio likewise experiences his home as confinement: "My dear and sainted father has decreed that I soar too high to remain free, and so I am to be caged" (Caine, Quarto 2), likening himself to a trapped animal. Mercutio's language makes his confinement explicit, and the irony in the use of the word "sainted" shows how his control is justified as paternal responsibility. After his death, his family quickly erases him from the physical space: "Mercutio's room had changed, too. It was stripped of its furnishings—gone to the poor, or to the Church, or (more likely) to be sold to cover the cost of his widow's departure. A sad heap of his things lay on a threadbare carpet" (Caine, Quarto 4). The removal of his belongings demonstrates how easily he is erased from the household, and the space that once confined him is just as quick to discard him, underscoring the fragility of belonging within Verona's houses.

In *Prince of Shadows* the concept of even having a home is rarely unconditional. Benvolio's half-English heritage makes his place within the Montague household precarious. His identity is constantly questioned, reminding him that belonging depends on bloodlines, not personal qualities. Rosaline experiences the same marginalisation as a cousin in the Capulet household; she is useless to them in terms of political power and therefore dispensable. In both cases, home is

conditional: a place one inhabits only by virtue of lineage and usefulness to the family, never freely or securely. The Ordelaffi palace, by contrast, reflects decline. Once grand, it now appears defensive and bare: “The difference truly came inside the Ordelaffi palace. . . . I was surprised to note the barren walls where rich tapestries had once been draped to keep out the night’s chills. . . . It seemed smaller, and poorer, than ever” (Caine, Quarto 4). The empty walls register loss materially, and the emphasis on what used to be there (tapestries) signals decline and vulnerability. Home here does not stabilise identity; it reflects how easily a family line can diminish. Its emptiness mirrors Mercutio’s erasure from the family line, suggesting that home can just as easily represent decay and loss as continuity.

The city of Verona itself functions as an extension of the household. What begins as domestic control, such as surveillance and separation, can also be observed in the structuring of the city. Its streets mirror the palaces’ cycles of violence, inheritance, and control. For Benvolio, “There had been enough of that between our two houses; the streets ran slick with spilled blood” (Caine, Prologue). Verona, like the Montague and Capulet homes, is founded on feud and surveillance, and social standing is fragile: reputations are easily tarnished, rumours hold immense power, and divisions of loyalty persevere. The boundary between domestic and public space collapses. The city is also described as suffocating: “This city is made of stone, and the stones will press us down, and down, cutting off all light and hope until dark is the only light you will ever see” (Caine, Quarto 3). The metaphor extends the fortress-like architecture of the homes to Verona itself, turning the entire city into a prison. Just as the Montague and Capulet households confine their family members, the streets and walls of Verona impose the same structures upon its citizens.

Across both private and public spaces, home is characterised by fear and control. Verona’s households preserve hierarchy first and belonging second: they sustain the feud rather than nurture their members. In *Prince of Shadows* the houses are prisons: Benvolio lies to survive, Rosaline is locked away, Mercutio is erased, and even the city is tainted by the violence of the feud. The physical spaces are decayed by tradition, more concerned with sustaining old conflicts than providing care, thereby exposing the family as a fixed ideological system that prioritises continuity over affection.

However, home has the possibility of redefinition. By the conclusion, Benvolio and Rosaline are urged to reject the old ways of Verona by Prince Escalus: “She is not

meant for a convent; nor are you meant for a prison house. Go and soothe your family's ills, and tomorrow we will speak of happier things" (Caine, Quarto 5). Home here begins to move away from legacy and duty, toward affection and choice. For Benvolio, Rosaline represents the possibility of a home not rooted in fear but in a shared future. While in children's literature the plot structure is often circular, leading the protagonist to return to home, the young adult genre is more linear in its depiction, showing the character leaving their home (Eccleshare 308), as is the case in *Storm-Wake*. In this case Benvolio and Rosaline return to their homes, but not under the same circumstances. The return is framed as conditional on change. Home is not restored as it was; it is presented as something the protagonists must rework. Verona itself, so long associated with feud and repression, becomes a space that is transformed through the action of the adolescent protagonists.

3.3.3 Home Away From Home: The Home Rejected and Replaced in *Ophelia*

In *Ophelia*, the idea of home is unstable and contested, moving from absence and constriction, to surveillance and instrumentalisation, and finally to the possibility of reconstruction in a chosen community. This instability reflects a defining quality of adolescent fiction: home can be both refuge and prison, nurturing and stifling. As Alston notes, the family home is part of a wider ideological system in which authority and morality are embedded, "a sanctuary and a prison" that enforces norms as much as it protects (69). Klein's retelling foregrounds this ambivalence by showing Ophelia first excluded from and then betrayed by her family home at Elsinore, only to find a fragile but sustaining form of belonging at the convent St. Emilion.

From the very beginning, home is presented through lack and disappointment. Ophelia has an idyllic vision of what their new home might look like: "Will the castle look like heaven, such as Saint John saw? Will it have towers sparkling with gold and bright gems?' I asked, but my father only laughed and Laertes called me stupid" (Klein, ch. 1). Ophelia is being ridiculed for having such childish notions of court life. In reality their new quarters are "two small rooms at ground level near the gatehouse," which she calls "close, dark, and damp" (Klein, ch. 2). This is a sharp contrast to her village home, where she once enjoyed freedom and openness. At Elsinore, the family is reduced to marginal quarters, a literal and

symbolic reminder of their low status. The castle becomes the opposite of the idyllic home of children's literature: physically confining and socially marginalising.

Within Elsinore, the family home becomes even more clearly associated with surveillance and training. Polonius commands her, "Obey her. That is all!" (Klein, ch. 4), when sending her to serve Gertrude. This reduces the meaning of home to obedience: it is not where she is recognised, but where she is trained to serve others. The layout of the castle also enforces this lesson. She describes it as, "a long journey from my father's quarters at the outskirts of the castle to Gertrude's rooms at the heart of Elsinore. We turned many times, until I felt myself to be lost" (Klein, ch. 4). She is also made to feel invisible: "They gave us barely a glance as we entered the hall leading to the queen's dwelling" (Klein, ch. 4). The architecture makes clear who matters and who does not. Home here is not a site of care but of hierarchy; it tells Ophelia where she belongs by marking where she can and cannot go.

Initially, the convent is imagined in the same terms of exile and loss. When Hamlet rejects her, she fears banishment as the worst fate: "Then they will tear me to pieces there! My honor sullied, I will be dismissed from court and packed off to a nunnery somewhere, never to marry!" (Klein ch. 15). While in early modern usage the term "nunnery" could carry sexualised connotations, Klein's Ophelia clearly understands it as a convent, stating "The words he shouted at me made no sense. Why should he send me to a convent?" (Klein ch. 20). At this point in the retelling, the convent is the antithesis of home: it signifies exile imposed by forces beyond her control and reinforces her lack of agency. The convent is imagined not as chosen independence but as enforced withdrawal.

Once she reaches St. Emilion, however, the meaning of home begins to transform. While she struggles with the transition from being a lady-in-waiting to the queen to a lowly member of the convent, she admits "Still this place seems to me a peaceful realm where no tyrannical king can oppress you" (Klein ch. 39). However, the convent is not free from authority: "There is no king at St. Emilion, as you say, but man's power still holds sway here. Mother Ermentrude is bound to obey Bishop Garamond, as he is God's deputy on earth. . . But this bishop serves Count Durufle, who is our convent's chief patron and a morally scrupulous man" (Klein ch. 39). Therefore, its rules are not aimed at controlling her identity but at protecting the community. This imperfect but supportive structure allows Ophelia to learn, recover, and raise her child. The convent therefore models authority as firm but

non-coercive: discipline is present, but it is directed toward collective survival rather than patriarchal control.

Yet even here, the novel reminds the reader that home is fragile. When her secret is discovered, she laments, “This place of refuge has suddenly become a prison where I await the trial that might condemn not only me, but Mother Ermentrude and all the sisters” (Klein ch. 45). The same convent that sheltered her can be turned against her: “It grieves me to think that I have brought shame to the place that has sheltered me. . . . Where would I go if the bishop orders Mother Ermentrude to send me away? In my condition and in such cold, death would be my certain end” (Klein ch. 45). In this situation home has turned into a prison once again and it serves as a reminder that reminds the reader that home, even when supportive, is not unconditional.

Ophelia’s redefinition of home is made explicit when she talks to her mother’s portrait: “Oh, teach me how to be a mother, and give me courage! . . . What will we do, my babe and I? Where shall we make our home?” (Klein ch. 39). This moment shifts home away from bloodline and inheritance toward chosen ties. The convent becomes the place where she receives the care absent from her biological family: “Marguerite did vouch for me, Isabel offered witness, and I produced Horatio’s letter. The bishop acknowledged me to be a widow and allowed me to remain at the convent” (Klein, Epilogue). Unlike her family at Elsinore, the sisters defend her at personal risk. If traditional family structures fail to provide emotional support, YA protagonists often seek alternative forms of kinship leading to new alliances and even “subversive visions of social order” (A. Miller 161). Bradford et al. emphasise that these story structures often locate belonging beyond the natal family: identity is secured through the formation of alternative or found kin networks, with the journey leading not to return but to the creation of a new family by the end (147).

In the end, Ophelia ultimately claims the convent as her chosen home. She refuses to return to Denmark, even though she has the power to: “I will never return to live under the yoke of another tyrant who would not hesitate to kill my Hamlet. . . . I embrace this exile, for I wish to live in peace” (Klein ch. 48). By choosing another home and giving up the ambition of a throne for her son she breaks the cycle of violence and living in constriction. Even as she acknowledges, “I am without a home, forever alienated” (Klein ch. 43) and “I have no home, for I am cut off from Denmark forever” (Klein ch. 37), she shows that home can be reimagined as something carried

forward, made through chosen family and care for her child. The story of Ophelia therefore presents home as fragile, unstable, and shaped by authority: first neglected and instrumentalised within the court household, then reimagined through the non-coercive guidance of the convent. Unlike Elsinore, which defines home through obedience and surveillance, St. Emilion offers an imperfect but sustaining space in which Ophelia can reconstruct belonging through chosen ties. Authority remains present, but it is reshaped into a form she accepts and integrates into her identity.

Read together, the three novels suggest that “home” in young adult Shakespeare retellings is never a stable refuge but a shifting terrain shaped by power and loss. In *Storm-Wake*, the domestic sphere collapses under paternal domination: Moss’s island transforms from sanctuary to confinement until she learns to carry the idea of home as memory rather than place. In *Prince of Shadows*, the domestic space extends outward into the city, where both household and civic order depend on hierarchy, surveillance, and violence. In *Ophelia*, the absence of home is equally formative; emotional neglect and displacement compel Ophelia to rebuild belonging through chosen bonds and maternal care. Across these retellings, home is shown to be a site where care and control often overlap, and where growing up involves questioning inherited structures of safety and redefining what a home can be.

On a broader level, these readings show that in children’s and young adult literature the home is not just a backdrop but a structure through which authority is organised and enforced. Domestic space communicates power through its divisions, routines, and hierarchies, making visible who belongs and who does not. As previously mentioned, Alston argues the home is both sanctuary and prison (69–70), offering protection while at the same time constraining those who live within it. In the novels, this dual role is always unstable. Home depends on obedience, can collapse under pressure, and is often redefined when young people contest its limits or create alternative forms of belonging. Rather than a stable refuge, home appears as a transitional space that is continually made and unmade through the negotiation of authority.

3.4 “Why Then, Can One Desire Too Much of a Good Thing?": Love, Sexuality and Maturation

I now move on to depictions of maturation and sexuality in YA literature as well as the didactic tone and morality which is often associated with it. Sexuality has

been one of the defining but also one of the most contested themes in young adult literature. What distinguishes the adolescent novel from other forms of popular teenage fiction is its willingness to take seriously questions of sexuality and relationships, often through experimental or self-reflective strategies of narration (O'Sullivan, *Comparative Children's Literature* [book] 42).

A central tension in YA literature lies between sexuality and authority. Peter Hunt describes this as a fundamental problem in children's and adolescent literature: adults frequently wish to censor depictions of sex whereas others maintain that texts should be "open," designed to challenge rather than merely confirm prevailing values (P. Hunt 33). Caroline Hunt observes that books which speak honestly about adolescent experience particularly those that include sexual relationships often unsettle adult readers, leading to pressure from publishers, schools, or society to suppress them (C. Hunt 5). Sexuality in YA literature is therefore not only a theme but also a site of conflict, where adult authority directly collides with adolescent experience.

This conflict reflects broader cultural contradictions in how sexuality is addressed. Stringer highlights the double messages adolescents receive: institutions like parents, schools, and churches promote abstinence and restraint, while media and popular culture aggressively glamorise romance and sexuality, often in highly unrealistic ways (Stringer 75, 81). The task of reconciling these competing messages complicates therefore how young people view sexuality. Isaac points out a similar contradiction in literary education: "How does avoiding consideration of physical attraction benefit young adult readers? The perversity of canonizing *Romeo and Juliet* and then refusing to acknowledge one of the very themes that makes it attractive to young audiences speaks volumes about our society" (Isaac 65). Teachers' discomfort with adolescent desire, she argues, often leads them to stress violence and tragedy instead of engaging with sexuality, revealing how authority continues to suppress one of the very themes that makes the play compelling (Isaac 111).

As a result, sexuality in YA literature is shaped as much by cultural anxieties and adult regulation as by plot and thematic pressures. On the one hand, sexual development is represented as a rite of passage, a marker of autonomy, and a potential source of empowerment. On the other, it is routinely curtailed, moralised, or recast as dangerous, reflecting broader attempts to control adolescent behaviour. School and market gatekeepers, together with cultural norms privileging restraint

over romance, set the limits of representation. The following analyses trace how each novel negotiates these limits, examining how plot outcomes, sanctions, and focalisation define the space where desire and authority meet.

3.4.1 Flesh and Blood: Bodily Resistance against Paternal Rule in *Storm-Wake*

In *Storm-Wake*, Moss's sexual maturation is central to her coming-of-age and is most clearly represented through her first menstruation. The novel depicts this moment in vivid detail, illustrating it as both frightening and transformative for the protagonist. Sexuality is not romanticised but presented as a contested site where Moss's natural growth clashes with her father's desperate attempts to control her. This tension reflects what Seelinger-Trites identifies as a defining pattern in YA fiction, where sexuality is recognised as powerful but is consistently restricted or moralised by adult authority (85). Moss's body becomes the space in which this conflict is played out.

Moss's first menstruation introduces this conflict through shock and misinterpretation:

She was leaking. There was something dark. Blood! It was everywhere. Between her legs. Soaking her smalls. On her hands now, too. She shoved Adder away as her dog caught the scent of it. In places, it had clotted dark. Was this sickness too? She had asked the sea for answers, and this was what it had returned. Sickness [...] more sickness [...]. (Christopher, act 3, sc. 8)

At this stage, Moss reads her bleeding as illness, connecting it with Pa's own sickness. However, Moss soon comes to reinterpret what has happened. Reflecting on what she has read and observed, she realises:

In the books in the cave, she'd read about females bleeding. She'd seen it happen with the dogs growing up. Blood meant she was growing too, could be mating. This blood was not to be worried about. Why hadn't she realized it before? And why had it come now, besides? Why not earlier? (Christopher, act 3, sc. 10)

Through this process, she reclaims understanding of her own body. Later, she asserts her perspective directly: "Course it hadn't been sickness like Pa's! 'What I've got's natural, Pa,' she said, sighing" (Christopher, act 3, sc. 10). The act of recognising her

bleeding as natural marks her first assertion of bodily knowledge. She begins to claim authority over her own body, separating her understanding from her father's ideological script of sickness and control.

Pa's reaction exposes how paternal authority resists this transformation. He insists: "No, Moss. That wasn't meant to happen; you weren't meant to bleed like this . . . I asked the flowers so you wouldn't get bleeding. You weren't meant to grow, not so quick, not yet" (Christopher, act 3, sc. 10). By stating that he tried to stop her body from developing, Pa reveals how fully he equates her developing sexually with threat. Pa does not see her as an emerging adolescent but insists on freezing her in childhood. His denial of her maturation reveals a deeper anxiety about losing power; he equates Moss's sexuality with danger because it threatens the dependency that sustains his authority. Seelinger-Trites states that sexuality and sexual maturation often "marks a rite of passage that helps them define themselves as having left childhood behind" (84). Pa's effort to halt Moss's growth reflects his refusal to let that passage occur. His need to control her body is not only protective but also oppressive. He treats her menstruation not as part of natural growth but as an event to be suppressed, contained, or explained away.

When denial fails, Pa reasserts control by redefining Moss's bleeding as destiny. He tells her: "I've a theory—I've been thinking it makes sense why your bleeding came now, too[...] This spirit—this Finn—maybe he's meant to be your mate: the companion you'll stay with when I am gone!" (Christopher, act 3, sc. 10). By linking her sexuality to a predetermined partnership, he reasserts interpretive control over her body, positioning it within a patriarchal order in which the husband merely succeeds the father's authority. In doing so, the text exposes how puberty, rather than marking independence, becomes a disciplinary tool through which adult power regulates and contains female development.

Moss's anger at Pa's manipulation marks the beginning of her resistance. She recalls bitterly, "And once, he had asked the flowers to stop her bleeding. To keep her as a Small Thing. She could've slapped his face!" (Christopher, act 3, sc. 10). Her outrage exposes her realisation that his behaviour is not protection but repression. Moss's ability to name her experience as "natural" and to challenge his distortions signals her shift into adolescence. She no longer accepts Pa's stories at face value but recognises them as attempts to maintain power. Sexuality becomes the ground for

her rebellion: through knowledge and language she reclaims ownership of her body, refusing to let her father define it for her.

Her developing independence is reflected in her growing closeness to Callan. Unlike Pa, Callan does not attempt to interpret or control her. He treats her as capable of choice and equality, showing respect rather than authority. Moss's attraction to him is uncertain and at times frightening, but it represents a new way of relating to others, one based on trust and reciprocity rather than dependence. Her affection for Callan is therefore part of her broader journey from obedience to autonomy. She is caught between Pa's desire to freeze her in childhood and her own emerging sense of selfhood, but it is through her relationship with Callan that she begins to imagine a future beyond the confines of the island.

By the end of the novel, Moss's sexuality is inseparable from her agency. What begins as confusion and fear develops into knowledge, resistance, and independence. Her menstruation becomes the turning point that marks the moment she understands Pa can no longer dictate the terms of her life. Her attraction to Callan and rejection of Finn reinforce this independence, demonstrating her capacity to define her own relationships and desires. As Seelinger-Trites points out, YA protagonists negotiate the power structures that shape constructions of sexuality (3). For Moss, her body is one of the most immediate of these structures, and by rejecting Pa's control she claims it as her own.

3.4.2 These Moderate Delights: Contained Desire in *Prince of Shadows*

In *Prince of Shadows*, sexuality is portrayed not as a natural stage of growth or as a social expectation that can be redefined, but as a dangerous, excessive, and cursed force. Love is repeatedly described as madness, fever, or sorcery, and this figurative language becomes literal through Mercutio's dying curse. The move from metaphor to literal curse matters because it turns moral judgement into a plot mechanism. Desire is not simply described as destructive; the plot structure makes it destructive. The novel thus externalises cultural anxieties about adolescent passion and rather than it being a private affair it is depicting desire as a supernatural affliction that destabilises individuals, families, and society.

From the outset, Juliet's attraction to Romeo is presented as transgressive and unnatural. Benvolio insists: "Juliet is a child, but she is no fantastic. She has been raised knowing her duty to this house, and she has been at peace with it all her life.

One chance meeting with a boy—the sworn enemy of her own family—would never overcome it. She might engage in flirtation, but this ... Benvolio, this cannot simply be love. It borders on sorcery” (Caine, Quarto 3). Juliet, who has always submitted to her family’s authority, is suddenly transformed by desire that seems to overwhelm duty and rationality. The language of “sorcery” suggests compulsion rather than choice, implying that sexual attraction is a force outside the self that is strong enough to overcome obedience to the family. However, rather than representing a step toward independence, Juliet’s sexuality is framed as destabilising her identity while also threatening the balance of her household.

Romeo’s passion is described in the same pathological terms. Benvolio recalls “the blind look in my cousin’s eyes” (Caine, Quarto 3), noting it was “more than mere love. It was a martyr’s exaltation. And it was unnatural” (Caine, Quarto 3). Friar Lawrence reinforces this interpretation: “The passion between them is too great, Benvolio; I’ve never seen the like. A madness, you understand, a thirst slaked only by love’s drink, or death. Which would you have?” (Caine, Quarto 3). The metaphors of madness, fever, and holy fire recur throughout the novel, aligning adolescent desire with self-destruction. For Benvolio, the intensity of Romeo’s love is indistinguishable from illness: “It seemed less love to me than a fever, a sickness burning away caution and good sense” (Caine, Quarto 3). These descriptions deny sexuality the role of maturation or empowerment; instead, it is depicted as an affliction that strips individuals of rationality and compels them toward self-destruction.

Romeo himself embraces this view of love as compulsion, telling Benvolio: “Christ forgive me, Benvolio, but there is nothing in the world for me but her, and nothing for her but me, and if I cannot have her, better I am dead, better we are both dead, better the world is dead and our dreams with it” (Caine, Quarto 3). His rhetoric combines desire with death, revealing how passion obliterates reason and self-preservation and thus adolescent love becomes indistinguishable from delirium, echoing cultural fears of sexuality as an uncontrollable contagion. This framing also teaches the reader how to interpret emotional intensity: not as intimacy, but as a state that spreads and overrides judgement.

The novel literalises these fears through Mercutio’s dying curse, “Love is the curse, Ben. Love is the curse. Do you understand?” (Caine, Quarto 3), and establishes a supernatural framework for interpreting the lovers’ passion. The curse binds itself to physical objects, Mercutio’s diary and rosary, and spreads its influence through

Verona. Benvolio experiences its effects directly: “Mercutio’s curse, made flesh and evil intent. I felt my body flush suddenly with an unnatural heat, and sweat began to pour from my body, dampening my clothes” (Caine, Quarto 5). The bodily detail literalises the earlier fever metaphor by casting arousal in the language of illness. While desire itself may be experienced as overwhelming or involuntary, the novel frames that loss of control as pathological rather than developmental.

Even genuine affection is shaped by this logic. Benvolio confesses that an image of Rosaline haunts him: “That image would not leave me, and it—being honest—was the last thing I saw each night before sleep carried me off, and the first I thought of upon waking. Was it a curse? If it is a curse, I die cursed, and happy” (Caine, Quarto 4). Even here, desire is not described in neutral terms: Benvolio can only understand romantic attachment through the curse framework. The language available to him already assumes that attraction is dangerous or abnormal. The result is that pleasure becomes legible only when paired with threat. Desire is not allowed to stand alone as a positive experience.

The breaking of the curse highlights the novel’s refusal to reconcile sexuality with growth. In the climactic scene, Benvolio thrusts his hand into the fireplace to burn the rosary: “I thrust my whole hand into the flames. The agony hit in an instant, but I held” reflecting, “Better dead, I thought with absolute, cold clarity. Better it ends here, with me, and she might live” (Caine, Quarto 5). Desire here can only be overcome by violence and self-denial. Unlike *Storm-Wake*, where Moss learns to reclaim her body and desire, *Prince of Shadows* depicts sexuality as something that must be violently rejected. The curse is ended not through reconciliation but through pain and sacrifice.

The novel also reveals the contradictions of social responses to adolescent sexuality. Benvolio questions whether it is “sensible that he formed such a close attachment that he would marry her in only days? Or that he would linger in Verona past his exile to stay in her embrace, when he knew well his life was forfeit?” (Caine, Quarto 5). Romeo’s actions are framed as irrational, but they also expose how societal rules make adolescent desire impossible to reconcile with family duty. Friar Lawrence recognises the inevitability of their love but frames it as sin: “Their love was so strong that if I had refused to bless it, it would have been done without God’s seal; there is no doubt of it. Would you have me step aside and allow the sin instead?” (Caine, Quarto 3). The friar presents institutional management through

marriage as the lesser evil. His logic assumes sexuality will occur regardless, but still treats it as morally dangerous, requiring regulation. Although sexuality is often introduced as a potential source of power, YA story structures typically restrict this potential by disciplining or diminishing it before the story concludes (Seelinger-Trites 85, 90). This tendency mirrors wider cultural norms that treat adolescent sexuality as deviant and in need of correction (Seelinger-Trites 88). The contradiction is striking: while YA novels recognise sexuality as central to growth, they also enforce adult values that limit its expression. Sexuality here is acknowledged as unstoppable but simultaneously condemned, forcing authority figures to regulate it through marriage or punishment. The friar's dilemma in this instance reflects the tension between societal acceptance and condemnation.

By the conclusion, Benvolio acknowledges the paradox of adolescent desire: "It was madness, and magic, and in that moment I understood with fatal clarity how my cousin could have thrown away his life, and all our lives, for love. If this was sorcery, then I had learned to love it" (Caine, Quarto 3). Sexuality remains framed as a curse and sorcery, but also as irresistible. This unresolved ambivalence sets *Prince of Shadows* apart from the other novel. Whereas *Storm-Wake* presents sexuality as natural but repressed, *Prince of Shadows* portrays it as inherently destructive, a curse that can only be broken through sacrifice. This keeps the novel's position consistent: sexuality is central and intense, but it is not reconciled with growth. It remains something that threatens stability and must be contained at high cost. Desire destabilises families, communities, and identities, and its consequences are figured as both supernatural and inescapable. By literalising passion as a curse, the author dramatises cultural anxieties about adolescent sexuality in their most extreme form: central to identity, but also irrational, and ultimately fatal.

3.4.3 "But Never Doubt I Love": Negotiating Love and Desire in *Ophelia*

In *Ophelia*, sexuality is central to the protagonist's development but is marked by the same ambivalence critics have identified across YA fiction. It is depicted as both awakening and empowerment, yet also as risk, shame, and repression. The novel explores how female desire and chastity are controlled by family, religion, and class, while also charting Ophelia's growth from innocence to experience, from fear and shame to acceptance and defiance.

At the beginning of the novel, Ophelia defines herself through ignorance and inexperience: “I am a green girl. I know nothing of love” (Klein, ch. 4). Gertrude, her mother figure, reinforces this binary of knowledge and restraint: “You, Ophelia, are sensible, but unschooled in matters of love and passion. It is necessary to learn the ways of the world and the wiles of men, so that you may resist them” (Klein, ch. 5). Sexuality is thus acknowledged but immediately subjected to moral instruction. Ophelia may learn about love only to better defend her chastity. Within Elsinore, the body is defined not as one’s own but as property bound to social reputation. Polonius treats her virtue as a commodity tied to ambition: “‘And you believe his tenders of affection?’ he said with scorn. In his presence I felt small and insecure. . . . ‘Set your price much higher. In short, tender yourself more dearly, or you’ll tender me a fool!’” (Klein, ch. 14), again echoing the original lines of the play, however making more explicit the transactional nature of her sexuality. Laertes repeats this warning, linking her honour to his own: “Consider the loss to your honor—and to our family’s name—if you believe Hamlet’s songs of love and open your chaste treasure to him” (Klein, ch. 14). Elnora reinforces the lesson, reminding her that “a lady must always aim to please—first, the queen she serves, and second, the man she will marry” (Klein, ch. 4). In each case, Ophelia is defined by her chastity and obedience, her desire is not her own but a measure of her family’s honour.

Her relationship with Hamlet transforms this framework from instruction to experience. Their intimacy is described through desire as well as restraint: “A second kiss he offered me, and I took a third one from him. Still I wanted more, for the touch of his lips on mine was pure delight. But I would not seem greedy or immodest, so I turned aside my face” (Klein, ch. 8). Ophelia’s self-surveillance shows how deeply she has internalised the moral codes that govern female desire. Later she reflects: “My own thoughts were at war within me as I pondered what Hamlet and I had done. I had given him my most valuable gift, one that could never be taken back” (Klein, ch. 14). By referring to it as a “gift” shows how her virginity has been socially constructed as her worth, and losing it is imagined as irreversible. Yet Ophelia also reinterprets the moment positively: “‘You are ruined and undone by this sin! . . . No, you are made new by love. A maid no more, but born a woman.’ said a wiser, more generous voice” (Klein, ch. 14). In this conflict of voices, sexuality is reframed from sin to transformation. Through it, the retelling resists the moralising tone of traditional

didacticism by allowing Ophelia to interpret her experience as renewal rather through shame.

Pregnancy complicates Ophelia's process of maturation. Seelinger-Trites notes that protagonists in YA fiction often struggle with the full spectrum of sexual experience, including the fear and consequence of unwanted pregnancy (84). Ophelia confesses her own uncertainty: "I had no inkling of what it meant to bear a child. I knew only that I would grow heavy with the burden, and one day deathlike pains would grip me until the creature sprang from my loins and cried to be cared for. What would I do then?" (Klein ch. 27). The physical bluntness of this description underscores her fear and lack of preparation, linking sexuality with danger and social vulnerability. She confesses that she wanted to escape "both Elsinore and the unknown fate of motherhood" (Klein ch. 27), even imagining death as a way out. The novel shows how female sexuality is inseparable from vulnerability, especially when combined with limited knowledge and social expectation.

The double standard that governs women's sexuality is most explicit in the novel's depictions of assault. Marguerite tells Ophelia about her relationship with Prince Fortinbras:

One day he assaulted me as if I were a land to be invaded and seized. I fought to repel him and was nearly overcome, when by fortune a servant heard my cries and discovered us. I denounced this suitor to the king, but the prince denied his crime and instead impugned my virtue. He called me whore and spurned me. (Klein ch. 48)

Similarly, Ophelia herself is harassed by Edmund, an experience that she relives in her nightmares: "Edmund pursues me, a dagger in his hand. I feel his hot breath on my neck and his hands on my breasts, but my feet are chained to heavy stones and I cannot move" (Klein ch. 45). These scenes foreground the gendered violence that underpins Elsinore's morality, exposing the hypocrisy of a system that preaches chastity while enabling male aggression, thereby reclaiming narrative space for women's perspectives.

Yet the novel also provides an alternative vision of female sexuality through Ophelia's time at the convent. There, her pregnancy is not condemned but accepted: "This is no punishment, Ophelia, but a blessing" (Klein ch. 43), one sister tells her, touching her belly with joy. Another admits, "For I see now that virginity is not the

highest virtue of a woman” (Klein ch. 48). Within this community, sexuality is integrated into identity rather than excluded from it and these moments reframe sexuality outside the rigid codes of Elsinore. The convent is thus represented as a setting in which compassion replaces judgement and bodily experience becomes compatible with faith. Authority persists, but it is redefined as supportive rather than punitive.

Ophelia therefore positions sexuality as both a source of vulnerability and a means of growth. At Elsinore it is policed, with Hamlet it is explored yet fraught with guilt, through pregnancy it becomes both a burden and a site for transformation, and in the convent it is finally reconciled with selfhood and acceptance. Trites emphasises that many YA texts assume a readership in need of guidance, producing didactic stories that stress caution and responsibility. These narratives often prioritise social instruction over authentic representation, reflecting “societally sanctioned ideologies” about restraint and morality (Trites 93). The retelling resists such restriction by giving voice to the contradictions of female sexuality. While it acknowledges the moral pressures that define women’s lives, it also insists on desire as part of maturation and identity. By depicting sexuality as complex, embodied, and inseparable from authority, *Ophelia* challenges the suppressive tendencies of both Elizabethan society and conventional YA fiction. Therefore, it resists the common phenomenon that is identified by Hunt to suppress sexual themes in books for YA readers (C.Hunt 5). By giving voice to Ophelia’s experiences, the novel insists that adolescent sexuality must be acknowledged, even as it reveals the cultural anxieties that continue to discipline it.

Across all the three novels, the contradictory position of sexuality in young adult fiction is illustrated. As Seelinger-Trites and C. Hunt note, these texts are shaped by a didactic impulse: they recognise the power of desire but seek to contain it within moral and social boundaries. Each novel reflects this tension differently: through paternal restriction, moral contagion, or institutional control, showing how adolescent sexuality is continually defined through the negotiation of authority. At the same time, all three works push against these constraints by granting their protagonists interpretive agency. Whether through Moss’s reclamation of her body and choice of relationship, Benvolio’s confrontation with the fatality of passion, or Ophelia’s rejection of shame, each retelling transforms regulations they contend with into recognition.

On a broader level, these retellings demonstrate that sexuality in YA adaptation is not merely a private or romantic concern but a site where cultural ideologies about gender, obedience, and maturity are contested. Love becomes a space through which power is tested. In this sense, the adolescent body is never purely biological but ideological, a space where adult authority seeks to instruct and moralise, and where young protagonists learn to interpret, resist, and redefine that power.

Moreover, the retellings reveal how adaptation itself becomes a means of revising inherited narratives of desire. By reworking Shakespeare's tragedies through the lens of young adult fiction, these texts both reproduce and critique the cultural scripts that have long associated love with transgression and punishment. They expose the persistence of moral anxiety around adolescent sexuality while also imagining new possibilities for agency and self-understanding. In doing so, they reaffirm the genre's capacity to question authority not only within the story but also within the literary tradition it inherits.

4 Comparative Analysis: Pre-Texts and Adaptations

Having considered each novel individually, I want to examine them alongside their Shakespearean pre-text. The comparative analysis builds directly on the close readings, bringing their findings into dialogue to identify recurring strategies of adaptation. By considering *Storm-Wake*, *Ophelia*, and *Prince of Shadows* alongside their originals, it becomes possible to trace shared patterns, such as the shift in narratorial voice and focalisation toward marginal figures, the reconfiguration of family and home, or the disciplining of adolescent desire, as well as to highlight the distinctive emphases of each text. This comparative approach shows how the novels collectively mediate Shakespeare's plays for young adult audiences, sustaining his cultural authority while also reframing it through the lens of adolescent subjectivity.

4.1 Weathering the Storms: Reimagining Authority in *The Tempest* and *Storm-Wake*

Storm-Wake reimagines *The Tempest* by converting Prospero's disciplined and restorative power into a form of coercive isolation that must be escaped. Shakespeare's play presents authority as moral order: Prospero's governance restores harmony to the family and the state, and Miranda's obedience ensures that order is

reproduced. Christopher's adaptation transforms this logic into one of confinement and resistance. The result is a textual framing that interprets the mechanisms of paternal control (magical, domestic, and bodily) as forces that inhibit growth. In the process, *Storm-Wake* redefines home, authority, and sexuality through the psychology of adolescence rather than the morality of rule.

In *The Tempest*, authority is grounded in knowledge and presented as morally legitimate. Prospero's control of the island, his command over spirits, and his orchestration of events all serve to stabilise the world that betrayal had disordered. His paternal authority mirrors his political authority: he teaches, directs, and protects, shaping Miranda's knowledge of herself and her past. When he stages her encounter with Ferdinand, it is not deception but care, designed to secure both her virtue and her dynastic future. The play's resolution confirms this structure. Order is regained when Miranda's marriage restores Prospero's lost dukedom uniting love with public reconciliation. His power is didactic and redemptive, and his control is justified by the moral harmony it produces.

Christopher's adaptation inherits these elements only to turn them against themselves. Pa, like Prospero, rules the island through storytelling and fear. His authority depends not on wisdom but on secrecy and deception. He tells Moss that the world beyond their shores has been destroyed and forbids her to venture beyond the limits he sets. What passes as paternal care conceals a system of emotional coercion sustained by secrecy and surveillance.

Pa's regulation extends into the most intimate sphere of his daughter's life. When he asks the enchanted flowers of the island to halt her menstruation, he attempts to hold back both bodily change and emotional development. Prospero orchestrates Miranda's sexual awakening for dynastic purposes; Pa seeks to suppress Moss's entirely. His authority depends on a fantasy of perpetual childhood, in which obedience equals safety and ignorance ensures loyalty. Moss's resistance, the refusal to believe his stories, her anger at his control, and her eventual decision to leave, marks the process by which moral authority is reinterpreted as oppression. Her defiance turns paternal protection into the object of critique.

This inversion of the paternal structure exemplifies what Sanders describes as the redistribution of narratorial voice and focalisation in adaptation, where secondary or silenced figures become interpretive sources (98). By shifting the perspective from the ruling father to the confined daughter, the retelling recasts *The*

Tempest from a story of command to one of emancipation. The moral theme of Shakespeare's play, authority leading to harmony, is replaced by domination breeding resistance. Moss's narratorial voice replaces Prospero's speeches of control; her perception of the island as unstable and deceptive dismantles the illusion of his benevolent rule. The authority that was once justified as order is exposed as a system of dependency in which the daughter becomes active in her resistance.

The contrast between the two works is also spatial. In *The Tempest*, the island functions as the ground of recovery. Its storms and spirits are instruments of Prospero's control, and its isolation allows him to reorder human relationships before returning to Milan. The space is stable and governed by his will. In *Storm-Wake*, the island's geography reflects instability rather than order. Its storms and eruptions are not controlled but threatening and unpredictable, mirroring Pa's psychological decline. What first appears as a refuge becomes a prison. The setting externalises Moss's realisation that home, when built on fear, cannot remain safe.

This transformation also changes the function of the home. In *The Tempest*, home is restored through reconciliation; in *Storm-Wake*, it must be left behind. As Moss matures, she realises that the island's safety is an illusion built on censorship. Her decision to depart turns the cultural script of return into one of escape. Geerts and Van den Bossche note that adaptations often create new "subject positions" from which readers can resist the ideologies of the pre-text (8). Christopher's novel invites this resistance by redefining the meaning of belonging: to grow up requires leaving the space that once defined security. The island's collapse which is literal and emotional, becomes the outward sign of this necessity.

The two works differ most sharply in their treatment of sexuality. In *The Tempest*, Miranda's desire is acknowledged but controlled. Her attraction to Ferdinand is approved because it fulfils political purposes, joining Milan and Naples and resolving the play's conflicts. Her sexuality is part of a social design; it is validated because it serves the hierarchy. In *Storm-Wake*, sexuality is not instrumental but personal. Moss's first menstruation, described from her own perspective, marks the beginning of self-understanding. What she first sees as illness becomes proof of her growth and when Pa tries to stop it, his actions reveal his fear of her independence. Unlike Prospero, who directs Miranda's desire into marriage, Pa attempts to erase sexuality altogether. The novel reclaims this bodily change as

natural and empowering, replacing Shakespeare's model of female virtue with self-recognition.

Christopher also redefines the role of romantic attachment. Miranda's relationship with Ferdinand is arranged, functioning as a transaction between men. Moss's relationship with Callan develops through equality and shared curiosity. It represents a chosen connection rather than being prescribed for someone's benefit. The difference between the arranged alliance and self-defined companionship marks one of the key reconfigurations of Shakespeare's plot logic: sexuality moves from being a social contract to an expression of individual agency.

This change extends into the story structure. *The Tempest* resolves its tensions through collective forgiveness and return. Its closure reinforces the cyclical logic of restoration: exile ends, power is re-established, and the young marry to preserve continuity. *Storm-Wake* replaces this with linearity and openness. Its focus narrows to Moss's consciousness, transforming the supernatural aspects of the play into psychological realism. The storms and magic are no longer tools of divine order but manifestations of uncertainty and fear. By translating Shakespeare's external spectacle into interior experience, Christopher converts the allegory of power into a study of adolescence.

The endings of both works express their ideological difference. Prospero's authority ends with renunciation but not loss: he surrenders his magic but retains moral control and asks for forgiveness. The world he restores remains hierarchical, its order reaffirmed through his wisdom. Moss's story ends with departure rather than forgiveness. Her act of leaving, the rejection of Pa's authority and of the island's illusions, signals that growth requires separation, not restoration. The story closes on uncertainty, not harmony. The difference between return and departure encapsulates the transformation from early modern ideals of hierarchy to contemporary values of independence. Ultimately, *The Tempest* imagines a world sustained by obedience and order, while *Storm-Wake* imagines one that begins with their collapse. Both works end with change, but where Prospero restores what was lost, Moss creates something new.

4.2 "Therefore Love Moderately": The Expression of Passion in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Prince of Shadows*

Prince of Shadows rewrites *Romeo and Juliet* by transforming Shakespeare's vision of love as self-determining into a narrative of constraint and moral regulation. In the original play, desire is a conscious act of rebellion that for a moment transcends family and civic authority. The lovers' deaths preserve their agency while exposing the cost of inherited hostility and prompting reconciliation. In Caine's adaptation, this emphasis on mutual agency is significantly altered. By telling the story through Benvolio and introducing Mercutio's curse, *Prince of Shadows* reframes love not as deliberate defiance but as an external force that erodes reason and self-control. The result is a story that replaces Shakespeare's tragedy of mutual choice with a moral lesson about emotional excess, aligning the text with conventions of YA fiction, which emphasise reflection, accountability, and the possibility of survival.

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* centres on the immediacy of the lovers' experience. The play's religious imagery repeatedly frames desire as something that claims legitimacy beyond household loyalty and patriarchal permission, allowing Romeo and Juliet to imagine love as an alternative to inherited obligation. Their rebellion is not solely portrayed as recklessness but as insight, a deliberate attempt to construct a moral order based on mutual recognition rather than inherited status. Even in death, they retain agency: their suicides reveal the destructive limits of familial loyalty and expose the social cost of rigid hierarchy. In this way, love in *Romeo and Juliet* functions both on a personal level and social critique, as it remakes both the characters and their society.

Caine alters this dynamic through narrational mediation. The story is filtered through Benvolio's retrospective voice, which distances readers from the lovers' immediacy. Their declarations become mediated by scepticism. Where Shakespeare grants his protagonists interpretive authority, allowing them to define their love, the retelling relocates that authority to an observer who interprets it as delusion. Benvolio describes Romeo's behaviour as "a sickness burning away caution and good sense" (Caine, Quarto 3), and dismisses Juliet's defiance as sorcery. These descriptions redefine love as pathology, stripping it of its original intent. The lovers' passion, once a marker of their autonomy, becomes an illness and irrationality. The adolescent experience in this case is not presented, as one might expect, through reckless immersion but through a controlled narration that mediates the intensity of adolescent experiences.

The narrational device of Mercutio's curse solidifies this shift in the moral framing of desire. The curse literalises passion as a contagion and externalises what in Shakespeare remains psychological. Its effect is twofold. Firstly, it translates the lovers' intensity into an objectified threat: desire becomes an external force that must be contained. Secondly, it provides a means of moral regulation. By locating the source of their passion outside of their individual agency, the novel absolves the lovers of responsibility while reaffirming a social order built on the control of sexuality. The curse therefore acts as a cultural narrative compromise between emotional authenticity and moral restraint. It allows the story to preserve the emotional scale of *Romeo and Juliet* while removing the sexual and moral ambiguity that might challenge a younger readership. As Stephens and McCallum observe, adaptations for children and adolescents often reproduce canonical authority while translating its ideologies into forms of social consensus (254). In *Prince of Shadows*, that consensus is the containment of desire within moral discipline.

Benvolio's role as narrator further develops the novel's moral structure. His relationships with Mercutio, Rosaline, and his family, replace the lovers' rebellion with quieter forms of love. The novel substitutes empathy and care for the play's depictions of an ecstatic romance. Mercutio's story, reframed as the tragedy of a son abused by his father for his sexuality, relocates conflict from the public feud to the domestic sphere. Violence is no longer just a matter of civic rivalry but of patriarchal control within the household. This redefinition of authority reshapes the moral themes of the story. Verona's streets and palaces, once settings of public rivalry, become spaces of private surveillance and control. Benvolio's capacity for restraint, rather than Romeo's passion, becomes the measure of virtue. The novel thus reconfigures adolescence as a period of self-regulation in the face of excess rather than rebellion. The contrast becomes particularly clear in the respective conclusions. Shakespeare's tragedy ends with mutual suicide and reconciliation: the lovers' deaths expose the destructiveness of inherited power and restore order through loss. In *Prince of Shadows*, the conclusion, although similar in plotline, with most of the characters dying and reconciliation being encouraged, the adolescent agency is replaced by moral purification. The curse is broken through Benvolio's deliberate act of self-sacrifice. His suffering substitutes for the lovers' deaths as the means of restoring balance. The conclusion values the teens' restraint and absolves them of any transgression.

This recalibration of values reflects the broader adaptation of Shakespeare's cultural authority for contemporary audiences. As mentioned previously modern retellings often moderate Shakespeare's moral complexity to align with current social expectations of propriety and educational purposes. *Prince of Shadows* performs this moderation through discursive distance and allegory. By translating sexuality into supernatural imagery, it removes the immediacy of desire and reframes it as a question of morality. Caine's adaptation thereby reworks Shakespeare's radical representation of youthful passion, rendering it intelligible within a framework of control. This transformation also changes the ideological role of love in the story's moral framework. In *Romeo and Juliet*, love destabilises the patriarchal and political systems that govern Verona, exposing their destructiveness. In *Prince of Shadows*, love reaffirms those systems by illustrating the consequences of excess. The adaptation therefore functions as both homage and correction, preserving Shakespeare's cultural authority while aligning his tragedy with contemporary ideologies of adolescence as discipline, introspection, and endurance.

4.3 “To Thine Own Self Be True”: The Emancipation of Ophelia in *Hamlet* and *Ophelia*

In *Hamlet*, Ophelia exists largely through the words and actions of others. Her role is defined by male authority: Polonius uses her to protect the family's reputation, Laertes warns that her chastity reflects his honour, and Hamlet alternates between desire and rejection, commanding her to “get thee to a nunnery” (Ham. 3.1.131). Her silence marks the limits of female agency in a world ruled by patriarchal power. Her death, often read as suicide, becomes the logical endpoint of this silencing. Lisa Klein's *Ophelia* reverses this structure. By retelling the story through Ophelia's voice, the adaptation transforms a figure of passivity into a speaking subject. Stephens and McCallum note that retellings can disclose what was previously suppressed or unspoken in canonical texts, especially when focalisation shifts and marginal characters are granted agency (22). Klein's novel enacts this shift directly, rewriting the tragedy as a cultural narrative of endurance and self-definition rather than submission and death.

In *Hamlet*, authority is patriarchal and absolute. Ophelia's value is measured entirely by her capacity to conform. Klein retains this structure but changes its meaning by internalising resistance. When Polonius instructs her to break off her

relationship with Hamlet, Shakespeare's Ophelia replies dutifully, "I shall obey, my lord" (Ham. 1.3.145). In Klein's retelling, the line is repeated but its meaning is altered: "I shall obey, my lord.' The lie I gave my father was in truth the vow I gave Hamlet. He, not my father, was now my lord" (Klein ch. 14). What sounds like obedience in the play becomes, in the novel, an act of defiance. Her apparent compliance masks her true loyalty, which she gives to Hamlet rather than to her father. The act of speaking gains a second layer of meaning, a secret allegiance that undermines paternal control.

The same strategy appears in her exchanges with Laertes. In *Hamlet*, she warns him against hypocrisy:

But, good my brother,
Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,
Whiles, like a puffed and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads
And recks not his own rede. (Ham. 1.3.50–55)

Klein reworks this as a challenge: "You, dear brother, take this advice of me. Tend to your own honor, and I will tend to mine. Do not show me the steep and thorny way to virtue, while you take the primrose path of ease" (Klein ch. 14). She then adds Ophelia's private reaction: "He laughed in derision. I wanted to throw myself at him and scratch his face" (Klein ch. 14). This is central as Wilkie-Stibbs states that overt intertextual references raise destabilising questions of the pre-text (185). By reframing Shakespeare's original text in this way, Ophelia is presented as a figure of resistance every step of the way.

Elsinore in *Hamlet* is a dangerous and corrupt place. The court is marked by suspicion, spying, and moral decay. Ophelia has no safe place in it as her position is marginal, her movements are monitored, and she is ultimately destroyed by the pressures of family and politics. Her retreat to St. Emilion redefines the concept of home. At first, the convent resembles another institution of obedience, ruled by religious hierarchy. Yet, unlike the Danish court, it becomes a place she chooses. It provides education, companionship, and care. Authority here is communal rather than paternal. The convent's rules remain, but they protect rather than confine.

In Shakespeare's play, Ophelia's sexuality is mostly hinted at, and always treated with suspicion by the characters around her. Her relationship with Hamlet is

used against her, her chastity is constantly under scrutiny rather than allowed to define her own desire. Klein makes sexuality a central part of the story. She presents Ophelia's romantic relationship with Hamlet as genuine, including intimacy, pregnancy, and the fears that come with it. Sexuality is a source of risk, Ophelia is vulnerable to male aggression and the threat of social disgrace like in the play, but also of growth. In the convent, her pregnancy is not condemned but accepted. This reframing changes the meaning of sexuality in the retelling. Instead of shame, sexuality becomes part of Ophelia's identity and survival.

This reframing alters the moral structure of the story. In Shakespeare's tragedy, female sexuality destabilises order and Ophelia's death is tied to patriarchal structures. In Klein's novel, sexuality becomes a site of growth and belonging. The convent, though still regulated by religious hierarchy, allows Ophelia to exist as both mother and individual. Her child and her chosen community replace the fractured household of her youth. The move from Elsinore to St. Emilion is therefore more than geographical, it is ideological.

Structurally, the adaptation mirrors these transformations. In *Hamlet*, Ophelia's scenes are brief and fragmented. She exists in the margins of male dialogue, and her descent into madness is the only possibility given to her to speak freely. Klein reverses this by constructing the retelling through Ophelia's narratorial voice and focalisation. The effect is not simply feminist revisionism but a redefinition of tragedy itself. Death, which closes Shakespeare's version, is replaced by survival. Ophelia's withdrawal to the convent reinterprets the supposed drowning as escape. As in *Storm-Wake* and *Prince of Shadows*, the ending privileges endurance and agency.

The adaptation also reimagines what it means to live within and beyond authority. In *Hamlet*, obedience and rebellion both end in destruction. In *Ophelia*, resistance is gradual and strategic. She lies to her father, defies her brother, and finally rejects the structures that societally defined her value. At the same time, Klein does not strip Ophelia of traditionally "feminine" traits and allows her to retain affection and moral complexity; her love for Hamlet, her grief, and her care for others remain integral to her character and her role as mother and healer is central to her new life. The novel shows that femininity and agency can coexist. This balance between strength and vulnerability is crucial to how the novel reframes femininity.

Agency is not presented as the rejection of feeling but as the capacity to act within emotion rather than against it.

The comparison between *Hamlet* and *Ophelia* shows how Klein adapts Shakespeare's tragedy into a YA narrative of survival and growth. Authority is still patriarchal, but Ophelia challenges it rather than being so overcome by it she commits suicide. Home remains dangerous in Elsinore but is redefined through the convent as a place of support. Sexuality is still a source of risk, but it becomes part of Ophelia's identity rather than her downfall. Most importantly, Klein shifts the focus to Ophelia's own perspective, turning her from a marginal victim into a central, active heroine. She rebels against hierarchical structures but still values love and family, presenting a character who is feminine, competent, and proactive. As Coats notes, adaptations can help young readers overcome the foreignness of Shakespeare's language and context by presenting characters and conflicts in ways that feel relevant to their own lives (316). By borrowing and reframing Shakespeare's dialogue, Klein makes visible this shift in subject position. Lines that once signalled obedience or restrained wit are rewritten as acts of concealment and defiance. In this way, the adaptation transforms Shakespeare's victim into a heroine more relatable for current audiences. One who acknowledges danger and oppression but ultimately survives through choice and self-determination.

5 Discussion

Retellings for young adult readers mediate between Shakespeare's cultural authority and adolescent expectations by transforming focalisation, characterisation, narration, and plot structure. They sustain Shakespeare's place in high Culture through cultural prestige while destabilising embedded ideologies by reframing them through YA conventions. This chapter synthesises how retellings reshape Shakespeare for YA readers, how they negotiate and expose ideology, and what these processes reveal about adolescence and the canon; the novels maintain Shakespeare's status via paratexts, allusions, and recognisable structures yet redirect interpretation by centring adolescent perspectives.

A major cultural function of retellings is to introduce younger audiences to canonical works. Stephens and McCallum argue that rewritings of high Culture texts both popularise and transmit the cultural values associated with them, effectively initiating child and adolescent readers into Culture (254). Shakespeare occupies a

special place in this process as his plays are repeatedly re-presented so that their cultural capital continues to circulate. But the retellings considered here do not simply pass on Shakespeare's stories. I argue they bring the original down from its cultural pedestal and invite young readers to interact with it on their own terms.

I. Focalisation and the Politics of Voice

A consistent feature across the novels is a shift in focalisation. In Shakespeare, characters such as Miranda, Ophelia, and Benvolio occupy marginal or secondary positions: Miranda serves her father's political aims, Ophelia is silenced by patriarchal order, and Benvolio remains a witness without agency. In the retellings, these figures become narrators of their own experiences. Moss narrates *Storm-Wake*, charting her resistance to paternal manipulation; Ophelia tells her own story in Klein's novel, reframing tragedy as survival; and Benvolio narrates *Prince of Shadows*, interpreting the famous love story through sceptical eyes.

This redistribution of narratorial voice and focalisation is not a stylistic adjustment but a structural one. By placing the narratorial voice in the hands of marginal figures, these adaptations align themselves with adolescent subjectivity and foreground what was silenced in the original texts. As Stephens and McCallum suggest, retellings have the potential to disclose marginal and suppressed voices precisely by changing the mode of representation rather than just the content (22). Foregrounding adolescent subjectivity is the structural means through which these novels shift interpretive authority from adults to young readers.

II. Adolescence and Ideological Negotiation

Adolescence across all three novels is defined by negotiation rather than emancipation. Coats describes it as a threshold, "fraught with angst, drama, and change anxiety," caught between dependence and independence (325). Stringer similarly emphasises the contradictory messages adolescents receive: cultural institutions promote sexual restraint, while popular culture glamorises romance and desire (75, 81). The novels make this contradiction visible by placing characters within systems they must question but cannot fully escape. In *Storm-Wake*, bodily change and self-awareness dismantle Pa's illusion of safety and make departure necessary; in *Ophelia*, intimacy and motherhood create vulnerability that is later reconfigured as chosen belonging at St. Emilion; in *Prince of Shadows*, viewpoint is

granted but outcome is governed by curse and kinship structures. These examples illustrate Seelinger-Trites's point that YA protagonists may rebel against injustice but remain constrained by wider oppressive societal frameworks (83). Adolescence is depicted not as emancipation but as ambivalent negotiation between independence and discipline.

What begins as personal conflict with authority thus becomes a broader interrogation of inherited moral structures. These dynamics illustrate how retellings reconfigure ideology rather than simply update setting. *Storm-Wake* turns Prospero's benign instruction into paternal repression; *Ophelia* converts patriarchal control into partial autonomy within an alternative social order; and *Prince of Shadows* reframes romantic transcendence as destructive obsession. Stevenson, Rose, and Lesnik-Oberstein remind us that children's and YA fiction is never free from didactic impulses, and these novels reproduce moral frameworks while simultaneously questioning them. They transmit Shakespeare's stories but redirect their ethical focus from social hierarchy to personal negotiation.

III. Intertextuality and Reader Positioning

Intertextuality operates as both continuity and critique. O'Sullivan argues that intertextual reference destabilises reader certainty and encourages reflective engagement (*Comparative Children's Literature* [book] 28). Stephens similarly suggests that intertextuality has the potential to subvert ideology (85–86). Klein's *Ophelia* makes the point especially visible by borrowing and reframing Shakespeare's language. When Ophelia says, "I shall obey, my lord," the line is repurposed: outwardly addressed to Polonius, inwardly it is a vow to Hamlet. The line is both preserved and contradicted at once. Elsewhere, she turns Laertes's lesson back on him, confidently refusing his lecture on morality. The rhetorical reversal exposes double standards and, crucially, trains readers to see the pre-text as something to argue with, not simply absorb. *Storm-Wake* signals its connection to *The Tempest* through setting and premise, but it resolves the shared plot differently. Prospero's island becomes Pa's collapsing prison; Miranda's dynastic marriage becomes Moss's self-defined relationship and open-ended future. The transformation encourages readers to ask why Prospero's control has so often been read as benign and what remains invisible in that reading. Culturally, *Romeo and Juliet's* passion is mythologised. *Prince of Shadows* reframes it as pathology, the product of a curse.

For readers who know the play, this challenges the idealisation of their love and desire. For those who encounter it first in Caine's novel, Shakespeare's story is mediated through a lens of danger and compulsion, questioning whether such a connection can realistically be seen as a healthy kind of love or whether intense desire is even the same thing as love.

By borrowing and reversing Shakespeare's language, the novels train readers to approach canonical texts critically. As Rudd points out, children are not passive receivers of ideology but active constructors of meaning (37). Retellings encourage this active reading by foregrounding their intertextuality. They not only transmit Shakespeare but also model how his works can be interrogated. Readers familiar with the play are prompted to reconsider what has been idealised; readers encountering Shakespeare through the retelling are taught to expect contestation as part of reading the canon. Therefore, they function as invitations to compare, to question, and to reinterpret. In this way, retellings can model critical reading at the same time as they transmit the canon.

IV. Mediation, Cultural Work, and Limitations

These retellings mediate between canonical prestige and age-appropriateness by acknowledging desire and disciplining it through plot structure. The result is not a uniform "sanitised" Shakespeare, but a set of strategic emphases and omissions. Rokison notes a long-standing tendency in school and youth-oriented adaptations to omit or soften sexual content, even as editions become more "entertaining" in tone (7). The present corpus illustrates a related, though not identical, process. *Storm-Wake* makes bodily change central but subjects it to paternal policing. *Ophelia* makes intimacy explicit but relocates it in communal acceptance rather than institution-sanctioned marriage. *Prince of Shadows* externalises passion as a curse and also supports more measured relationships in Benvolio and Rosaline. In each case, desire is acknowledged but disciplined. This aligns with Trites's finding that YA fiction repeatedly frames sexuality as dangerous and often insists that love and committed relationships precede and legitimise desire (92–93).

At the same time, the books avoid straightforward moralising. Moss regains autonomy over her body and relationships, Ophelia's pregnancy is accepted as something positive within a supportive community and Benvolio's sacrifice contains, rather than glorifies, destructive passion. These are neither straightforward

endorsements of restraint nor celebrations of transgression. They are negotiated positions that make sense for adolescent readers navigating mixed cultural messages and for texts that cannot fully escape didactic impulses.

Finally, the retellings show how the canon is both sustained and unsettled in contemporary culture. Sanders notes that appropriations transmit cultural capital while recovering repressed or marginalised voices (98). Müller observes that Shakespeare's dominance is continually renewed through this kind of repetition ("Introduction" 5). The adaptations in this study confirm the point. They secure Shakespeare's cultural significance by retelling his stories in forms designed for new readers yet by shifting focalisation and changing plots, they also expose the ideological habits of the originals and offer different ways of reading them. It also invites readers to ask who gets to speak, what counts as home, and how desire is framed. If retellings initiate readers into high Culture, they do so in a way that equips those readers to question what they are reading.

6 Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore how contemporary young adult retellings of Shakespeare engage with the authority of the canon and with the construction of adolescent subjectivity. Through close reading and comparative analysis of Lucy Christopher's *Storm-Wake*, Lisa Klein's *Ophelia*, and Rachel Caine's *Prince of Shadows*, I have examined how these texts negotiate three interrelated concerns (authority, home, and sexuality) and how they reframe Shakespeare's plays for adolescent readers. The study has shown that while the retellings transmit Shakespeare's cultural capital to a new generation, they also reconfigure the ideological frameworks of the plays. In doing so, they reveal both the adaptability of Shakespeare's works and the particular pressures and expectations placed on young adult fiction.

The analyses have demonstrated that authority in these retellings is never neutral. Parental, patriarchal, and political control is presented as coercive and often destructive, a force that adolescent protagonists must resist, escape or learn to live with. The representation of home across the corpus similarly resists the stability and closure found in Shakespeare's plays. In *Storm-Wake*, the island functions less as sanctuary than as enclosure; in *Ophelia*, Elsinore is a site of betrayal that must be

abandoned; in *Prince of Shadows*, the households of Verona are depicted as instruments of surveillance and violence.

Sexuality constitutes the third strand of analysis and reveals the careful balancing act required when retelling canonical texts for young audiences. Shakespeare's plays often present sexuality as transgressive, disruptive, or socially fraught. The retellings do not erase this dimension but manage it through emphasis on consent, bodily autonomy, and consequence. Desire is acknowledged, even validated, but also disciplined through plot resolution. Across these domains, each text reworks the balance between structure and agency that defines both Shakespeare's work and the adolescent condition.

Together, these thematic strands illustrate a consistent pattern. The retellings foreground adolescent subjectivity, recasting Shakespeare's plays not as dynastic tragedies but as narratives of negotiation, survival, and partial agency. They neither reject the canon nor accept it uncritically. Instead, they maintain Shakespeare's cultural prestige while subjecting it to interrogation through the lens of adolescence. This process reflects a broader tendency in adaptation: canonical texts endure not because they remain unchanged, but because they are continually reshaped to meet the needs of new audiences. In the case of YA retellings, those needs are closely bound up with the cultural construction of adolescence itself.

Methodologically, this thesis has relied on close reading and comparative analysis. This approach has been particularly effective in showing how focalisation, characterisation, and thematic emphasis are reworked across the texts. Focusing on three thematic axes allowed for sustained analysis while also making visible broader patterns that cut across individual works. The decision to foreground authority, home, and sexuality reflects both their centrality in Shakespeare's plays and their particular resonance within YA literature. Close reading has made it possible to track the subtle ways in which these themes are adapted, while comparative analysis has highlighted the consistency of certain strategies across distinct texts. The combination of methods has therefore not only illuminated the specific novels under consideration but also contributed to a clearer picture of YA Shakespeare retellings as a literary phenomenon.

At a wider level, the study contributes to ongoing debates in adaptation studies and children's literature. In adaptation theory, it supports the view that retellings are not derivative but dialogic, operating through both transmission and

critique. The novels examined here sustain Shakespeare's authority while simultaneously exposing its ideological foundation. In children's and YA literature, the study demonstrates how canonical texts are recontextualised to align with adolescent concerns, particularly around power, belonging, and sexuality. The findings therefore highlight the dual role of YA retellings: they introduce young readers to Shakespeare while also reshaping his plays to reflect contemporary understandings of adolescence.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Its corpus is deliberately narrow, restricted to three Anglophone prose novels published in the early twenty-first century. It therefore excludes the wider field of Shakespearean adaptation for young audiences, which spans across other languages, media, and genres: from picture books and graphic novels to film and theatre. Language adaptation also warrants closer examination. The ways in which Shakespeare's idiom is modernised, simplified, or partially retained, whether for educational value or stylistic continuity, reveal much about cultural assumptions regarding accessibility and audience. Likewise, the role of paratexts such as covers, blurbs, and branding could illuminate how these works position themselves between education and entertainment in the YA market. Finally, reception studies focusing on classroom use or reader responses would offer valuable insight into how adolescents themselves engage with these retellings and whether they recognise, resist, or reproduce the interpretive positions the texts construct for them.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this thesis have broader significance. They suggest that Shakespeare's endurance in contemporary culture depends not only on his institutional prestige but also on the flexibility of his works to be reimagined for new audiences. YA retellings exemplify this process of reimagining. They show that the canon is not static but negotiable, open to adaptation and critique. At the same time, they highlight the cultural expectations placed on adolescent literature to mediate authority, construct belonging, and regulate desire. By situating Shakespeare within this framework, the retellings reveal as much about the cultural construction of adolescence as they do about the plays themselves.

In conclusion, this thesis has demonstrated that YA retellings of Shakespeare are complex, ideologically engaged texts that both sustain and destabilise the canon. They recentre marginal voices, redefine spaces of belonging, and reconfigure the representation of desire. In doing so, they align with the conventions of YA literature

while also offering young readers a way into Shakespeare that is recognisable yet transformed. In short, the canon persists not through repetition but through revision. YA retellings make that process visible: they pass Shakespeare on to new readers and, at the same time, teach those readers how to question what they inherit.

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8 Appendix

8.1 Abstract English

This thesis explores how contemporary young adult (YA) retellings of Shakespeare engage with the authority of the literary canon and the construction of adolescent subjectivity. Focusing on Lucy Christopher's *Storm-Wake*, Lisa Klein's *Ophelia*, and Rachel Caine's *Prince of Shadows*, the study investigates how these novels rework *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet* for modern adolescent audiences. Using close reading and comparative analysis, the research traces three thematic axes – authority, home, and sexuality – through which these adaptations negotiate power, belonging, and identity. The theoretical framework draws on adaptation theory, intertextuality, and children's literature scholarship to examine how canonical prestige is both mobilised and contested within YA fiction. The analysis shows that these retellings consistently shift focalisation to marginal characters, granting narratorial agency that the original plays withhold. In doing so, authority is reconfigured: rather than resolving in a benevolent restoration of order, power is repeatedly exposed as coercive control that must be resisted, bargained with, or strategically navigated. The idea of "home" is likewise unsettled, moving from a stable sanctuary to a contested and often confining space, so that departure becomes a condition of autonomy. At the same time, the novels manage adolescent sexuality by validating desire while still setting limits through plot outcomes shaped by consent, consequence, and self-definition. Ultimately, this thesis argues that YA retellings perform a dual cultural function: they sustain the Shakespearean canon by transmitting its cultural prestige, while simultaneously destabilising its embedded ideologies through the lens of adolescent experience. By replacing restoration with survival and obedience with negotiation, these adaptations suggest that the canon's endurance depends not on immutability, but on its capacity to be continually reimagined and contested.

8.2 Abstract Deutsch

Diese Arbeit untersucht, wie zeitgenössische Nacherzählungen von Shakespeare für junge Erwachsene (YA) sich mit der Autorität des literarischen Kanons und der Konstruktion jugendlicher Subjektivität auseinandersetzen. Mit Fokus auf Lucy Christophers *Storm-Wake*, Lisa Kleins *Ophelia* und Rachel Caines *Prince of Shadows* untersucht die Studie, wie diese Romane *Der Sturm*, *Hamlet* und *Romeo und Julia* für ein modernes jugendliches Publikum neu gestalten. Mithilfe von Close Reading und vergleichender Analyse werden drei thematische Achsen – Autorität, Zuhause und Sexualität – herausgearbeitet, über die diese Adaptionen Macht, Zugehörigkeit und Identität verhandeln. Der theoretische Rahmen stützt sich auf Adaptationstheorie, Intertextualität und literaturwissenschaftliche Ansätze der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur, um zu untersuchen, wie kanonisches Prestige innerhalb der YA-Literatur sowohl mobilisiert als auch infrage gestellt wird. Die Analyse zeigt, dass diese Nacherzählungen den Fokus konsequent auf Randfiguren verlagern und ihnen eine narrative Handlungsmacht verleihen, die ihnen in den Originalstücken vorenthalten bleibt. Auf diese Weise wird Autorität neu konfiguriert: Anstatt in einer wohlwollenden Wiederherstellung von Ordnung zu münden, wird Macht wiederholt als Zwangskontrolle entlarvt, der man sich widersetzen, mit der man verhandeln oder die man strategisch umgehen muss. Auch die Vorstellung von „Zuhause“ wird in Frage gestellt und wandelt sich von einem stabilen Zufluchtsort zu einem umkämpften und oft beengenden Raum, sodass das Verlassen des Zuhauses zu einer Voraussetzung für Autonomie wird. Gleichzeitig thematisieren die Romane die Sexualität von Jugendlichen, indem sie das Verlangen legitimieren, aber dennoch durch Handlungsverläufe, die von Einverständnis, Konsequenzen und Selbstdefinition geprägt sind, Grenzen setzen. Letztendlich argumentiert diese Arbeit, dass YA-Nacherzählungen eine doppelte kulturelle Funktion erfüllen: Sie erhalten den Shakespeare-Kanon aufrecht, indem sie sein kulturelles Prestige weitergeben, und destabilisieren gleichzeitig seine eingebetteten Ideologien durch die Linse der jugendlichen Erfahrung. Indem sie Wiederherstellung durch Überleben und Gehorsam durch Verhandlung ersetzen, suggerieren diese Adaptionen, dass die Beständigkeit des Kanons nicht von seiner Unveränderlichkeit abhängt, sondern von seiner Fähigkeit, ständig neu interpretiert und hinterfragt zu werden.