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Shakespeare and the Accumulation of Cultural Prestige in Video Games

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Abstract. The present article analyses the manner in which AAA action-adventure games adapt, quote, and reference Shakespeare's plays in order to borrow the bard's cultural capital and assert themselves as forms of art. My analysis focuses on three major releases: *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*, *BioShock: Infinite*, and *God of War*. The article shows that these games employ narrative content from Shakespeare's plays in order to adopt traits traditionally associated with the established arts, such as narrative depth and complex characters. In addition to this, explicit intertextual links between the games' respective storyworlds and the plays are offered as ludic rewards for the more involved players who thoroughly explore game space.[1]

Keywords: Shakespeare, remediation, video games, action-adventure, cultural capital, cultural prestige.

Introduction

Since the release of Steve Russell's *Spacewar!* in 1962, video games have witnessed a tremendous progress in terms of length, complexity of gameplay, the realism of their 3D representation, and the richness of their aural input. As an activity, gaming has become almost pervasive. What was initially a social activity restricted to the arcade has also conquered the homes of families in developed countries with home consoles such as the Atari 2600, released in 1977, enjoying much success in North America, Japan, and Western Europe, and has become even more popular later with the emergence and spread of the personal computer. The advent of handheld consoles and mobile devices further extended the presence of gaming as an activity to virtually any place where attention could be paid to the small screen of the device.

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The growing success of gaming was met with growing concern throughout the years with respect to the alleged negative influence that gaming might have on its young audiences. One of the peaks of the video game controversy can be considered the 1993 hearings in the American Congress which eventually led to the establishment of the Entertainment Software Rating Board. By 1992, video game technology had developed to the point that they could provide very realistic representations of their violent content involving human beings. This caused games like *Mortal Kombat* (Midway, 1992) or *Night Trap* (Digital Pictures, 1992) to be heavily contested by the more conservative voices of the American society of the time, which determined Congress to try to better regulate the content of video games.

Despite the moral panics that video games have stirred (Mäyrä 2013, 293),[2] these have also managed to overcome their status as a moral pariah to the point that many organizations now use games for other more "serious" purposes than that of mere entertainment. Activities which are essentially non-ludic in nature have undergone gamification, as is the case for example with education. Rather than banishing games away, there is a growing tendency to embrace video games as a means of interactively teaching students (Ferdig 2014, 320–321).

Besides the social recognition that these so-called serious games have benefited from, conventional entertainment games have also tried to overcome their condition as a low form of ludic entertainment. Besides the attempts of avant-garde artists to turn gaming into art (and vice versa) (Wolf 2012, 41), commercial game developers have also tried to elevate the register of their products. For instance, the interactive movies of the nineteen-eighties and nineteen-nineties can be subsumed under video games' attempt to attain cultural prestige. As the name of the genre suggests, interactive movies were video games that relied on pre-recorded video footage which was played back during gameplay based on a branching narrative model. Player input was small, in the sense that the player had no direct control over any of the characters and, instead, button timing or decisions made at narrative nodes determined what pre-recorded content would be played back by the game engine (Perron 2007, 127; Wolf 2007, 100).

Interactive movies rose to prominence in the 1980s by making use of the more generous storage capacity of laserdisc technology. While most arcade games and console games could make use of only minimal cut-scenes as a result of their limited storage (Klevjer 2014, 302), interactive movies offered players the verisimilitude of cinema. Early interactive movies relied on pre-recorded film animation (see *Dragon's Lair* [Advanced Microcomputer Systems, 1983])

2 These panics have nevertheless decreased in number in the recent years.

(Wolf 2007, 100), but by the end of the 1990s live-action cut-scenes had already become the norm (Perron 2007, 129). Despite their capacity to remediate[3] cinema, interactive movies cannot be considered prototypical games due to their low level of interactivity. In their case, having artistic pretentions seems to imply downplaying their ludic nature. Fortunately, the more conventional, gameplay-oriented games released from the 1990s onwards would prove that artistic aspirations do not necessarily lead to a denial of the ludic.

The development of 3D rendering graphics, the popularization of CD-ROM technology, and the readiness of the industry to adapt its consoles to the CD further enabled action and adventure video games[4] to increase their length, to include longer and more complex cut-scenes and to remediate media which were associated with high art (Therrien 2007, 123). One of the most emblematic games that are indicative of the artistic pretentions afforded by the gaming technology of the 1990s is *Myst*. Cyan's 1993 adventure game features a visually and narratively rich game world with a variety of diegetically relevant remediated documents scattered across. The game faithfully embodies Henry Jenkins' narrative architecture (2004), i.e., the medium specific means employed by games to tell stories whereby, instead of linearly rendering the material signs that create the storyworld, the player freely explores game space and discovers chunks of narrative in a more or less pre-established order.

Since *Myst*, many highly interactive games have sought to attain a high level of artistry and, in doing so, obtain the social validation of art. In this article I analyse the manner in which AAA action-adventure games[5] released for fifth generation consoles and beyond employ Shakespeare in their pursuit of prestige. The present article is conceived as a follow-up to the forthcoming article *The Gamification of Shakespeare in Silent Hill 3 and Manhunt 2: From Reverence to Rejection*, where I discuss the two opposite attitudes evinced by the two survival horror games *Silent Hill 3* (Konami Computer Entertainment Tokyo, 2003) and *Manhunt 2* (Rockstar London, 2007) with respect to Shakespeare. There, I show that, while *Silent Hill 3* remediates Shakespeare in order to assert itself as a form

3 Remediation refers to the attempt of one medium to imitate the representational affordances of another (Bolter et al. 2000).

4 Action and adventure used to be separate genres which merged into the now popular action-adventure genre in the 1990s.

5 The term action-adventure refers to that genre of video games whose challenges demand that players employ the set of skills characteristic of action games, as well as those characteristic of adventure games. According to Chris Crawford (1982), action games require that players show good sensorimotor skills and hand-eye coordination, while players of adventure games must show good cognitive skills.

of high art, *Manhunt 2* literally destroys Shakespeare's text as a manifest rejection of the established arts and, consequently, a criticism of the dominant desire of AAA action-adventure games to attain the social validation of art. Here, I pursue a similar approach to the issue of prestige by looking at three other games, namely *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* (Kojima Productions, 2008), *BioShock Infinite* (Irrational Games, 2013), and *God of War* (SIE Santa Monica, 2018).

Shakespeare and Narrative Depth

Video games, as a medium, feature a complex temporal modality (Elleström 2011, 36). As far as the materiality of the medium is concerned, the game is not instantaneous like a painting or a photograph, but rather, its material signs change over time in accordance with its programming and the player's input (Elleström 2011, 21). Moreover, the sequentiality of material signs points to a virtual temporality of the storyworld cued by the material signs. The events may not be represented/simulated in a chronological order, but then it is up to the player to mentally construct a coherent order of events.

The sequentiality[6] of video games leaves room for a significant narrative potential which action-adventure video games have been eager to meet especially since the 1990s (I am primarily referring to the games released for fifth generation consoles and beyond).[7] Games achieve this in two ways: by remediating older linear narrative media, mainly film, and by adding narrative functions to the game mechanics. As far as remediation is concerned, non-interactive interludes have been a constant in video games since *Pac-Man* (Namco, 1980) and their narrative use for almost just as long.[8] As already pointed out, their presence in

6 According to David Herman (2009), narrativity is to be treated in degrees and rests on four prototypical traits: appropriateness of context, sequentiality, a break of equilibrium, and experientiality.

7 I do not ignore the narrativity of action-adventure games released for third and fourth generation consoles. In fact, in comparison to arcade games, the games released for third generation platforms such as the Nintendo Entertainment System, or the Sega Master System and for fourth generation consoles such as the Super Nintendo Entertainment System and the Sega Genesis featured more linear storytelling. This difference should not be surprising if we take into consideration the fact that arcade games were played in public (arcades) and they required quick play sessions in order for more coins to be inserted. Console games, on the other hand, were played at home, which allowed for longer play sessions and, consequently, could offer more narrative pleasures. Nevertheless, these early console games featured low levels of narrativity which prevented them from being regarded as ludo-narratives to the same extent as the games for the next generation of consoles would be.

8 Rune Klevjer (2012, 302) considers *Donkey Kong* (Nintendo Research and Development, 1981) to feature the first primarily narrative use of cut-scenes.

action-adventure games became more prominent once CDs became the most used physical storage support. The storage capacity of the CD allowed developers to use full motion cut-scenes as a storytelling means. The static and text-based cut-scenes of earlier consoles were substituted with live-action cut-scenes (cut-scenes produced with real actors on real sets), or pre-rendered cut-scenes produced by the game engine. Besides cinematic cut-scenes, audio logs, paintings, and diaries have been intensely used by games in order to construct an immersive verisimilar storyworld. The worlds of games like *BioShock* (2K Boston, 2007) abound in such documents scattered around game space and offer valuable diegetic, but also ludic information.

In addition to this, games have begun to better integrate their mechanics into the static component[9] of their storyworlds. As Jesper Juul (2014, 175) notices when discussing a cooking video game called *Cooking Mama*, all content in a representational game will therefore falls into one of three categories:

"Fiction implemented in rules: The most straightforward situation, where the game rules are motivated by the game's fiction. We expect to be able to chop a carrot, and the game lets us do it. Other examples would include cars that can be driven, birds that can fly, and so on.

Fiction not implemented in game rules: When fiction suggests a possibility that is not accessible to players. We generally expect to be able to leave a kitchen and to cut a carrot in any way we like, but the game *Cooking Mama* prevents us from doing so.

Rules not explained by fiction: When rules are difficult to explain by referring to the game's fiction – for example, the way *Cooking Mama* gives the player unlimited replacement ingredients or the multiple lives characters experience in arcade games."

In order to further their narrativity, video games have tried to increase the number of rules explained by fiction. In other words, storyworlds have to be so complex that most game mechanics also end up serving a narrative function, as well. A look at some recurrent mechanics and their relation to the static component of the games' respective storyworlds is indicative of the tendency to narrativize rules. After the success of *The Matrix* (the Wachowski brothers, 1999), video games became interested in introducing mechanics that could mimic Neo's ability to dodge bullets. One of the first games to feature such mechanics

9 Marie-Laure Ryan (2013, 364) distinguishes between a static component of the storyworld, which is comprised of all the rules and lore that govern it, and a dynamic component, which designates the events.

was *Max Payne* (Remedy Entertainment, 2001), which, nonetheless, offered no explanation as to why Max Payne, a normal human being with no superpowers, could perform this superhuman feat (Nae 2018, 161–162). Similar mechanics are featured in horror first-person shooter *F.E.A.R.* (*First Encounter Assault Recon*) (Monolith Productions, 2005), but in this case the game's storyworld manages to consistently account for the mechanics. In one of the game's early cut-scenes the protagonist's superior acknowledges the playable character's enhanced reflexes, thus implying that the bullet time mechanics simulates those very reflexes. As the game unfolds and the backdrop of the events is further revealed, we learn that, in fact, the protagonist is not an average human being, but rather the result of a genetic experiment. This makes his superhuman abilities even more consistent with the static component of *F.E.A.R.*'s storyworld.

The manner in which games have been recently implementing their mechanics in the static component of their storyworlds has led to a better diegetic blending of their representation and simulation, i.e., of the non-interactive and interactive moments. The high degree of narrativity evinced by the AAA action-adventure games released for fifth generation consoles and beyond compels us to regard these games as ludo-narratives. As ludo-narratives, mainstream action-adventure games have tried to be socially accepted as art. This has determined many of them to engage a number of visual, musical, and/or intertextual links to a variety of established works, genres, or even media associated with high art. William Shakespeare, one of the most emblematic figures of Western literature and theatre, could not be absent. By referencing Shakespeare's works in their storyworlds, video games hope to add narrative depth to their events and characters and to borrow some of the social currency from which Shakespeare, as a canonical figure, benefits. This way, the events and characters of these video games are no longer autonomous, but rather they become invested with a literary history and are to be seen as contemporary versions of the emblematic figures of Western literature. These games become, then, part of a cultural tradition (constructed around an already established medium) that validates them as art.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that in most AAA video games referencing Shakespeare, including the ones discussed below, the intertextual links established with the plays do not lead to an extensive adaptation of the latter's narrative content. Although video games allegedly fulfil the Renaissance theatrical ideal of two-dimensionality and complete directorial control,[10] the

10 According to Eleni Timplalexi, modern theatre is characterized by a desire "to transform three dimensional human physicality into two dimensions" (sic) and to ensure that the performance

games discussed in this article are not performers, but users of Shakespeare (Fazel and Geddes 2017, 4) that employ the bard's canonical status for their own specific goal of attaining prestige.

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots, *Richard II*, and (Literary) Tradition

The *Metal Gear* franchise had already accumulated a long history by the time of the release of *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots.* From its very onset (*Metal Gear* [Konami, 1987]), the franchise has maintained a strong dialogue with other media, especially cinema. Although the early instalments could not imitate the visual aesthetics of the feature film to the same extent that the later ones would, the games' storyworld was indebted to the successful 1981 film by John Carpenter, *Escape from New York.* The protagonist of the early *Metal Gear* games, Solid Snake, is inspired from the film's protagonist, Snake Plissken. Not only do they share the name, but they are also stealth operatives using similar gear during combat. The backdrop of the events in both the film and the early games is a rampant futuristic Cold War setting, where nuclear threat is more present than ever.

When the *Metal Gear* franchise moved to the PlayStation with the release of *Metal Gear Solid* (Konami Computer Entertainment Japan, 1998), it made full use of its new graphic rendering capabilities and the CD-ROM to include a significant number of hours of pre-rendered cut-scenes. The game's cinema envy would be confirmed by future releases and would be taken to an extreme level in *Metal Gear Solid 4,* which contains around eight hours of cinematic cut-scenes out of an average of 18 hours of gameplay. The amount of pre-rendered cinematic content is indicative of the game's artistic aspirations and of its main creator's self-assertion not so much as a game designer, but as a film auteur.[11]

The game's artistry does not stop at the cut-scenes, but also relies on a series of other discursive strategies aimed at asserting the game's status as art. By relying on the social capital that earlier games had attained, *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* is keen on showing its historical roots in order to make its relation to a gaming tradition evident. Consequently, the game remediates a level of

of the actor perfectly fits the director's vision (2018, 130–131). This theatrical ideal seems to be afforded by the rule-based digital medium of video games (2018, 141–142).

11 The next instalment of the franchise, *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* (Kojima Productions, 2015), features opening and ending credits at the beginning of each mission which, besides remediating television series, imposes Hideo Kojima as the auteur of the game – he is credited as designer, writer, producer, and director of the game.

Metal Gear Solid using the same graphics and gameplay of the original. This remediation of the early instalment is narratively framed as the protagonist's flashback of one of his previous missions, which is then simulated by the game. The game goes on to remediate other past popular game genres, such as 2D fighting games in the final battle between Solid Snake and the antagonist, Liquid Snake. These remediations bind *Metal Gear Solid 4* to a tradition that transfers to it the cultural capital of early games.

However, establishing its ludic and cinematic lineage[12] seems not to be enough for Hideo Kojima. The game also claims the legitimacy of the literary canon and, as a result, tries to establish a link between Solid Snake (who, in *Metal Gear Solid 4*, is dubbed Old Snake, due to his rapid aging) and John of Gaunt, one of the characters of William Shakespeare's *Richard II*. During the cut-scenes preceding the final attack against Liquid Snake, one of the game's characters encourages Solid Snake and his team by quoting from John of Gaunt on his deathbed trying to give a final piece of advice to the king, Richard II: "the tongues of dying men / Enforce attention like deep harmony: / Where words are scarce, they are seldom spent in vain" (Shakespeare 1996, 365).

In Shakespeare's play, John of Gaunt is a patriot nobleman who abides by traditional medieval conceptions on royalty, in particular that of the king's two bodies, i.e. the idea that the king is God's lieutenant on earth, and he should be obeyed no matter how unfit he may be to rule. John of Gaunt clings to the traditional view on kingship despite the failure of the new king, Richard II, to live up to his position as God's representative (Carroll 2003, 130). The play reflects a tension between an old absolutist model of government and an emerging new one that demands more accountability from the king.

In *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* there is a similar tension between two forms of government: the democratic nation-state characterized by self-determination, and the new transnational organizations that offer an apolitical governance based on control and artificial intelligence. The position of Solid Snake is similar to that of John of Gaunt in the sense that he is devoted to the old world order of a democratic America that existed before the dystopian Patriots[13] emerged. Furthermore, the choice of the quotation is not arbitrary since the lines appear when both characters are close to their demise.

12 Although *Escape from New York* was not an art-house film, by 2008 it had attained a cult status in apocalyptic sci-fi.

13 In *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*, the Patriots are a complex artificial intelligence that has control over all the registered weapons in the world.

The quotation from Shakespeare renders Solid Snake an updated version of John of Gaunt, therefore a Shakespearean character. This way, the game tries to claim a spot alongside other adaptations, remediations, and reworkings of Shakespeare in order to become part of a literary tradition and borrow some of the bard's cultural capital. Like remediations of early games and cult films, Shakespeare is a means used by *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* to elevate itself to the status of art. As we shall see further, such employments of Shakespeare can be found in other recent games as well.

Intertextually Constructing the Storyworld with Shakespeare in *BioShock Infinite*

Adaptations are linked not only to their sources, but rather to an entire history of previous adaptations. *BioShock Infinite* is a relevant example of how previous adaptations can inform the reworking of a source text if we take into consideration the intertextual relation between the game and *Hamlet*. In order to construct its storyworld, the game adapts content from *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (Tom Stoppard, 1967), an absurdist play that retells the events of Hamlet from the point of view of the two characters. In keeping with the aesthetics of the theatre of the absurd, the play begins by denying the common laws of probability that characterize the real world. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are tossing coins with the former betting on heads and the latter on tails. No matter how many times they flip a coin, the result is always heads, which baffles the characters, but also suggests to the spectator that the laws of probability that govern the world of the play are not the same as the ones that govern the world of the spectator.The game adapts the coin tossing scene and repurposes it in order to reveal the particular laws that govern the storyworld of *BioShock Infinite*. Early in the game, the player controlling the protagonist Booker DuWitt on his quest to free Elizabeth comes across the Lutece siblings, who ask the player to toss a coin. One of the siblings is wearing two chalk boards on which a table is drawn showing the number of times the flipped coin has shown heads or tails. Like in the play, the result is always heads. As the game progresses, the player learns that the storyworld of the game is a multiverse, i.e. a set of parallel universes which share a series of constants, but have different variables, and that the Lutece siblings can travel between versions of the same universe. In the events prior to the beginning of *BioShock Infinite*, the siblings had brought many other versions of Booker DeWitt to free Elizabeth, all of whom had flipped the coin, got heads, and eventually failed.

The illusion of free will has been one of the main themes of the franchise since the original *BioShock* in 2007. Where *Bioshock Infinite* is different in delivering its pessimistic view on free will is its use of a Shakespeare adaptation as the main means of signalling to the player the pre-determined nature of the events represented and simulated by the game. While in the case of *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* knowledge of Shakespeare's play was not crucial in making sense of the game's storyworld, here knowledge of the adaptation of *Hamlet* plays a seminal role in comprehending the events in which the playable character is enmeshed.

Shakespeare is present not only in the game's linear representation of the narrative, but also in the gameplay. Throughout most of the game, Elizabeth accompanies Booker DeWitt and scatters for resources. Elizabeth often finds coins which can be used as currency at various machines to buy weapons or upgrades. Whenever Elizabeth finds a coin, she throws it to the playable character, who always catches it with heads facing the playable character. To refer back to Juul, this mechanics can be considered a case of "fiction implemented in rules," or, to put it differently, a case of assigning diegetic meaning to gameplay. The coins discovered by Elizabeth do not only serve their ludic function of allowing the player to improve her in-game abilities, they also reassert Booker DeWitt's inescapable failure by alluding to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*.

Finally, Shakespeare is used as a form of reward (Easter egg) for the players most invested in the game's storyworld. In *BioShock Infinite*, the player can employ a series of special abilities called vigors during combat. One of these vigors, called possession, determines the affected enemy AI to fight alongside the playable character when hit by the vigor. When this special ability is activated, a female voice seems to whisper unintelligible words that have the above mentioned effect on the enemy AI. The player curious enough to look deeper into the unintelligible words will find out that, in fact, they belong to a soliloquy from *Romeo and Juliet,* where Juliet expresses her love for Romeo: "when he shall die, / Take him and cut him out in little stars" (Shakespeare 1996, 263). The function of the vigor of possession is translated as a form of seduction brought up by Juliet's passionate soliloquy. While this intertextual link does not have an important implication for the events of the game, it does, nevertheless, elevate the register of the game to a more prestigious status via the association with Shakespeare and strengthens the bond to art, which the adaptation of *Rosencrantz and Guildernstern are Dead* establishes.

The game design choice to conceal Shakespeare and offer the intertextual link to the bard's plays as a form of ludic reward for the more industrious player is

present not only in *Bioshock Infinite*, but in *God of War* as well, as it will be seen in the next section.

God of War, Oral Storytelling, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

The *God of War* franchise is a hallmark game series of the hack and slash genre which debuted in 2005 with its eponymous instalment. The first seven games are set in the Greek mythological world, but in 2018 the game series saw a reboot, with the latest instalment being inspired by Norse mythology. The changes in terms of storyworld are coupled with a series of additions to gameplay. The new *God of War* is an open-world game where knowledge about the storyworld and the characters requires spending a significant amount of time exploring and listening to the tales of Mimir, one of the protagonist's companions, while sailing on the boat. The player interested enough in documenting the game's storyworld so as to listen to Mimir's tales to the end will, at one point, learn of Mimir's past: "I couldn't have been much older than you when I started. A faerie king's errand boy and unofficial jester. By night, my mates and I had the run of the forest. Goodfellows, they called us – knavish sprites to the last. We'd get up to all manner of mischief, making fools of the local mortals, but as long as our lord was kept amused, we were spared the consequences. [happy sigh] Then one day he was not amused, and I saw fit to move on" (*God of War*).

His being dubbed "Goodfellow" and the type of mischief he describes reveal Mimir's identity as being that of Puck from William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the play, Robin "Puck" Goodfellow is a sprite of Oberon, the king of "faeries," who is responsible for the twisted and confusing events in which the play's characters are enmeshed. The player familiar with the content of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will immediately recognize Mimir as Oberon's Puck, which functions as a form of ludic reward for the player patient enough to listen to Mimir's stories and not immediately get off the boat in order to pursue the main objective.

This game design choice is indicative of an anti-gameplay philosophy that goes against the impetus to be interactively engaged in the world of the game. Typically, video games reward active players in the sense that the more you play, the more knowledge about the storyworld of the game you discover and the higher the playable character's level becomes (provided that the playable character's stats can be improved through upgrades). Although *God of War* does feature a highly

complex upgrade system and offers players ludic rewards in terms of diegetic knowledge for their exploration of the game world, it also rewards idleness and the rejection of gameplay.

Through Mimir, *God of War* remediates oral storytelling, a medium where the receiver is passive, passivity which is also enforced upon the player in the game. The remediation of oral storytelling in order to reference Shakespeare is aimed at elevating the register of the game to a more artistic level and seems to suggest that artistry and interactivity are not fully compatible. The game's procedural rhetoric (Bogost 2007) encourages the player not to make use of the medium's procedurality. Although the player still has control over Kratos (the playable character) and can leave the boat at any time once close to a dock, the player willing to obtain more diegetic information about the storyworld must deliberately give up her agency in the game and adopt the passive stance of the listener in oral storytelling.

Conclusion

AAA action-adventure games have long attempted to overcome the negative stereotypes related to gaming and present themselves as art. One of the means employed by games to achieve this has been the remediation of established art forms and of canonical literary figures. Although less present than in other media, Shakespeare has been referenced by a number of games, such as the ones discussed in this article, in order for these games to add narrative depth to their storyworlds via a series of explicit intertextual links to Shakespeare's plays and borrow the bard's cultural capital so as to move up the ladder of prestige. In *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*, the game links Solid Snake to *Richard II*'s John of Gaunt in order to render Solid Snake a Shakespearean character and, in doing so, to borrow some of Shakespeare's cultural capital. A more complex intertextual relation to Shakespeare is present in *BioShock Infinite*, which adapts content from two plays: *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet.* In the case of *Hamlet,* the link is achieved indirectly through the absurdist play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, which is used to signpost the fact that the storyworld of the game is governed by laws completely different from those of the player's real world. Moreover, the quotation from *Romeo and Juliet* is offered as a reward for the player invested enough in exploring and deciphering the storyworld of *Bioshock Infinite*. By the same token, *God of War* also opens up an intertextual relation to Shakespeare as a ludic reward for those players interested enough in

the game's storyworld so as to give up on their ludic and narrative agency and enact the passive role of the listener of oral storytelling.

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