

## Understanding “Violence” in Shakespeare-themed Comics

The *boy crisis* entered the American psyche during the closing years of the twentieth century, and there are two key moments in 1998, according to Kenneth Kidd, that serve as likely candidates for the first utterances of the phrase: a NPR interview on *The Mellow Report* and a May issue of *Newsweek*. Three interrelated concerns generally dominate this debate: 1) that boys are neither reading as much nor performing as strongly as girls in school; 2) that boys are at risk of becoming feminized by contemporary educational practices; and 3) that boys need to have access to more diverse depictions of masculinity in their reading.

While this so-called *boy crisis* grew in the American imagination, there concurrently was a post-millennial boom in adaptations of Shakespeare for boys, most abundantly within illustrated genres, such as comics and manga. My previous work on adaptations of Shakespeare proves that many of these reimaginings aimed to produce diverse models of Shakespeare-inspired boyhood and identity. In this presentation, however, I am interested in the following questions: first, how is Shakespeare’s violence, both domestic and on the battlefield, depicted in comics?; and second, what sort of activism and empathy, if any, are depicted when Shakespeare finds his/its way into twenty-first century comics? In the end, I argue that amidst the *boy crisis*, although several films, such as Tim Blake Nelson’s *O*, and novels, such as Gary D. Schmidt’s *The Wednesday Wars*, turn to Shakespeare’s plays to depict more culturally progressive images of boyhood, genres such as a comics and manga by contrast often offer hegemonic and toxic versions of masculinity for its presumed readership.