New Age Interactive Experience: Exploring the role of Video Game Adaptations in Teaching Select Shakespearean Tragedies

Steve Vincent

Assistant Professor

PG Department of English

Catholicate College, Pathanamthitta,

Abstract - Interactive video game adaptations refer to video games which are based on existing works of literature, films, or media forms. In comparison to the Traditional media, these games allow players to interact with the story and characters in a very different way. This paper examines the potential of interactive video games as a tool for teaching Shakespeare's tragedies. While traditional teaching methods often focus on analysis of the text, interactive video games can provide an immersive and engaging encounter that allows students to experience the characters and events of the plays in a more tangible way. It also discusses how games can be used to support critical thinking, analysis, and creativity.

Key words: Interactive, Video-games, Shakespeare, Tragedy

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the decades Interactive video games have been a popular source of entertainment and enthralled millions around the world with its immersive gaming experience. In modern times, video game adaptations have become immensely popular in film and television, allowing audiences to experience their favourite games in new and exciting ways. It is to be noted that the most successful adaptations are interactive in nature, allowing players to immerse themselves in the game world and above all have the power to control the story themselves. Nowadays, the interactive video game adaptations can take various forms, from virtual reality experiences to interactive movies and television shows. These customizations offer a lot of ease by allowing the players to control the story by making decisions that can alter or affect the outcome of the game itself. It helps to create a level of interactivity that guarantees a unique and immersive experience for players. There is a feeling among the players that they are part of the story and not mere passive observers. Video games have the power to appeal especially the youngsters, who may not be as interested in the traditional way of reading books or remain passive while watching movies.

When one considers the promotional angle, it is to be noted that Interactive video game adaptations can draw considerable attention to the original work, especially if the game is a hit among the audiences thus increasing interest in the original work and possibly gain an entirely new fan base. Interactive video game adaptations give the necessary freedom to players to explore different storylines or perspectives that may have been ignored or not spoken much of in the original work. This can open up new vistas of deeper understanding of the story and characters. This in turn shows that interactive video game adaptations offer a unique and immersive way for the players to experience in their interaction with plot, characters and multiple voices. This promises a new life and renewed interest towards original works from which they have been adapted. It also heralds a revolutionary approach in education where interactive video game adaptations allow students to interact with the material in novel ways. One can consider the case of 'Assassin's Creed: Origins' which has a "Discovery Tour" mode. This feature allows the players to explore the land of Ancient Egypt and get valuable insights about its history, culture and way of life. The biggest plus point of such a feature is that it has turned learning into fun and induced curiosity. especially in the classes of history and social studies across the world.

Shakespearean tragedies are often considered to be some of the most iconic works in the realm of English literature. These are plays that follow the Aristotelian formula of a good but fallible hero who makes a mistake and loses his place before somehow restoring normalcy. These tragedies have in common a fatally flawed character or system, that ultimately results in great loss. According to Dunton-Downer in. *Essential Shakespeare Handbook*" Shakespeare wrote the majority of his tragedies under the rule of James I, and their darker contents may reflect the general mood of the country following the death of Elizabeth I, as well as James' theatrical preferences". He further states that "Tragedies from these eras traced their philosophical essence back to the Senecan tragedy, grounded in nobles who have a tragic flaw or commit a grave error (hamartia) which leads to their reversal of fortune (peripeteia)".

William Shakespeare explores the depths of human suffering and despair in his tale of a monarch who divides his kingdom among his three daughters. *King Lear*, first performed in 1606, was considered to be too depressing to be staged for many years, but its nihilism has greatly influenced contemporary play. *King Lear: A Digital Retelling* is a video game adaptation of Shakespeare's famous tragedy *King Lear*. It was developed by a renowned Canadian game studio named iThentic. When one considers the notable features of this video game, the first thing that strikes the mind is an interactive retelling of the play that allows players to experience the story in a unique and immersive way. Further, the stylized visuals and cartoon-like presentation of the game set it apart from other adaptations of King Lear, It can be fairly argued that the use of interactive elements allows players to shape the story in new and interesting ways. The foremost strengths of *King Lear: A Digital Retelling* lay in the fact that it uses interactive elements. Compared to the different traditional adaptations of *King Lear*, in the form of movies or plays, the interactive video game allows players to make choices and decisions that has the power to change even the outcome of the story itself. This feature not only adds to the game's intrigue but also enables players to investigate alternate paths through the narrative and assess the effects of various decisions.

Players are given complete flexibility to select the character they will play as at the start of the game. The narrative will develop differently depending on which character the player selects, and their choices will have varying effects on the other characters and the story's overall resolution. It helps in the creation of a sense of agency along with ownership in the players and encourages them to invest more time and attention in the story and its characters. Yet another strength of this game is the clever use of visual elements. The game's distinctive and appealing stylized graphics, which are presented in a cartoon-like format, help the narrative have a distinct feel. The hand-drawn animations and illustrations are well-done, and some of the characters' voices give them personality. The visual design of the game is a positive because it is constant throughout, which helps the player have a seamless and immersive experience.

Finding ways to make a classic work of literature like *King Lear* appealing and pertinent to a contemporary audience is one of the challenges of adapting it. This task is met by *King Lear: A Digital Retelling,* which uses interactive features and multimedia-rich presentations to produce a unique and compelling interpretation of the tale. The game promotes active engagement with the story and fosters a feeling of ownership and investment in the result by allowing players to take various routes through the narrative and make decisions that have an impact on the result. King Lear: The Digital Retelling is a skillfully accomplished adaptation. It differs from other *King Lear* adaptations through the use of interactive elements and stylized visuals, and fans and newbies to the game will find it to be an enjoyable and worthy experience thanks to its compelling narrative and distinctive presentation.

The shortest tragedy written by William Shakespeare is *Macbeth*. It is believed that the first stage performance of the play occurred in 1606.It dramatizes the detrimental psychological and physical affects that political ambition has on those who aspire to power. Macbeth: The Interactive Experience is an immersive virtual reality adaptation of Shakespeare's Macbeth. It was developed by an immersive theatre company Punchdrunk. In order to affect the course of the narrative, players can engage with characters and objects in the game's virtual version of Macbeth's world.

The use of ambient technology to make a totally realistic world is one of the game's most noteworthy features. In ways that conventional programmes cannot, players can interact with characters, investigate various environments, and manipulate objects. Players can freely move around and interact with the environment as if they were actually there because the game is intended to give an immersive experience. *Macbeth: The Interactive Experience* is intended to be a non-linear gaming experience. With numerous branching routes and alternative endings, players can make decisions that change the course of the narrative. The user feels empowered because they believe their decisions actually affect the course of the narrative. The player must overcome challenges and puzzles in the game in order to advance the plot. The use of sound and melody in the game is another noteworthy feature.

The game has a melancholy music that enhances the ambiance. Additionally, anxiety and suspense are evoked through sound design, particularly during significant portions of the narrative Regarding the Macbeth adaptation, the play mainly sticks to the original narrative. It also has brand-new components made especially for the game, though. For instance, the game has a number of side quests that let players delve deeper into various facets of the narrative and the "Macbeth" universe. Overall, Shakespeare's classic drama has been adapted in a special and engaging way in Macbeth: An Interactive Experience. Players can engage with the story in a way that conventional mods cannot because it makes use of the most recent technology to create a world that is entirely realistic. The game's use of sound and music, which enhance the ambience and foster a feeling of suspense and excitement, is also noteworthy.

Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet,* also known as *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, was composed between 1599 and 1601. It is one of Shakespeare's longest plays. The drama, which is set in Denmark, tells the story of Prince Hamlet's efforts to exact revenge on his uncle Claudius, who killed Hamlet's father in order to usurp his throne and wed Hamlet's mother. One of the most powerful and influential tragedies in the English language, Hamlet has inspired seemingly endless retelling and adaptations.

Interactive narrative game *Hamlet: The Text Adventure* was created by Bob Bates and released by Infocom in 1991. The game, which is based on Shakespeare's famous play "Hamlet," tells the tale in a special way that lets players engage with it via a text-based user interface. The game's ability to create a narrative from the text is one of its most noteworthy features. In order to engage with the environment and advance through the story, players must enter commands in response to a sequence of text-based prompts. The user feels empowered because they believe their decisions actually affect the course of the narrative. Regarding the Hamlet adaptation, the play mainly sticks to the original narrative. It also has brand-new components made especially for the game, though. To advance through the story, for instance, the player must overcome a number of puzzles and challenges in the game. These difficulties are frequently founded on the incidents of the original play but are delivered in a fresh and original manner. The game's use of words is another noteworthy feature. Due to the fact that the game is intended to be a faithful adaptation of Shakespeare's play, it includes many unique dialogue lines. As a result, some players may find the game challenging because they must understand Shakespearean English in order to advance in the plot.

Hamlet: The Text Adventure is intended to be a non-linear gaming experience. With numerous branching routes and alternative endings, players can make decisions that change the course of the narrative. This makes the game feel replay-able because players can go back and alter their decisions to see how the plot develops. Shakespeare's famous play has been adapted in an original and cutting-edge. It uses text-based prompts to give the player a feeling of action, and it includes some challenges and puzzles that enhance the overall experience. The play is noteworthy for its use of language because it includes many lines of dialogue that were written specifically for it. While some players might find this difficult, it provides a distinctive and immersive way to experience one of Shakespeare's most well-known plays.

Yet another video game based on Hamlet is *Elsinore.* Golden Glitch created and released *Elsinore*, a point-and-click adventure game, for Windows, Linux, and macOS in 2019. The Ophelia figure from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the focus of the game. In Elsinore, Ophelia experiences a vision of everyone in Elsinore Castle dying, and she repeatedly relives the same four days as she attempts to avert the disaster that will befall everyone. The Ophelia character is controlled by the user as she navigates a time loop that builds to the play's tragic conclusion. The four days prior to those events allow the player to control the result by directing Ophelia around Elsinore Castle and conversing with its inhabitants. The conversations the player has result in unexpected results where tragedy still happens in other ways—every time Ophelia dies, the time loop starts over, four days before Hamlet ends.

The user converses with the inhabitants of the castle about things they have seen or anticipate happening in order to control events. The "Hearsay" option in the game lists the subjects that can be discussed. Ophelia experiences numerous loops and sees events; when she awakens again, she recalls these and can discuss them with other characters. A branching timeline in the game shows the player potential outcomes and displays both the place and time where an incident will occur. Apart from Ophelia's deaths, the game has 13 distinct outcomes that vary depending on the player's decisions made during the course of the game.

Conclusion

Shakespearean play adaptations for interactive video games have had a big influence on scholarship and education. They provide a fresh and interesting way to experience Shakespeare's plays, and teachers can use them to introduce their pupils to them. The language, themes, and motifs of the plays can also be explored and examined using these activities. The role of marginalized or less prominent characters, their point of views can also be highlighted. Shakespearean drama adaptations for interactive video games have also had an impact on the entertainment sector. They stretched the capabilities of video games and offered up fresh narrative and gameplay possibilities. These adaptations also sparked interest in other Shakespearean adaptations for theatre and cinema. It will be fascinating to see how these adaptations develop over time and how they affect the way Shakespeare's plays especially tragedies are understood and valued.

References

Aebischer, Pascale, et al. *Remaking Shakespeare: Performance across Media, Genres, and Cultures*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Brigham Young University BYU ScholarsArchive.

https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1089&context=studentpub.

Bulman, James C. *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Performance*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

Dunton-Downer, Leslie, and Alan Riding. *Essential Shakespeare Handbook*. Dorling Kindersley, 2014.

"Elsinore (Video Game)." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 24 Mar. 2023,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elsinore_(video_game)#:~:text=Elsinore%20is%20a%20point%2Dand,William%20Shakespeare's%20play%20Hamlet.

Gee, James Paul. *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Muncy, Julie. "'Elsinore' Smartly Reimagines 'Hamlet' with Ophelia as the Hero." Wired, Conde Nast, 8 Aug. 2019, https://www.wired.com/story/elsinore-review/.

Roberts-Smith, Jennifer, and Shawn DeSouza-Coelho. "Shakespeare, Game, and Play in Digital Pedagogical Shakespeare Games." Games and Theatre in Shakespeare's England, 2021, pp. 275–302., https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1z3hkc2.16.

"Teaching with Games: Video Case Studies." YouTube, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLA3C69D48D4FFE87E.

Wells, Stanley. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.