

Cross-Modal Translation in the Digital Age: Adapting/ Remediating Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for Interactive Media through the *Elsinore* Video Game

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Abstract

The present paper explores the evolving field of cross-modal translation with a particular focus on the adaptation of literary works into interactive digital genres, using the 2019 video game *Elsinore*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, as a case study. As technology advances, the boundaries between text, audio, and visual media blur, presenting new challenges and opportunities for translators and content creators. This study argues that cross-modal translation in video games is driven by a dynamic interplay of adaptation and remediation, functioning together as an intrinsically synergistic and mutually reinforcing process. While previous research has largely overlooked this connection, recognizing this synergy is crucial to understanding the complexity of cross-modal translation in video games. Through a combination of theoretical analysis and a detailed examination of *Elsinore*, the study addresses the linguistic, cultural, and technological challenges of preserving the essence and integrity of literary works while adapting them for interactive platforms. Key concepts such as interactivity, immersion, and narrative in video game adaptations are analyzed, along with how these elements influence the user's engagement with the source material. The examination of *Elsinore* includes aspects such as story structure, narrative impact, user interaction, and the methods used to translate literary devices into interactive elements. By focusing on how *Elsinore* adapts and remediates *Hamlet* for an interactive format, the paper highlights the challenges and innovations in cross-modal translation. It also examines how the game preserves key themes and motifs while introducing new interactive elements, and how these changes shape user engagement and narrative exploration. Finally, this research contributes to understanding how interactive media offer new ways to experience and engage with classical literature, opening up avenues for future exploration in cross-modal translation and interactive storytelling.

Keywords: adaptation, cross-modal translation, literary gaming, narrative immersion, remediation.

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Introduction

The traditional definition of translation has often been limited to the idea of “mapping one original text from a source to a target language” (Kristal, 2014, p. 28). However, recent advancements in media studies and semiotics have stretched this definition significantly, especially with the rise of new digital media formats. Alin Olteanu (2020) proposes a paradigm shift in our understanding of translation, arguing for a deep connection between translation and interpretation. This connection stems not only from the inherent traits of communication but also from the multimodal nature of knowledge itself. Olteanu’s assertion that “translation is interpretation and vice versa” (Olteanu, 2020, p. 8) emphasizes that conveying meaning is intrinsically linked to the diverse modes through which knowledge is expressed and understood. Building upon Roman Jakobson’s (1959) concept of linguistic signs’ transformative nature, Olteanu integrates Elleström’s (2018) medium-centered communication model to redefine translation as “the media effects of transferring cognitive import, or... the emergence of media products” (p. 2).

This expanded definition extends translation beyond language, encompassing the diverse meaning articulations found in digital media and highlighting the inherent link between translation and medial adaptation, or remediation. The emergence of new media has catalyzed a shift in translation and adaptation studies from linear interpretations to intermedial and transmedial frameworks. To comprehend the transmediality and multimodality inherent in translation and remediation, Olteanu draws upon Charles Peirce’s semiotics (1958), Danesi’s media semiotics (2002; 2008; 2010), and Nöth’s concept of “semiotic mediation” (2012), creating a robust theoretical foundation for understanding cross-modal translation in the digital age. This far-reaching perspective on translation is reminiscent of Linda Hutcheon’s investigation of adaptation in her influential book *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006).

Hutcheon analyzes adaptation as both a distinct form and a dynamic process, highlighting the changes that take place when narratives move from their original setting to a different medium or cultural environment. In this regard, adaptation is not merely about reproducing content; it involves reinterpreting and reshaping narratives to fit new contexts, often resulting in shifts in political valence and meaning (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 17). On the other hand, the idea of remediation, as discussed by Bolter and Grusin (1999), adds depth to these discussions by examining how new media reshape older media. Remediation indicates that digital media do not develop in a vacuum; instead, they reinterpret and transform existing media forms, creating a lively interaction between the old and the new. However, as Baetens (2023) explains, remediation refers to “the representation of one medium in another,” where media do not simply compete with each other, but rather try to “supersede each other in order to offer the... public a kind of media use that comes as close as possible to the (utopian) ideal of immediate transparency” (Baetens, 2023, 278).

Therefore, to fully grasp the complexities of interactive literary adaptations, remediation must be understood as involving not only the appropriation of one medium by another but also a mutual influence and reciprocal relationship between the two. Such a process highlights the fluid nature of media boundaries and the ongoing evolution of storytelling across various platforms. Hutcheon’s exploration of adaptation emphasizes that transformation is inevitable as stories transition between different media and cultural contexts. This transformation agrees with the concept of remediation, where the reworking of older media into digital formats highlights both continuity and innovation. The merging of translation, adaptation, and remediation illustrates the

elaborate ways narratives are reshaped in the digital era, enabling stories to reverberate across a wide range of cultural and media environments. These ideas are especially pertinent in the realm of cross-modal translation, where adapting literary works to interactive digital media involves not just translating narrative structures and themes but also remediating them to adapt them with the aptitudes and potential of new media. In this way, adapting literary works into interactive formats can be viewed as a complex process that weaves together elements of translation, adaptation, and remediation, each playing a role in reimagining stories for the digital age. Manifestly, in our increasingly digital world, the boundaries between different modes of communication are becoming increasingly fluid. Despite the various attempts to define cross-modal translation in existing literature, a comprehensive and clear-cut definition remains elusive, as it is an emergent and multidimensional concept. While the term “cross-modal” is more commonly associated with communication rather than translation, some scholars, such as L. Bowker (2023), have referred to translation itself as “another form of cross-modal communication” (p. 6), encompassing processes like converting written text to spoken text or vice versa (p.10).

This paper aims to address this gap by introducing a more precise and comprehensive definition of cross-modal translation, particularly focusing on its application in adapting content across diverse media forms, with emphasis on interactive digital genres. Jakobson's concept of intersemiotic translation (1959) and Hutcheon's theory of adaptation (2006) have provided valuable insights into related phenomena. However, these earlier works predate the unique complexities of cross-modal translation as seen in recent video game adaptations. For that reason, and drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's work on multimodality (2001), Jenkins' concept of convergence culture (2006), and Bolter and Grusin's theory of remediation (1999), this paper defines cross-modal translation as *the holistic transformation of a narrative or creative work across different sensory and interactive modalities*. This process encompasses not only linguistic and semiotic shifts but also changes in user interaction and engagement. It necessitates a reimagining of both content and form to suit the affordances and constraints of the target medium, while simultaneously refashioning the original work and the new medium itself.

Literature Review

Shakespeare's works have garnered significant attention in the gaming world, largely due to what Andrei Nae terms “the Accumulation of Cultural Prestige” (2019). In his study, Nae examines how major action-adventure games incorporate Shakespearean elements to elevate their artistic status, focusing on titles like *Metal Gear Solid 4*, *BioShock: Infinite*, and *God of War*. These games, Nae argues, employ Shakespearean narrative content to adopt traits associated with established art forms, such as narrative depth and complex characterization.

Nae's 2021 study, “Playing with Shakespeare in *Silent Hill 3* and *Manhunt 2*: From Reverence to Rejection,” further explores this theme. He analyzes how two survival horror games, *Silent Hill 3* and *Manhunt 2*, utilize Shakespearean elements differently - one seeking artistic legitimacy, the other rejecting the art-game association.

In the context of adapting *Hamlet* into the video game *Elsinore* (2019), scholarly discourse remains relatively sparse. Nevertheless, two significant studies have surfaced that warrant attention. Niayesh and Roszak (2023) examine *Elsinore* as a feminist reinterpretation of *Hamlet*, centering on a mixed-race Ophelia. Their analysis explores how the game reimagines gender roles and addresses social minorities in gaming. The authors praise *Elsinore* for its aesthetic and political value while calling for deeper exploration of its decolonial implications. Julian Novitz (2020) includes *Elsinore* in a comparative study of four *Hamlet*-inspired video

games. His work, “‘The Time Is out of Joint’: Interactivity and Player Agency in Videogame Adaptations of *Hamlet*,” explores how these adaptations utilize player agency and interactivity to reinterpret Shakespeare’s classic. Novitz argues that while these games may appear to overwrite the original text, they fundamentally depend on and engage with the play’s legacy, illustrating Derrida’s concept of Shakespearean texts’ “spectral” qualities - their ability to facilitate a dialogue between past and present. The scholarly exploration of *Elsinore* continues to evolve, and the most recent contribution is authored by Julia Wold (2024) in “‘This is the fate I choose’: *Elsinore* and thoughtful choice in Shakespeare games.”

This study provides a fresh perspective on the game’s adaptation of *Hamlet*, focusing on the philosophical concept of “prohairesis,” or thoughtful choice. Wold’s analysis centers on how *Elsinore* incorporates the idea of prohairesis, which combines knowledge and motivation, as a fundamental element of both the game design and the player experience. This concept, deeply rooted in the original Shakespearean work, is brilliantly translated into the interactive medium of video games. By casting Ophelia as the player-character, the game further emphasizes the theme of choice, particularly for a character traditionally viewed as lacking agency in the original play. The study highlights how *Elsinore*’s interactive approach echoes Early Modern preoccupations with thoughtful choice. This configuration not only enhances the player’s engagement with the narrative but also offers a new lens through which to view characters who were historically perceived as passive or powerless. Wold’s work adds a significant layer to the scholarly discourse on *Elsinore*, complementing earlier studies by Niayesh and Roszak (2023), Nae (2019, 2021), and Novitz (2020). All these studies highlight *Elsinore*’s significance in adapting classic literature to interactive media, emphasizing its innovative approach to player engagement, narrative structure, and cultural commentary. However, the limited number of scholarly analyses suggests that there is still much to explore regarding this unique adaptation of *Hamlet*. Building on these foundational studies, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of *Elsinore* through the lens of cross-modal translation, examining how the game adapts and remediates *Hamlet*’s narrative, themes, and interactive elements, thereby contributing to the general understanding of the complex interplay between adaptation, remediation, and interactive storytelling in video game adaptations of classic literature.

Methodology

This study employs an integrated framework of cross-modal translation, adaptation, and remediation to analyze the interactive adaptation of *Hamlet* in the game *Elsinore*. Cross-modal translation, as defined in this paper, encompasses the holistic transformation of a narrative across different sensory and interactive modalities. This involves scrutinizing the specific techniques and design choices used to translate the originally textual work into an immersive, player-driven experience. Likewise, adaptation theory, drawing on Hutcheon’s concept of “repetition with a difference,” is utilized to investigate how *Elsinore* borrows from and reinterprets Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. This analysis focuses on the strategic choices made in adhering to or departing from the original play, highlighting the creative liberties taken and novel interpretations offered. Furthermore, remediation, as conceptualized by Bolter and Grusin and expanded by Baetens, is employed to explore how the game medium is integrated into the *Hamlet* narrative. This aspect of the analysis examines how the interactive format not only represents but also refashions the original work, creating a reciprocal relationship between the source material and the new medium.

By interweaving these three complementary approaches, this study demonstrates how cross-modal translation in video games operates through a dynamic interplay of adaptation and remediation. This methodology allows for an in-depth examination of how *Elsinore* preserves the

essence of Hamlet while transforming it into an interactive experience, shedding light on the synergistic relationship between these processes in the context of video game adaptations of classic literature.

1. Perspectives on Cross-Modal Translation: Literary Adaptation and Remediation in the Digital Age

As explained above, the concept of cross-modal translation is closely tied to the larger concept of adaptation, which has been extensively explored in scholarly works. Jan-Nöel Thon (2016) highlights how the intersection of technology and the growing popularity of adaptations and franchises has led to a new era of “transmedial entertainment.” These franchises seamlessly cross over between different media and “hermetic” works (xvii). Indeed, as Janet Murray observes in *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (2016), the experience of immersion in a fictional world is not a passive “suspension of disbelief,” but rather an “active creation of belief” (Murray, 2016, 107). When engaging with an immersive medium like a game or virtual reality, critical faculties are not simply put aside. Instead, creative capacities come into play to actively reinforce the reality of the experience.

The interactive adaptation of *Hamlet* in the game *Elsinore* illustrates how the related, yet distinct concepts of cross-modal translation, adaptation, and remediation are utilized to provide a multifaceted and well-grounded examination. Cross-modal translation refers to the process of adapting this work from the literary, dramatic medium to the interactive game, highlighting the transformation required when a narrative is conveyed across different modalities. Adaptation, on the other hand, is the traditional borrowing and retelling of the story in a new way. Finally, remediation goes beyond just adapting the story; it involves the appropriation of the medium itself, where the literary is enfolded within the interactive game medium, shedding light on how the latter is integrated into the *Hamlet* narrative, resulting in the blending of different perceptions and the co-creation of the virtual world by players and watchers. By incorporating these three complementary terms, an integrative framework for understanding the complexities involved in the interactive adaptation of literary works across different media forms becomes workable.

2. Adaptation and New Media: Establishing the Videogame as an Adaptive Medium

According to Dawn Stoddart (2018), the field of adaptation studies has largely neglected video games despite their prevalence as an adaptive medium. While Hutcheon (2013) notes the significant number of video games derived from films, academic discourse often sidelines or contests their status as adaptations. Scott A. Lukas (2010), for example, argues that video games remake rather than adapt other media. He challenges the common perception of film adaptations of video games as simple adaptations, arguing that they are more accurately considered “remakes,” indicating an inherent subversion of the original work. Lukas contends that when one medium, such as film, crosses into the territory of another, like video games, the result is a remake rather than a traditional adaptation. This is because the boundaries between these media are becoming increasingly blurred, leading to a “slippage” between the technical, cinematic, literary, and interpretative elements (Lukas, 222). Stoddart contends that this narrow focus overlooks the diverse range of media that video games adapt, including graphic novels, television, and music. She also highlights the multidirectional nature of video game adaptation, encompassing tie-in games, novelizations, and film adaptations of games.

Thon (2016) discusses how video games represent narrative through interactive elements and predetermined content, leading to nonlinear narratives influenced by player actions (p. 75). Unlike other media, games combine “strategies of prototypically narrative representation” with dynamic gameplay (p. 107). The player’s actions, shaped by game rules and mechanics, are crucial in creating “ludic events” that are not predetermined (p. 107). The narrative emerges from a “complex interplay” of these elements (p. 107).

In *Elsinore*, the interactive adaptation of *Hamlet*, a combination of fixed narrative elements and player-driven events is evident. The game includes cinematic sequences, still images, and comic panels that enhance the story and reflect Michael Heim's (2010) Holodeck concept which is prophetic in its exploration of virtual reality's metaphysics. *Elsinore* weaves scripted events into gameplay, allowing players to engage with the narrative as it unfolds. This integration showcases the complexity of contemporary narrative representation, where stories not only propel the plot but also communicate game mechanics and underlying values. By blending interactive and fixed elements, *Elsinore* enables players to experience Hamlet's world, similar to the role-playing possibilities of the Holodeck. Its time-looping mechanic enhances player immersion, allowing choices to shape the narrative. Thus, *Elsinore* exemplifies how video games can reinterpret classic literature into interactive experiences, highlighting the changing role of narrative in the digital era.

2.1 Video Games and Interactive Storytelling

The interplay between interactive storytelling, adaptation, remediation, and translation represents a complex and multifaceted area of scholarly inquiry. Interactive storytelling, where audiences impact the course of the narrative through their choices and actions (Murray, 1997), has become increasingly prevalent with digital technologies, offering a more immersive and personalized experience as the narrative unfolds based on the recipient's choices (Ryan, 2001). These adaptations involve creative reinterpretation, where the original work is reimagined and transformed to suit the new medium or to accommodate the cultural context (Stam, 2005).

This process of adaptation and interactive storytelling becomes particularly fascinating when applied to classical works, such as plays, in the video game medium. As Brian Richardson (2011) notes, many video games violate "mimetic expectations, the canons of realism, and the conventions of natural narrative" (p. 34). This divergence from traditional narrative structures presents both challenges and opportunities when adapting classical plays into interactive formats. While the development process often prioritizes game mechanics and gameplay over storytelling, potentially leaving narrative as an afterthought, it also opens up new possibilities for reimagining classical works. The interactive nature of video games allows for a unique engagement with the themes and characters of these plays, potentially offering players agency in ways that are not possible in traditional theatrical performances. However, this also raises questions about the fidelity to the original work and the balance between interactive elements and narrative integrity. Despite the challenges, many games tout their interactive narratives and adaptive storytelling, often ambitiously attempting to merge the rich literary tradition of classical plays with the immersive, player-driven experiences that video games can offer. This is particularly relevant when examining the relationship between video games and storytelling, as exemplified by the case study of *Elsinore* as will be detailed later.

The challenges and opportunities of adapting classical plays into interactive video game formats are well illustrated by the work of Elizabeth B. Hunter, a digital humanist. Hunter's approach to video game adaptation of dramatic texts provides a practical example of how the interactive nature of games can be used to engage with classical works in new ways. Drawing from her experience in directing site-specific, immersive theatrical productions, Hunter developed a method for transforming Shakespeare's plays into video games. Her "walking showcases" at Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark, which staged Shakespearean scenes in unconventional locations between 2010 and 2016, served as a precursor to her game design work (Hunter, 2018, 175). Recognizing the scalability limitations of live theatre, Hunter turned

to video games as a medium that could potentially replicate the benefits observed in these immersive productions—namely, enhanced comprehension, critical thinking, and audience affinity for the source material. Her initial project, *Something Wicked*, an adaptation of the combat scene from *Macbeth*, exemplifies the potential for video games to offer unique interpretations of classical texts while addressing the challenges of balancing gameplay mechanics with narrative fidelity (Hunter, 2018, 175). Hunter’s effort demonstrates how practitioners are actively exploring ways to merge traditional storytelling with the interactive possibilities of video games. Indeed, video game adaptations allow players to explore themes and characters interactively, enriching the understanding of the original works (Bushnell, Hunter, & Nicholas, 2023). However, challenges persist, such as maintaining reverence for the source material and managing the complexities of player agency, which can lead to divergent interpretations (Novitz, 2020).

The narratologist-ludologist debate provides a useful gateway of analysis for considering the duality between creativity and fidelity when adapting classic texts for new interactive mediums. It also provides a framework for understanding how the game reconciles its interactive gameplay with the rich narrative literary traditions. Game developers usually confront this dichotomy and strive to maintain a fair balance between creativity and loyalty to the original by focusing on core themes while conceding inventive reinterpretation (Bickley & Stevens, 2023). The following analysis will show how *Elsinore* both remediates and adapts Shakespeare’s work for contemporary audiences, highlighting the sophisticated storytelling techniques required to translate classic literature into an engaging interactive experience. As explained above, adaptation looks at how *Elsinore* reinterprets and reimagines the *Hamlet* story, which can involve adapting narrative structures and techniques from both literary and game formats. Remediation, on the other hand, is concerned with how the game medium integrates with and transforms the original *Hamlet* narrative, which requires examining the blending of traditional storytelling techniques with interactive gameplay mechanics.

2.2 The Narratologist-Ludologist Debate: Connecting Interactive and Narrative Dimensions in *Elsinore*

Theorists have debated whether games can be considered narrative media, akin to films and literature (Aarseth, 1997; Murray, 2017; Ryan, 2006). Ludologists argue that gameplay is the core of video games, distinct from narrative elements (Eskelinen, 2001). In contrast, narratologists view games as capable of incorporating interactive and narrative components (Murray, 2005; Ryan, 2006). The conflict between these perspectives may stem from differing interpretations of the word “narrative” and the formal characteristics of games versus other media (Murray, 2005). Ryan (2006) suggests that existing narrative theories may need expansion to account for interactive storytelling. However, not all games necessarily have a narrative context, and any narratives may serve different purposes across game genres (Jenkins, 2004). Kokonis (2014) sought to resolve the dispute by arguing that a broader *semiotic* perspective is necessary to integrate both approaches, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the hybrid nature of games and their narrative elements. The polemics between narratology and ludology has been a longstanding and crucial issue in the short history of interactive storytelling (Pizzo et al., 2024, p. 59). On one side, Janet Murray hypothesized that digital media, including video games, can be understood as tools of storytelling. On the other, Espen Aarseth (1997) argued that to comprehend video games and the field of interactive entertainment, it was necessary to move away from narratological categories and instead use those derived from ludology. This rivalry for supremacy between the historically established narratology and the emerging ludology has not yet

been resolved. However, ludology has established itself as a field of research and an academic discipline in its own right.

Elsinore exemplifies a sophisticated approach to interactive narrative design, presenting a complex web of narrative possibilities that diverge significantly from the linear structure of Shakespeare's original play. The game's narrative architecture is characterized by a high degree of contingency, where player actions and choices directly influence character fates and ultimate outcomes. This level of narrative plasticity is evidenced by the game's inclusion of 14 distinct possible endings, including variations on Ophelia's fate. Such a multifaceted narrative structure enhances player agency and encourages repeated engagement with the text, as players explore the consequences of different choices across multiple playthroughs.

The inclusion of multiple endings, particularly the variable fate of Ophelia, represents not only a significant departure from the source material but also demonstrates the game's commitment to player-driven narrative experiences. This idea is reminiscent of Murray's (1997) concept of cyberdrama, where the computer becomes a medium for creating and experiencing stories that respond dynamically to user input. By allowing players to potentially alter even major plot twists like Ophelia's death, *Elsinore* challenges traditional notions of narrative fidelity in adaptation and pushes the boundaries of how classic texts can be reimagined in interactive digital environments (Hutcheon, 2006).

This dynamic approach to storytelling serves a dual purpose: it preserves the thematic complexity and interpretative openness of Shakespeare's original work while simultaneously empowering players to actively participate in shaping the narrative. The result is a hybridized form of storytelling that combines elements of traditional linear narratives with the interactive affordances of digital gaming. By reimagining *Hamlet* through this interactive prism, *Elsinore* not only offers a novel interpretation of the classic play but also contributes to ongoing discussions about the nature of narrative in digital media and the role of agency in interactive storytelling, where players influence the outcome, thus challenging traditional linear narratives.

In practice, games that utilize storytelling are increasingly integrating narrative components with elements of game design, leading to a stronger narrative role for computer-controlled characters and greater dramatic tension (Pizzo et al., 2024, p. 59). On a theoretical level, it is evident that the epistemological tools for analyzing narrative fiction can be expanded by incorporating the ludological perspective (Walton, 1990). The prevailing view is that the complementarity of the narratological and ludological approaches is the result of the increasing presence of artificial intelligence techniques in the design of games and digital narrative works (Pizzo et al., 2024, p. 59). Advances in AI for computer-controlled characters can particularly benefit the provision of narrative coherence in online games, orienting players' actions and providing narrative hooks and closure. This is crucial, as narrative in multiplayer or "sandbox" games has been relatively rudimentary due to the technical and logistical challenges in orchestrating a coherent experience for multiple players simultaneously (Koenitz et al., 2015, p.154).

3. From Text to Interactivity: Adapting and Remediating *Elsinore*

Developed by Golden Glitch Studios and released in 2019, *Elsinore* is an innovative American video game that transforms Shakespeare's classic play *Hamlet* into an immersive, time-looping interactive narrative. Rather than simply adapting the original text, the game reimagines the story, empowering players to actively shape the course of events through their choices and actions. Indeed, *Elsinore* presents a unique perspective on *Hamlet* by featuring Ophelia as the central character. This shift allows players to experience the story from a different vantage point,

taking hold of the struggles of a previously marginal and silenced female character, and even enhancing her empowerment. As Mangiron & O'Hagan (2013) note, the modern video game is typically "designed to engross the end user ... and encroaches into the affective dimension" (p. 103). Significantly, the game's innovative time-loop mechanic offers players the potential to change outcomes in each iteration, demonstrating that in video games, "the narrative design is not the focus of the player's attention" (Ryan, *Avatars*, p. 196). This mechanic, along with the game's focus on character development and temporal manipulation, transforms a thematic element of the original play into a core gameplay feature.

Moreover, *Elsinore* takes creative liberties by expanding the roles and backstories of minor characters, introducing new plot elements like Ophelia's murder mystery, and crafting branching narratives that diverge from the original. These adaptations serve to deepen engagement with *Hamlet*'s key themes, including the haunting of the present by the past, the struggle against an inevitable tragic future, and the consequences of indecision and action. Thus, *Elsinore* carefully balances interactive features to preserve the essence of the original *Hamlet* while empowering players to shape the narrative Novitz (2020).

Elsinore's rich strategy of adaptation, from reinterpreting source material to expanding narrative scope and thematic exploration, demonstrates the game's ability to respect the essence of *Hamlet* while utilizing the unique capabilities of the interactive medium. This modality not only enriches the understanding of characters beyond Hamlet but also amplifies the play's preoccupation with time, deferral, and action, offering a fresh and engaging interpretation of Shakespeare's classic work.

3.1 The Philosophical Depth of *Elsinore*'s Time-Loop Mechanic

In analyzing *Elsinore*, it is crucial to consider both its merit as a standalone cultural artefact and its effectiveness in interpreting the original Shakespearean work. Matthew Crofts emphasizes this dual focus, stating, "What requires exploration is how successful the adaptive process is in the creation of these games: not only as cultural products themselves, but also in reflecting or interpreting the original work" (Crofts, 2023, 39). *Elsinore* is open for examination through a variety of possibilities, assessing how it captures and transforms the essential elements of *Hamlet*—its themes, characters, and narrative structure—within the interactive framework of video games.

It is impressive to discern how *Elsinore* as a game closely follows the chief plot landmarks and character frame of the original work. It is also fascinating to discover how it still manages to preserve the core essence of *Hamlet* while utilizing interactive storytelling techniques which reframe players' understanding of the original. It is clear that the game developers have taken great care to maintain the thematic depth and philosophical complexity of the play ensuring that the interactive adaptation grapples with the same weighty questions surrounding grief, morality, madness, and the human condition. As mentioned above, the game's time-looping mechanic, in particular, allows players to explore these themes from multiple perspectives, mirroring the original's open-ended and introspective nature.

The time loop mechanic in *Elsinore* is not merely a characteristic feature of video games, but a brilliantly conceived device that amplifies and embodies one of *Hamlet*'s most vital thematic and philosophical elements: the protagonist's uncertainty and the multitude of potential actions available to him. By allowing players to revisit and alter events, the game mechanic becomes a potent metaphor for Hamlet's introspective nature and his continual grappling with different courses of action.

3.2 Auditory Deception: From Shakespeare's Stage to Interactive Gameplay

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the ear serves as a crucial motif for knowledge acquisition and potential deception, a theme that is innovatively reimagined in the video game *Elsinore* through its "Hearsay Menu." This transformation exemplifies the process of remediation, where traditional storytelling techniques blend with interactive gameplay mechanics to reinterpret and deepen narrative themes.

Mary Anderson (1991) observes, "Shakespeare provides a series of images which examine the various ways of gaining knowledge and certainty as a basis for judgement and action," amongst which are the eye and ear. (p. 299). This auditory theme is evident throughout *Hamlet*, with lines such as "Nor shall you do my ear that violence" (Act I/ Scene ii) highlighting the potential for deception through hearing. Anderson argues that in *Hamlet*, the ear is often associated with danger and manipulation, suggesting that information obtained solely through auditory means can be unreliable or even "malignant" (p. 302).

Elsinore transforms this concept by integrating Hamlet's concern with deceptive or partial auditory information into the mechanics of player agency. The game encourages players to actively investigate, make decisions, and witness the consequences of their choices, rather than passively receiving information as in the original play. This interactive element allows players to engage with the theme of information gathering and verification in a way that concurs with video games' unique affordances, while still maintaining the spirit of Shakespeare's original emphasis on the ear as a conduit for both knowledge and misinformation.

Through this process, the game creates a powerful synthesis of narrative and gameplay, where auditory cues are not just plot devices but integral to the player's manipulation of the unfolding story. The player's decisions, often based on overheard conversations or secondhand information, mirror the unreliability of auditory information in the original play. This process fuses the traditional theme of auditory deception with the interactivity of the digital medium, transforming passive reception of potentially misleading information into an active exploration of consequence, agency, and the impact of knowledge. Actually, *Elsinore* does more than merely adapt *Hamlet*; it reimagines the play's exploration of deceit, danger, and unreliable information in a way that highlights how digital storytelling can transform classical narratives. By providing deeper insight through player interaction and decision-making, the game demonstrates how remediation can enhance the understanding and engagement with foundational literary themes.

3.3 Hamlet's Internal Conflict: From Soliloquy to Interactive Dilemma

In Shakespeare's play, Hamlet's famous soliloquies reveal his internal struggle with indecision and the weight of his choices. The time loop in *Elsinore* externalizes this internal conflict, transforming it into an interactive experience. Players, just like Hamlet, must contend with the consequences of their actions and inactions, repeatedly facing the dilemma of how to proceed. This mechanic thus recreates Hamlet's psychological state, where each decision is fraught with potential outcomes and moral implications. Interestingly, *Elsinore* employs a branched conversation model, allowing players to choose their own responses. This mirrors the soliloquies and asides used by Shakespeare in his plays, extending the functionality to let players not only glimpse into the characters' minds but also actively decide what they say.

Beyond conversations, the game is rich with philosophical themes concerning character relationships and explanatory scenes. The cut-scenes and dialogue sequences encourage players to reason about these philosophical concepts in a more propositional way, further enhanced by the time-looping mechanic. This narrative structure creates opportunities for characters' dialogues and cut-scenes to offer insights into philosophical themes such as truth, agency, destiny, morality, and the human condition. Through these narrative elements, the game can both express and demonstrate philosophy (Spiegel, 2024).

Furthermore, the ability to explore multiple timelines and outcomes in *Elsinore* mirrors the play's open-ended nature and its exploration of fate versus free will. Just as readers and audiences of *Hamlet* have long debated the potential outcomes had the prince made different choices, players of *Elsinore* can actively explore these alternate pathways. This feature enhances engagement with the source material while also providing a unique, interactive conduit through which to examine the play's philosophical questions about action, consequence, and the nature of reality itself. By translating Hamlet's internal ruminations into a tangible, interactive mechanic, *Elsinore* succeeds in preserving and even enhancing this core aspect of Shakespeare's work. The time loop becomes more than a gameplay element; it evolves into a philosophical tool that allows players to embody and explore the very essence of Hamlet's dilemma, thereby deepening their understanding and appreciation of the original play's themes.

4. Balancing Narrative Constraints and Player Agency: The Complex Interactivity of *Elsinore*

The nature of interactivity in *Elsinore* presents an intriguing paradox. Does it correspond to what Smed et al. describe as "external-ontological interactivity" (p. 21), where the participant observes a simulated world and exercises strategic control over its elements, or does it reflect "external-explanatory interactivity," where the player engages with a simulated world in real-time along "ready-made paths" (Smed et al., 21)? Indeed, this distinction becomes more complex due to the game's structure and the player's prior familiarity with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Undeniably, as Hunter (2018) remarks, "people are emotionally attached to Shakespeare's 'original' text even if they are simultaneously confused and frustrated by its complexity" (Hunter, p. 192).

At first glance, *Elsinore* seems to offer players significant agency, allowing them to engage with the game world and make decisions that affect the narrative. Yet, the game's story-driven nature and its basis in a well-known literary work create a unique tension. Players are not truly operating in an open-ended simulation but rather within a narrative framework largely dictated by Shakespeare's original plot. This paradox is further intensified by the players' likely familiarity with *Hamlet*. Their prior knowledge of the story's characters, events, and outcomes inevitably influences their interactions within the game world. Players may find themselves torn between adhering to the known narrative and attempting to subvert it, creating a meta-level of engagement that goes beyond typical external-ontological/ explanatory interactivity.

Moreover, the game's focus on Ophelia as the player's avatar adds another level of complexity to this interactive dynamic. Players naturally develop empathy towards Ophelia, a character traditionally silenced and ostracized in the original play. This emotional connection can drive players to seek outcomes that diverge from the tragic fate Ophelia meets in Shakespeare's work, even as they operate within the constraints of the game's narrative structure.

To solve this paradox, it can be argued that *Elsinore's* interactivity exists in a liminal space between predetermined narrative and player agency. As illustrated by the aforementioned examples, the game challenges players to reconcile their knowledge of *Hamlet*, their empathy for Ophelia, and their desire to influence the story's outcome. This creates a unique form of interactivity that is neither fully "external-ontological/explanatory" nor entirely constrained, but rather a subtle fusion that reflects the complex relationship between player, avatar, and pre-existing narrative. Thus, *Elsinore* offers a sophisticated form of interactivity that goes beyond simple classification. It invites players to engage not just with the game world, but with their own knowledge, expectations, and emotional connections to the source material, creating a rich, multi-layered interactive experience.

Elsinore's modus operandi challenges players' assumptions and reshapes their perspectives, potentially catalyzing meaningful introspection that surpasses the more distant contemplation offered by the original play. The dialogue and descriptive text are presented in a manner that supports the game's non-linear, player-driven structure. Rather than delivering lengthy, uninterrupted monologues, the narrative is broken down into bite-sized, interactive exchanges, where players can choose from a variety of response options. When interacting with Hamlet, for example, the player is presented with options such as "Offer condolences," "Challenge his actions," or "Inquire about his state of mind." The player's choice not only influences the immediate conversation but can also have rippling effects on the narrative as a whole.

4.1 Reimagining Ophelia: Enactment, Representation, and Empowerment in *Elsinore*

The iconic image of Ophelia holding a skull in the *Elsinore* game thumbnail exemplifies how interactive media can use *enactment* to amplify the emotional impact of Shakespeare's narrative. This striking departure from the original play, where Hamlet contemplates Yorick's skull, serves as a powerful illustration of the game's innovative approach to adaptation. In *Hamlet*, the skull scene is a moment of profound reflection on mortality. *Elsinore* transforms this passive observation into an active, embodied experience. By placing the player in Ophelia's position, the game creates a subjective, visceral encounter with mortality that goes beyond the original text's contemplative nature. As Janet Murray astutely observes, "the emotional impact of enactment within an immersive environment is so strong" that it can profoundly transform the user's experience (Murray, 160). This shift from detached observation to personal enactment allows players to assimilate the event more deeply, titillating their capacity for empathy and embodied cognition. This reimagining of Ophelia's role and the skull scene serves as a microcosm of *Elsinore's* innovative framework to adapting *Hamlet*. It exemplifies how the game departs from the original to create a more immersive, player-centric experience, while still engaging with the play's core themes and motifs.

While *Elsinore* remains faithful to the essence of *Hamlet*, the interactive adaptation does introduce several other notable departures from the source material. Perhaps the most significant change is the shift in narrative perspective, with the player taking on the role of Ophelia rather than Hamlet. This option allows the game to offer a fresh interpretation of the classic story, shedding new light on the relationships and power dynamics between the central characters. By exploring Elsinore Castle and its inhabitants through Ophelia's eyes, the player gains a deeper understanding of the emotional turmoil and moral complexities that underpin the original work.

The reimagining of Ophelia in *Elsinore* extends beyond her role as the protagonist, encompassing a broader reimagining of female representation within Shakespeare's world. Furthermore, as Niayesh and Roszak (2023) argue, Golden Glitch's portrayal of Ophelia as a dark-skinned, plain girl is a deliberate departure from the traditional fair-skinned, saintly figure. This reinvention is consistent with the game's goal of "reinscribing the identities and experiences of social minorities within the video game industry" (Niayesh & Roszak 2023, p. 4).

By challenging the traditional interpretations of Ophelia's insanity and suicide, the game portrays Ophelia not merely as a passive victim but as a proactive individual who confronts the perilous world around her and seeks to address its complexities. This empowered representation of Ophelia is further reinforced by the game's expansion of female presence in the narrative. Another notable departure is the inclusion of more female characters, such as Lady Brit, Gertrude's lady-in-waiting, and Irma, the cook and Gertrude's former nurse. These additions serve to create a more diverse portrayal of women in the game's world, moving beyond the limited female roles in Shakespeare's original play.

4.2 *Elsinore* as an "Expanded Adaptation": Interactivity, Metalepsis, and Player Agency in Reinterpreting *Hamlet*

Based on the categorization of adaptations by Spierling and Hoffman (2010), *Elsinore* can be classified as an "expanded adaptation." The game begins with the original *Hamlet* narrative but enhances it by incorporating new material and perspectives absent from the play. This strategy positions *Elsinore* as more than a straightforward "cut-and-paste" adaptation; it actively builds upon the foundational story of *Hamlet*. Its interactive, nonlinear, and branching storytelling allows players to engage with the narrative in an exploratory manner, introducing new elements, character interactions, and plot developments that extend beyond the original linear progression. Smed et al. (2021) define a branching storyworld as one in which "each choice the interactor faces leads to a new and different situation," likening it to a tree where each option "opens new paths leading to a unique state" (p. 84). The game emphasizes the perspectives of other characters, such as Ophelia and Gertrude, facilitating an expanded exploration of various viewpoints and their impact on the overall narrative. As Thon observes, video games allow players to "naturalize" what may seem like an "impossible-seeming storyworld" (62).

Elsinore further exemplifies its status as an expanded adaptation through its narrative structure. This is particularly evident in its use of what Gérard Genette (1980) refers to as "narrative metalepsis," defined as "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe" (pp. 234-235). In *Elsinore*, this metalepsis is realized through the player's ability to influence and alter the narrative trajectory, effectively dissolving the traditional boundaries between audience and story.

The application of metalepsis in *Elsinore* is especially impactful due to the unique properties of video games as a medium. Jan-Noël Thon points out that "the specific mediality of video games establishes a particularly unstable relation between the ... representations they generate and the ... storyworlds they represent" (69). This instability enables *Elsinore* to transcend the confines of Shakespeare's original narrative, creating a dynamic and fluid storyworld responsive to player actions. Thon's observation that video games are "resistant" to the fictionality/non-fictionality distinction (69) further highlights how *Elsinore* blurs the lines between player reality and the fictional world of *Hamlet*. This blurring effect enhances the

expanded nature of the adaptation, allowing players to engage with the narrative as observers, participants, and co-creators.

Therefore, players' ability to make choices, alter events, and explore multiple narrative paths exemplifies this expanded adaptation. The game not only retells *Hamlet* but also introduces a meta-narrative layer where player actions become integral to the storytelling process. This expansion of narrative possibilities and the integration of player agency illustrate how *Elsinore* transcends a mere retelling, offering a rich, interactive reinterpretation of Shakespeare's work. *Elsinore* stands as an expanded adaptation of *Hamlet*, building upon the original text to create, in Thon's words, "representational impossibilities" (64). The developers have infused new narrative elements, characters, and thematic explorations, resulting in an immersive experience for players.

5. Remediating Hamlet: Old Media in New Forms

Elsinore maintains the play's narrative and key motifs while introducing a gaming experience driven by player choice. A particularly effective strategy is the shift in perspective from Hamlet to Ophelia, which provides a unique and insightful interpretation of the play. The game's branching narrative structure empowers players to make choices and experience the consequences of their actions, further developing the play's themes. The time-loop mechanic is a clever device that registers Hamlet's preoccupation with time, memory, and his analytically driven, pathologically influenced existential indecision resulting from over-knowledge illustrated in the iconic statement: "Thus conscience does *make cowards of us all*" (*Act III/Scene i*).

Elsinore offers a unique perspective on the perennial struggle between destiny and free will, inviting players to make choices within the tragic structure of the original play. This interactive approach facilitates a subjective experience of the play's philosophical complexities, providing deeper insight into individual agency in the face of predetermined destiny. By incorporating the engaging elements of the video game medium, *Elsinore* carves out a unique opportunity to explore the complex themes inherent in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, particularly the probing of madness and mental health. As Andrei Nae (2016) argues, the dual aspects of immediacy and interactivity are key in creating an immersive experience. In *Elsinore*, players are not mere passives but active participants in the unfolding narrative, making choices that can alter the course of events and change the fates of the characters. This immediacy pulls players into the psychological turmoil of characters like Ophelia and Hamlet.

Elsinore not only brings *Hamlet* into the digital age but also provides a valuable avenue for research into the most complex psychological and emotional landscapes. The branched dialogue, investigative gameplay, and relationship systems create a more immersive and personal experience than anything achieved with text alone. The visual and audio design also effectively support the atmosphere and emotional tone of the Shakespearean text, capturing the sense of foreboding, melancholy, and tension that permeates the original play. A significant difference between *Elsinore* and the original play is the element of player agency. While Shakespeare's story provides a fixed narrative, the game allows players to influence the outcome. Through their choices and actions, players can interact with the thematic elements of the play. The time-loop mechanic further enhances this interactive experience, offering a peculiar juxtaposition of repetition and variation that deepens insight into the characters and their motivations. This allows players to relate more actively to the themes of fate, free will, and the burden of knowledge, moving away from the more passive, contemplative nature of the original play.

Ultimately, *Elsinore* reveals metanarrative elements that reflect the challenges and complexities of adapting a literary work into an interactive medium. Through innovative approaches to narrative structure, thematic delivery, and design, *Elsinore* demonstrates a remarkable understanding of how to use the unique strengths of the video game medium to reinterpret and refine Shakespeare's timeless classic. It offers players a rich, complex experience that pays homage to the source material while providing a fresh and profound exploration of its enduring themes.

5.1 Challenging Fate: Time-looping Mechanic, Foreshadowing, and Dramatic Irony

The central time-looping mechanic in *Elsinore* can be interpreted as a sophisticated cross-modal adaptation of Shakespeare's use of foreshadowing and dramatic irony. In this interactive reimagining, players accumulate knowledge through iterative playthroughs, mirroring the dramatic irony experienced by the audience of the original play, who often possess greater insight than the characters themselves. Monica Evans (2023) astutely observes that time-looping in digital games can function as a translation of literary devices into interactive elements (p. 199). *Elsinore* deploys this mechanic for granting players agency in shaping the game's tragic denouement.

While Shakespeare's *Hamlet* inexorably progresses towards a devastatingly tragic conclusion, the time-loop framework in *Elsinore* allows players to rewind and repeat past events in pursuit of a more optimistic outcome. Evans notes that time-loop games "cannot help but express optimism, as the game's mechanics and interface encourage players to continually manipulate the game world until the best of all possible outcomes is achieved" (Evans, 2023, p. 198). This iterative process infuses the tragic narrative of *Elsinore* with a sense of hope, as the player gains the ability to influence unfolding events, transforming the play's fatalistic ending into an empowering experience.

Unlike time travel narratives in other media, which often focus on the metaphysical implications of temporal manipulation and emphasize determinism, digital games are inherently designed to be "won" through repetition and skill improvement. *Elsinore* reflects this privilege by empowering the player to actively intervene in the tragic events of *Hamlet*, exploring alternative paths and conclusions that diverge from the original play's predetermined fate. As Evans argues, time-loop games naturally "tend toward constructive optimism" by encouraging the player to reshape the narrative repeatedly until the most desirable outcome is achieved (Evans, 2023, p. 199).

In conclusion, the time-loop mechanic in *Elsinore* represents a creative adaptation of Shakespearean literary techniques, offering players the opportunity to transcend the determinism of the original play. By allowing players to interfere in real-time with the events, the game provides a hopeful and optimistic perspective on *Hamlet*, where the tragic elements are counterbalanced by the opportunity for player-driven resolutions. This innovative approach at once preserves the thematic richness of Shakespeare's work and elaborately extends it, demonstrating the unique potential of interactive media to reinterpret and expand upon classical narratives.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of *Elsinore* demonstrates the complex nature of cross-modal translation, where traditional literary works are transformed into interactive experiences. This adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* highlights the interplay between narrative fidelity and player agency, a hallmark of interactive digital genres. By incorporating 14 possible endings, the game highlights how player decisions directly influence character outcomes, especially through the perspective of Ophelia, whose role is significantly expanded compared to the original play.

One of the key findings is that *Elsinore* successfully remediates Shakespeare's work by intertwining narrative structure with interactive mechanics, allowing players to explore different storylines and influence the fates of the characters. The game's time-loop mechanic reflects the thematic concerns of the original play, such as fate, free will, and the consequences of action or inaction. By presenting multiple possible outcomes, *Elsinore* not only adheres to the existential dilemmas presented in *Hamlet* but also enriches them through interactive storytelling.

The game's use of Ophelia as the central character also introduces a significant shift in perspective. Traditionally viewed as a passive figure in the play, Ophelia's role in *Elsinore* empowers her with agency, allowing players to explore her emotional and psychological depth. This reimagining is in line with feminist reinterpretations of classical works, offering a modern take on the character's narrative while maintaining the thematic integrity of the original.

Furthermore, the integration of auditory deception, represented through the "Hearsay Menu" mechanic, enhances the theme of unreliable information, a central motif in *Hamlet*. By allowing players to gather information through overheard conversations, *Elsinore* transforms the passive reception of knowledge into an active, decision-driven process, emphasizing the player's role in shaping the narrative.

Overall, *Elsinore* exemplifies the potential of cross-modal translation to preserve the essence of classical literature while expanding its interpretative possibilities through interactivity. The game's innovations in narrative structure, character agency, and thematic exploration contribute to the broader discourse on how interactive media can engage with and reinterpret timeless literary works.

Conclusion

Elsinore is an innovative adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and its study offers a very powerful example of cross-modal translation in action. The reimagining of the interactive medium within narrative and theme pays homage to the spirit of Shakespeare's work, but further expands the interpretive possibilities. *Elsinore* transfigures the linear structure of the play into a participatory experience. *The branching storylines and time-loop mechanics breathe new life into Hamlet's existential dilemmas, as he grapples with indecision, the tension between fate and free will, and the overwhelming weight of knowledge.*

Most striking, perhaps, is how *Elsinore* redesigns the character relationships in their entirety. *The game distills Shakespeare's labyrinthine network of interpersonal relationships into a more accessible matrix that adapts in response to player choices.* This system at once reflects the thorny social dynamics of the original play and invites players to probe these relationships more deeply than a traditional theatrical staging might allow. No less striking is the richly interactive environment of the game which stands as a kinetic, spatial translation of Shakespeare's strongly descriptive language. Through exploration and discovery, players experience the consequences of their actions and the pervasive themes of the original play. This gameplay mechanic mirrors the eavesdropping and spying prevalent in *Hamlet*.

Furthermore, by rebalancing the focus onto Ophelia and by incorporating time-loop techniques, *Elsinore* sheds new light on the themes of grief, morality, and sanity pervading the original play. The reframing opens fresh venues for a more delineated engagement with grief, morality, and sanity—central motifs in *Hamlet* that are now reshaped in the video game by player agency and meta-narrative commentary.

What *Elsinore* shows, above all, is the potential of cross-modal translation to add something to our understanding of the classics. More than an adaptation that is true to the source material, it

stands out as an authoritative re-imagination, through the affordances of interactive media, of how to engage with some of Shakespeare's most perennial and universal themes. Therefore, *Elsinore* stands as a testament to the power of cross-modal translation to preserve, while simultaneously extending, our valuation of timeless narratives.

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