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The authors wish to warmly thank the Golden Glitch team, in particular Connor Fallon, for the permissions to reproduce visuals and for having most helpfully responded to our queries about the game, following the full player's experience of one of the authors.

- 1 Taken at face value, the plot of *Hamlet* easily lends itself to the charge of being one of the most devastatingly patriarchal ones in the entire Shakespearean canon. Indeed, the play is quite literally haunted by what we can anachronistically call a “dead white male” parent launching the action, while the rest of it crushes two sets of children in the main plot of the royal house of Denmark and the secondary plot of Polonius’s family. Meanwhile, the only two female roles of the play, Gertrude and Ophelia, get by turns manipulated, brutalized and distrusted throughout by the eponymous hero, with such radical rejections of their femininity as his “Frailty, thy name is Woman” as early as his first soliloquy in act 1, scene 2, before he even gets the Ghost’s revelation of the murder.¹ If the hero’s feelings and interiority are granted several – now world-famous – soliloquies in the course of the action, neither his mother nor his one-time love interest are afforded anything close to that, with Gertrude and Ophelia speaking only 69 and 58 lines respectively. Men, dead and living, appear to decide what the mother, wife, daughter or sister should say and how they should live – or rather die – be it onstage at the end of the play as Gertrude does, or offstage well before the play’s finale in Ophelia’s case. If the tragic action of the play expectedly piles up bodies of both sexes, we cannot help but notice that no woman is on the very short list of the catastrophe’s survivors, which besides anonymous male guards merely include Fortinbras who inherits the material kingdom, and Horatio who inherits the immaterial tale.
- 2 Over the more than four centuries lapsed since the creation of this play, attempts at breaking into the Father’s fortress of the simplistically sketched scenario above have been diverse and numerous. Early attempts have included cultivating the feminine side

of the hero, notably by giving the part to prominent actresses of the day, such as Sarah Siddons in the late eighteenth century or Sarah Bernhardt in the late nineteenth century, to quote but two famous early examples of a trend that has continued to this day.² One step further in the direction of exploring the feminine side of the Hamlet character has consisted in equipping the transvestite female with a back-story explaining how the hero is a heroine indeed. Such is the case in the 1921 movie by Svend Gade and Heinz Schall, with Asta Nielsen in the title role.³ This key change in the story – a female heir disguised as male from birth to prevent the kingdom from going to the Norwegians – makes the narrative branch off in a very different direction compared to Shakespeare’s original, with the main focus put on the tension between a woman’s private feelings, including romantic ones, and the public persona of the fraud male heir. Instead of merely adhering to the patriarchal social norm that makes it a son’s duty to avenge his father and become his worthy successor, Nielsen’s Hamlet consistently seeks ways to emancipate herself from an oppressive environment that forces her to play a heterosexual man’s part instead of living as a woman able to express her love for Horatio. Lessons learnt from these early attempts at remediating Shakespeare – both in the sense of changing the original theatrical medium and of redressing the contents – have been to subvert the play from the inside through choices of casting against the grain and the use of branching narratives to explore its less travelled paths.

- 3 Both strategies of cross-casting and branching the narrative have been massively used over the 20th and 21st centuries as *Hamlet* has pursued its technological and ideological updating. It has done so through a vast array of new media: radio and film, TV and video, and most recently social media tools and games. From early in their inceptions, all these new media have been keen on engaging with Shakespearean material as a way of gaining legitimacy and cultural currency – “accumulating cultural prestige” in Andrei Nae’s phrase.⁴ They have also used Shakespeare as a *lingua franca* recognizable across cultures and easily exportable through global markets. But if the question of “what can Shakespeare do for new media?” can find a couple of quick answers like these, the reverse question is less straightforward to answer, though certainly worth exploring: “what can new media do for Shakespeare?”, or to take up the wording used by Gina Bloom specifically about video games: “what can games do for Shakespearean theatre that it cannot do for itself?”⁵ In this article, we would like to attempt some answers to this question by exploring what the interactive and rewinding potentials of gaming can do for reforming – in the sense of forming anew, as well as redressing – gender distribution and agentivity in *Hamlet*.
- 4 Our case study will be that of the 2019 videogame *Elsinore*, a point-and-click adventure game for a single player developed in the US by a small independent company, Golden Glitch.⁶ In this game, the player is invited to take control and empower, not Shakespeare’s indecisive male hero Hamlet, but the wronged and submissive Ophelia of the original story. In this version, the starting point of the game is a premonitory dream by Ophelia in which she foresees the tragedy of Shakespeare’s classic as the future in store for the next four days at the castle of Elsinore. Her task is to avert the tragic time loop in which all are trapped by taking charge herself. She can do so by accumulating information – “hearsay” that she consigns in her “journal” – and talking and intervening with the other characters to change the course of action from the side. In the course of the game, we have access to a constantly modified “timeline” of action based on our choice of words and interventions for our avatar Ophelia. We are thereby

afforded a chance to rewrite from the inside Shakespeare's tragedy as something else. Every time we fail in that endeavour and Ophelia dies, the play rewinds and allows us to start again with the knowledge we have accumulated and the previous experiences we have stored. Pause and think, rewind and start again make this play, somewhat like Shakespeare's original, not an action play, but a reflexive one. The process is akin to an experience of close-reading and interpreting the original, with a view to updating it with some of the societal preoccupations of our time in terms of diversity and inclusivity, be they racial or sexual. This is a process in which both the designers of the game and the players are involved.

***Elsinore's* Game-Design and the Challenges of Inclusivity**

- 5 With its small team of twelve developers, many of whom previously worked, or are still working, for multinational video game companies such as Oculus, Telltale Games, EA or ArenaNet, Golden Glitch stands as an alternative way to produce, create, and consume video games. The independent company seems to be consciously pushing for more diversity within its own team, reaching a perfect parity between men and women, something which prior to this game was almost unheard of in the video game industry in the USA where *Elsinore* was made. Indeed, in 2019, Statista's estimations showed that only a fourth of all game developers were female, while about half of all US gamers were women.⁷ Other surveys suggested that reflexive and creative games that allowed the player to solve puzzles, play an interactive story and socialize with characters with different outcomes, or be involved in building and peopling a virtual world also tended to be preferred by female gamers, making them the likelier demographic target of *Elsinore*.⁸
- 6 In addition, by choosing a bisexual, mixed-race Ophelia as the protagonist of *Elsinore*, Golden Glitch seems to directly challenge the traditional marketing of video games in the US aiming at an audience that in that country at least is viewed as primarily white, male and hetero-normative. In 2019, a study selected a sample of 628 characters across twenty-six of the most popular games released in the US in 2018 to assess how diverse their characters were in terms of age, gender, race and sexual orientation. The results showed that about 65% of all main characters were male, and 50% were white. Comparatively, less than 25% of the characters were women, and while black people make up 13% of the US population, they represent only 3% of all game developers, and the study found that less than a tenth of all characters examined were black. Only 1% of 628 characters could be identified as openly LGBT.⁹
- 7 To better target a dominant white, masculine and heterosexual demographic in the US, most video game characters are either modelled in their image, or designed to appeal to their gaze, creating nearly no space for diversity within games. It is also a well-known problem that female characters in video games tend to be overly sexualized, often portrayed scantily clad and drawn with unrealistic body proportions, in order to please a heterosexual male audience, while often alienating a female audience that does not see itself represented by the avatar they are provided with.¹⁰ This *status quo*, however, has been challenged mainly by the rise of independent (or "indie") gaming from the end of the 2000s onwards, which played a key role in promoting the representation of social minorities by designing more inclusive characters across all

genres. For example, for his simple tower-building game *Stacks on Stacks (On Stacks)*, in which the player must create and defend colourful brick towers from enemies, independent game developer Ian Sundstrom justified his decision to give the player's avatar the appearance of a cartoon-like young black girl by admitting it is "very rare to see a female protagonist, although that's getting better and better – then, on top of that, a black female protagonist is rare".¹¹ With her dark skin, her period purple dress, her non-eroticized body and her potential bisexuality, Golden Glitch's Ophelia is at odds not only with sexualized representations of women in video games, but also with the received romantic views of Ophelia which are, let us remember, quite far from the sexual complexity of a part originally written for a boy actor. The image of an ethereally beautiful light-skinned woman in a white dress, particularly popularized by Pre-Raphaelite paintings such as Millais's *Ophelia*, represented her even in death with an ecstatic expression on her face, and a princess's dress that does not reveal her body, emphasizing her sexual and moral purity by turning the attractive maiden into a saint-like figure. This stereotypical representation is here not merely challenged, but completely deconstructed by a modern-day reinterpretation of the character, which rejects hackneyed and sexist tropes to embrace a more true-to-life depiction of Ophelia that neither sexualizes her nor puts her on a pedestal, but seeks to make her more realistic and relatable to more diverse female audiences, who often report feeling discomfort when playing hyper-sexualized female characters.¹² Golden Glitch's retrieving of the Shakespearean Ophelia's sexual ambiguity thus clearly stands as a bold reinterpretation of the character destined to reinscribe the identities and experiences of social minorities within the video game industry.

Figure 1 and Figure 2: Visual Comparison between John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* (c. 1851, London, Tate Britain) and the thumbnail of Golden Glitch's *Elsinore* featuring Ophelia in a contemplative state.





Courtesy of Golden Glitch: <<https://elsinoregame.com>>")

Redefining Female Agency in *Elsinore's* Patriarchal World

- 8 Playing in this revisited *Hamlet* does not simply mean being assigned an avatar whose appearance might differ from the player's, but puts players in a position where they are made to fully experience the weight of stigma and social exclusion which the game inflicts on the Ophelia character. The game is primarily one of *mimicry*, which Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Jonas Heide Smith, and Susana Pajares Tosca define as a type of role-playing game where "the important play experience centres on being someone else."¹³ Forcing the player into Ophelia's shoes ensures that they will experience limited agency within Elsinore's world. Indeed, true to her theatrical counterpart, Ophelia is mostly ignored by the rest of the characters, who will treat her with condescension, indifference or even outright hostility. The other characters will rarely, if ever, initiate conversation with her during the events of the game, mirroring the fact that she is mostly silenced or ignored in Shakespeare's original play. She appears to be somewhat suffering from Polonius's control, as she briefly mentions, if the player explores her bedroom, that her father rarely allows her to have visitors, while her older brother Laertes is able to leave Elsinore to go to university right at the beginning of the game. Moreover, Ophelia's struggles to move around the castle and socialize with its inhabitants freely are not merely suggested by the game's writing, but can be experienced firsthand by the player. Hamlet is notably implied to hold a grudge against Ophelia for ending their relationship prior to the beginning of the game, and will refuse to lead her to the ghost of his father unless she can prove that Gertrude had been cheating on King Hamlet with Claudius before his untimely death. The story of the game itself is therefore constructed to give the player a sense of isolation. No character will believe Ophelia if she attempts to warn them of time repeating itself, and many will actively try to slow the player's progression by withholding crucial information. In order to win, the player will have to doggedly turn the other characters into more or less reluctant allies through bargain, friendship, or blackmail, in a clear attempt to challenge gender stereotypes by rewriting Ophelia as a more assertive figure.
- 9 In order to break the time loop, the player will have to finish a series of quests that aim at preventing game-ending events, such as Ophelia's murder or Fortinbras's invasion.

While the other characters are occupied tearing each other apart, the player has to run against the clock to fulfil the objectives, which progressively turns Ophelia into an active character asserting control over the narrative, as well as over her own life. In this version of *Hamlet*, she becomes a much more active character as she fulfils the role of the main protagonist. Primarily defined by her determination as well as her insightfulness, she is stripped of her theatrical counterpart's vulnerability, as she is neither insane nor suicidal. Instead, it is the other characters who believe her to have lost her mind if she tries to explain that Elsinore is stuck in a time loop, and that if she stays in that time loop, she will be murdered, and her death disguised as a suicide. Not only does she no longer gravitate around Hamlet as his love interest, but she will not hesitate to call him out for being aggressive, neglectful or grotesquely self-centered. Eavesdropping more than once on his world-famous "to be or not to be" soliloquy in the chapel will thus prompt Ophelia to think: "I'd rather *actually* become a nun than suffer this again".

Figure 3: Ophelia's rejection of masculine self-pity.



Courtesy of Golden Glitch: <<https://elsinoregame.com>>

- 10 She is also given her own goals as well as a detailed backstory, which the player has the opportunity to explore early on by directly asking Polonius questions about her mother, who died shortly after her birth. This helps turn Ophelia into a more complex and nuanced character, whose sense of self and relationships with others can only be deepened by the player's actions.
- 11 As a choice-based narrative, *Elsinore* relies heavily on the player's *influence*, meaning their ability to bring changes to the story and characters through their decisions. This ability relies entirely on turning social isolation into Ophelia's greatest strength. Hardly ever getting noticed by anyone, while keeping up a facade of mellowness and innocence, turns her into the best of spies. Turning patriarchal stereotypes on their heads thus becomes a full part of the game mechanics, that is to say the types of action the game and its rules enable the player to perform. As the player eavesdrops on the characters' conversations and investigates their backgrounds, they gather intelligence that can then be used to nudge characters in the right direction. For example, thanks to

Ophelia's stealth and manipulative skills, it becomes entirely possible to sneak into the castle's chapel just in time to overhear Claudius's plans to assassinate Hamlet and report them to the latter, finally giving him the right push to make the first move and kill his uncle. Likewise, Ophelia's efforts to stop a series of tragic events from happening also lead her to become more and more self-assured, getting noticed later in the game by some characters while she attempts to spy on them. The player is made to follow Ophelia's character progression from a subdued young woman to a heroine capable of single-handedly modifying the play's initial narrative in drastic ways, leading to changes in Elsinore's gender politics, as female agency challenges and potentially overthrows the patriarchal *status quo*.

- 12 As in Shakespeare's play, the rulers of *Elsinore* are almost systematically male, with Claudius, Hamlet, Polonius or Fortinbras constituting the decision-making, political elite of the game. However, they can occasionally be turned into pawns in the schemes of the female characters in *Elsinore*. These very complex gender politics are made apparent during the very tutorial of the game, in which the player is made to understand during one of Claudius's political meetings that the character with the most influence over him is actually Gertrude, who is the only one capable of interrupting the council and redirecting his attention to Ophelia. Moreover, the game turns Shakespeare's *Elsinore* into a significantly less male-dominated space by including several additional female characters, such as Gertrude's lady-in-waiting Brit, or Irma the castle's cook and Gertrude's former nurse. Other characters are gender-flipped male-to-female, such as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, now a same-sex couple exemplifying the designers' decision to make Shakespeare's *Elsinore* a more sexually diverse place through these additions of female and queer characters. To complete the game, it is crucial for Ophelia to forge alliances with the generally friendlier and more helpful female characters in order to solve certain quests. For instance, one of the player's main objectives to prevent time from repeating itself is fulfilled by earning the trust of Lady Brit. Although initially presented as a stereotypical "mean girl" who treats Ophelia with nothing but contempt, investigating her backstory eventually reveals her to be one of the most morally complex and interesting characters of the game. The daughter of a noble house that fell into disgrace after King Hamlet's victory over Norway, she is helping Fortinbras to restore the honour of her family. Clever and observant, she relies on her status as lady-in-waiting to the Queen and her gender to remain unseen while spying on Elsinore's court, and can easily manipulate the King (either Claudius or Hamlet) into not suspecting the threat of a Norwegian invasion. This renders her similar not only to Hamlet, with whom she shares an impossible quest to avenge her father's death, but also to Ophelia in many ways, especially since she is as much of a manipulator as she is a victim of other men's machinations. Torn between her duty to her father and her growing feelings for Laertes, she cannot be loyal to the one without betraying the other, which turns her into yet another figure of the tragic revenger. In one of her dialogues, she will complain to Ophelia about her lack of agency, as in a rare heart-to-heart with her, she notably wishes that she were "born a man [to] paint and fight and run free" in a speech reminiscent of Beatrice's complaint for not being able to avenge herself in *Much Ado About Nothing* ("O that I were a man! [...] / I cannot be a man for wishing, therefore I will die a woman for grieving", 4.1.336-7).¹⁴

Figure 4: The powerlessness of women in Elsinore.



Courtesy of Golden Glitch: <<https://elsinoregame.com>>

- 13 Yet Brit's influence within the game is immense, as only she can prevent Fortinbras's invasion of Elsinore by turning herself in as a spy, thus avoiding a game-over for the player. The tragedy thus moves away from the model of virile revenge to explore the ramifications and limits of agency in a hostile society, whose norms force individuals into frustration and repressed desires.¹⁵

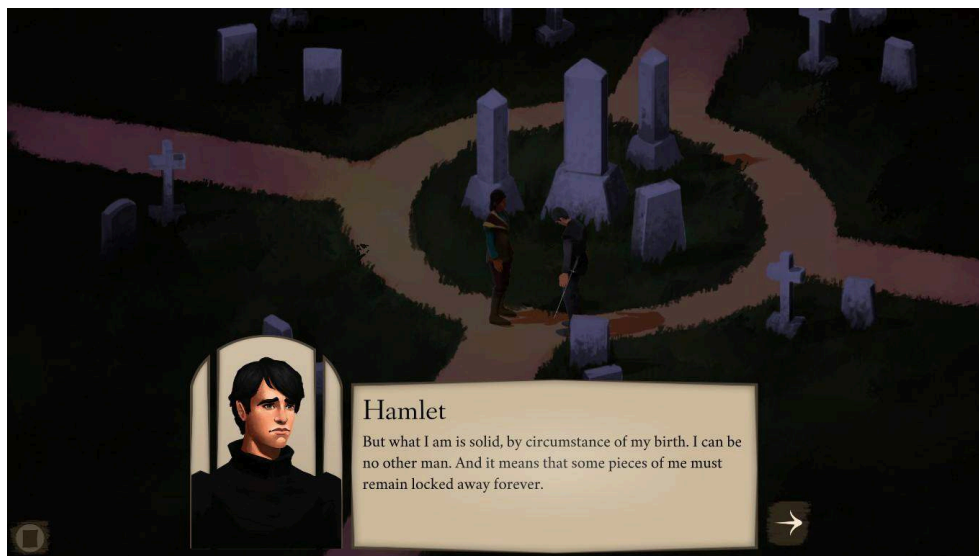
Gender and Sexual Fluidity as a Bringer of Changes to Elsinore's Gender Politics

- 14 While Ophelia is a multi-layered character with a well-developed identity that is not necessarily meant to resemble or reflect the player's, her perspective and choices can be guided by the player's preferences as they explore the story of the game. In particular, the subject of her sexual orientation is kept fully contingent, allowing her character to partially act as a frame onto which one can project their "selves" and their fantasies. Her five romance options include male characters (Hamlet, Claudius and, surprisingly, Othello) as well as female ones (Lady Guildenstern and pirate leader Grace O'Malley). Although they all correspond to different endings, they are not strictly necessary to win the game, and the player is free to pick one, explore them all, or ignore them entirely. However, should the player's preference go to one of the female partners offered by the game, they will be treated to an ending where Ophelia essentially makes the choice to leave Elsinore behind, either to start a romance with Grace O'Malley and join her on a life of adventures at sea, or to become a part of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's open relationship and accompany them on their aimless wandering around the world, leaving the inhabitants of the castle to their fates in both cases. Although these endings are not devoid of angst for our character Ophelia, who either dies young as a pirate or drowns her guilt over abandoning Elsinore with alcohol in the company of her lady friends, neither stand out as truly bad choices in a game where all endings are designed to be bittersweet at best and utterly tragic at worst. They are defined, in video game designing, as "wicked problems", that is to say

“problems that have no one correct answer and that require the moral and/or political involvement of whomever attempts to solve them”;¹⁶ endings in *Elsinore* are designed as moral dilemmas that require players to sacrifice one thing in order to obtain something else, such as sacrificing Ophelia’s sanity to allow her to experience long-term happiness. Both same-sex relationships liberate Ophelia (if temporarily) from the constraints and pain of her responsibilities as a saviour and her restricted agency as a woman stuck, physically and socially, in a patriarchal system. Modifying the play’s *dramatis personae* to include queer characters can therefore both be aimed at allowing all readers/players to see themselves represented, but also at challenging their certainties about the characters’ supposedly affixed identities by pointing out how the latter can be dictated by the patriarchal *status quo*.¹⁷

- 15 More crucially, investigating what remains hidden and unseen allows Ophelia to discover a counter-model to *Elsinore*’s vigorously enforced hetero-normativity and sexism by exploring not just feminine agency, but also queer identities. The player is notably offered the option to investigate Horatio and Hamlet’s intimate friendship, revealing that the two men shared a drunken one-night stand while at university. While Horatio harbours clear romantic feelings for Hamlet, the latter’s possible bisexuality is much more ambiguous as he declares that his princely status makes him unable to pursue a homosexual relationship even if he wanted to (“What I am is solid, by circumstance of my birth. I can be no other man. And some parts of me must remain locked away forever.”)

Figure 5: The contingency of Hamlet’s sexual identity.



Courtesy of Golden Glitch: <<https://elsinoregame.com>>

- 16 Paradoxically, his identity appears as anything but “solid” for the player, who probably thought Hamlet to be strictly interested in women given his past relationships with both Lady Guildenstern and Ophelia, therefore sharing the latter’s surprise at discovering Hamlet’s possible queerness. Yet, suggesting that parts of Hamlet will always, to some extent, remain “locked away” may emphasize the slippery and uncertain nature of the characters’ identities, which become open to multiple interpretations.

- 17 Ophelia herself can be played as bisexual, as the game allows the player to pursue both heterosexual and homosexual relationships at their discretion, including seducing Hamlet or Claudius, or entering a polyamorous relationship with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Even more of a surprise to the player is the revelation that the secondary character of Bernardo, presented as hyper-masculine within the game, is actually transgender, an identity that he can only perform onstage by playing Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*. After Ophelia recognizes him under his blonde wig and pink dress, he runs away, and if interrogated, will reveal that he was blackmailed out of transitioning by Claudius, using theatrical cross-dressing as an outlet to express his feminine self as well as his possible homosexuality. Ophelia notably hints that the physical and emotional intimacy he shared onstage with his “Petruccio” was “very, very convincing.” After an emotional coming-out scene where Ophelia expresses her support, she modifies her journal to refer to Bernardo as “he or she”.

Figure 6: Bernardo/Katherine's modified entry.



Courtesy of Golden Glitch: <<https://elsinoregame.com>>

- 18 Rewriting Ophelia as both a queer icon and an ally of LGBTQ+ characters thus encourages the player to consider a non-hetero-normative version of *Hamlet's* story that insists on the contingency of the characters' identities.

Conclusion: Updating on *Hamlet's* Potential for Inclusivity

- 19 With its thirteen other possible conclusions besides Ophelia's death, *Elsinore* clearly invites the player to consider that the action of just finishing a game may not be an end in itself, that tragedy can and must be reversed, and that just a mechanical “ending” does not necessarily afford a satisfactory sense of “closure”, to distinguish between the two categories considered by Alex Mitchell and Liting Kway.¹⁸ The experience of returning to the game beyond any given scenario's completion to explore other “traversals” – full playthroughs – turns the playing experience into a thinking one, along different ethnic, gender, and sexual parameters. What we gradually learn to

accept as we play is that there is ultimately no one correct system or full solution. Each choice made by the player triggers unforeseen consequences involving losses and gains, as is noted by Julian Novitz taking the example of informing Laertes that Claudius has murdered Hamlet senior, which results in Laertes's staying in the castle and preventing Ophelia's death, but also getting a chance to kill Hamlet; or else the option of convincing Polonius that the royal family have no respect for him, leading to his refusal to spy on Hamlet for Claudius, but also to his eventual suicide.¹⁹ All in all, these explorations with scenarios tell us how there is ultimately no easy, one-size-fits-all solution, and that each choice entails consequences – a lesson for moving forward in the game as much as in real life. The metatextual edge of this realization displaces the original play's status as a source coming before or standing superior to its revisitations by exploring more constructive plot options in a tragedy that refuses to stay so. Somewhat like a one-player variation on the Forum Theatre,²⁰ the interactive and rewinding options explored in *Elsinore* invite the player to become a “spect-actor”, interpreting and reversing on a landmark patriarchal tragedy through the resources afforded by a new medium in an updated context.

- 20 Meanwhile, even if no statistics exist to evaluate how many times this game was actually downloaded, or if it successfully appealed to diverse audiences, it is worth mentioning that reviews on American gaming websites such as TheGamer or Wired praised *Elsinore* for its clever rewriting of *Hamlet* with Ophelia as the protagonist, while Polygon writer Cass Marshall specifically complimented the game's racially and sexually diverse cast of characters.²¹ All reviews showed high enthusiasm for *Elsinore*'s treatment of gender, and with the most popular play-through of the game on Youtube being hosted by a trans woman, there is no doubt that the game was well-received in both feminist and queer spheres.²² Through its redefinition of the audience's role, *Elsinore* can thus be considered not only to contribute to re-inscribing the experiences of social minorities within the American video game landscape, but also potentially to attempt to educate players in that country (and perhaps beyond) into changing the way they consume media, ultimately promoting more diversity and co-creativity in art.

NOTES

1. 1.2.146. Edition used: *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, ed. Philip Edwards, The New Cambridge Shakespeare (3rd edition), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019.
2. On these and other examples of female-to-male transvestism within the so-called “Breeches Roles” tradition, see Dennis Kennedy, ed., *The Companion to Theatre and Performance*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 82.
3. For more on this version, see Tony Howard, *Women as Hamlet: Performance and Interpretation in Theatre, Film and Fiction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 134-159.
4. Andrei Nae, “Shakespeare and the Accumulation of Cultural Prestige”, *Film and Media Studies* 17, 2019, 115-128.
5. Gina Bloom, “Videogame Shakespeare: Enskilling Audiences through Theatre-Making Games”, *Shakespeare Studies* 43, 2015, 114-127, p. 114.

6. Accessible online at: <<https://elsinoregame.com>>, last accessed 21 September 2022.
7. Figures drawn from J. Clement, “Distribution of Game Developers Worldwide from 2014 to 2021, by Gender”, • Global game developer gender 2021 | Statista (August 19, 2021) and “U.S. Video Gaming Audiences 2006-2021, by Gender” (• U.S. video gamer gender statistics 2021 | Statista, August 20, 2021), last accessed 14 May 2022.
8. See Nick Yee, “Beyond 50/50: Breaking Down the Percentage of Female Gamers by Genre” in Quantic Foundry (January 17, 2017), accessible online at: <http://quanticfoundry.com>, last accessed 14 May 2022.
9. See Levi Tressel, “Diversity in Gaming. Analysis of the current representation of video game demographics and strategic guidelines for diverse character design in modern games”, unpublished BA thesis, Hochschule Medien Stuttgart, 2019, accessible online at: http://www.researchgate.net/publication/335867041_Diversity_in_Gaming_Analysis_of_the_current_representation_of_video_game_demographics_and_strategic_guidelines_for, last accessed 1 November 2022.
10. For more on this, see Teresa Lynch, Jessica E. Tompkins, Irene I. Van Driel and Niki Fritz, “Sexy, Strong, and Secondary: A Content Analysis of Female Characters in Video Games across 31 Years”, *Journal of Communication* 66.4, August 2016, 564–584, accessible online via academia.edu at: Sexy, Strong, and Secondary: A Content Analysis of Female Characters in Video Games across 31 Years | Journal of Communication | Oxford Academic (oup.com), last accessed 11 September 2022.
11. Ian Sundstrom, quoted in “The Future of Diversity and Inclusion in Video Games” by Nicola Dall’asen in *Allure*, August 18, 2020, accessible online at: The Future of Video Game Diversity and Inclusion | Allure , last accessed 11 September 2022.
12. For more on how hyper-sexualized female characters negatively impact the self-esteem and video game experience of female players, see the study of Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz and Dana Mastro “The Effects of the Sexualization of Female Video Game Characters on Gender Stereotyping and Female Self-Concept”, *Sex Roles* 61, 2009, 808-823.
13. In Erica Wetter, ed., *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction*, New York and Abingdon, Routledge, 2020, p. 36.
14. William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. F. H. Mares, New Cambridge Shakespeare (3rd edition), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018.
15. For more on this aspect in Shakespeare’s play, see Mary Beth Rose, *Gender and Heroism in Early Modern English Literature*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002.
16. Miguel Sicart, *Beyond Choices: The Design of Ethical Gameplay*, Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press, p. 138.
17. Broadly defined by Madhavi Menon as “all things that militate against the obvious, the settled, and the understood – in other words, nothing that may be fully or finally grasped” in *Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, Durham (N.C.) Duke University Press, 2011, p. 9. “Queerness” also includes all the identities and experiences within the LGBTQ+ community. “Queer” characters in Elsinore can hide their otherness (biracial, closeted gay man Horatio), come to terms with their true identities (transperson and non-straight Bernardo; possibly a bisexual Ophelia), or find ways to express their queerness implicitly within Elsinore’s walls (Guildenstern and Rosencrantz’s lesbian relationship is an open secret to most characters, but acknowledged only in private) or openly, away from the castle (any queer character who chooses to leave Elsinore’s court, or was never a part of it in the first place).
18. Alex Mitchell and Liting Kway, “‘How do I restart this thing?’ Repeat Experience and Resistance to Closure in Rewind Storygames”, 164-177 in Anne-Gwenn Bossler, David E. Millard and Charlie Hargood, ed., *Interactive Storytelling*, Cham, Springer, 2020, p. 167.
19. Julian Novitz, “‘The time is out of joint’: Interactivity and Player Agency in Videogame Adaptations of *Hamlet*”, *Arts* 9, 2020, 1-17, p. 12.

20. See Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*, trans. Adrian Jackson, London and New York, Routledge, 1995, p. 184.

21. Sergio Solozarno, “Elsinore Review: To Play Or Not To Play? (Definitely Play)” in *TheGamer* (November 2019), accessible online at: [Elsinore Review PC \(thegamer.com\)](https://www.thegamer.com/elsinore-review/); Julie Muncy, “Elsinore Smartly Reimagines *Hamlet* with Ophelia as the Hero” in *Wired* (August 2019), accessible online at: [‘Elsinore’ Smartly Reimagines ‘Hamlet’ with Ophelia as the Hero | WIRED](https://www.wired.com/story/elsinore-smartly-reimagines-hamlet-with-ophelia-as-the-hero/); and Cass Marshall, “Elsinore Revisits a Classic Political Drama – with a Time-Loop Twist” in *Polygon* (July 2019), accessible online at: [Elsinore revisits a classic political drama – with a time-loop twist - Polygon](https://www.polygon.com/2019/7/19/20711111/elsinore-revisits-a-classic-political-drama-with-a-time-loop-twist). These three websites were last accessed on 21 November 2022.

22. Laila Dyer’s playthrough of the game, which has gathered roughly a thousand views on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLzDeS-SWRIMPnxsXe3ZPv4kvUkEf0hVAO>, last accessed 21 November 2022.

ABSTRACTS

This article focuses on *Elsinore*, a 2019 American video game undertaking to rewrite and reinvent *Hamlet* as a feminist and inclusive narrative by centring on the character of Ophelia. She is represented as a mixed-race, bisexual woman, whose task is to gather information and subtly influence the other characters’ actions to avert the tragic course of the Shakespearean script. Gender issues are thereby re-inscribed at the heart of the play’s original themes and narrative, as the player is invited to turn into an agent capable of redirecting the patriarchal action from the side to redefine both the plot and its gender norms. Through its redefinition of the audience’s role, *Elsinore* could thus not only re-inscribe the experiences of social minorities within the video game landscape, but also potentially educate players and encourage them to change the way they consume media, ultimately promoting more diversity and co-creativity in art.

Cet article porte sur *Elsinore*, jeu vidéo américain sorti en 2019, qui entreprend de réécrire et de réinventer *Hamlet* comme récit féministe et inclusif, en donnant le premier rôle au personnage d’Ophélie. Elle y est représentée comme métisse et bisexuelle, et la tâche que le jeu lui assigne est de recueillir des informations et d’influencer subtilement les actions des autres personnages pour éviter le cours tragique du scénario shakespearien. Les questions de genre se trouvent ainsi réinscrites au cœur des thèmes et de l’intrigue d’origine de la pièce, alors que le joueur est invité à se transformer en agent capable de subvertir l’action patriarcale pour redéfinir à la fois son cours et ses normes genrées. Par sa redéfinition du rôle du public, *Elsinore* peut ainsi éduquer les spectateurs et les inciter à changer leur façon de consommer les médias, favorisant de la sorte plus de diversité et de co-créativité dans l’art.

INDEX

Mots-clés: agentivité, co-création, Hamlet, inclusivité, jeux vidéo, normes genrées, Ophélie, patriarcat

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