

Analyzing Intertextuality and Transmedia Adaptation from Shakespearean Tragedy to Modern Interactive Series

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Abstract: This article analyzes the use of Shakespeare's tragedies in relation to intertextuality and transmedia storytelling. It looks into the way intertextuality and transmedia storytelling have facilitated the use of these stories within modern media. Moreover, it analyzes the way Shakespearean tragedies incorporate such core elements of the story like revenge, ambition, and fate through conventional and modern retellings using various media formats like movies, television shows, video games, and interactive media. It also highlights the difference between adaptations like "The Lion King," which maintain the essence of the Shakespearean tragedies while offering multi-media experiences, and those like "Shakespeare in Love," which lack the interaction aspect. Moreover, the paper discusses how interactive media is gradually making way for audiences' empowerment and active engagement with themes from Shakespeare. The significance of the study highlights the potential for the modern media to change the perception and interaction with classic texts, particularly through interactive media. In the future, it is suggested that more research be done on the subject matter of integrating Shakespearean tragedies into new media forms, such as virtual reality and augmented reality, and conducting comparative analysis of different adaptations of the same through different media forms. The findings lead to an understanding of how transmedia adaptation and intertextuality can help improve narrative in the modern digital age.

Key Words: shakespearean tragedy, intertextuality, transmedia adaptation, audience engagement, interactive media, modern storytelling, virtual reality

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Introduction

Intertextuality can be defined as the inter-relationship of texts where a new text is referred to, built upon, or influenced by earlier texts and form a network of reference (Fan, 2024). This notion, which was proposed by Julia Kristeva, is that all texts are products of the previous texts, whether direct quotes, allusions, or thematic reverberations. Transmedia adaptation, in its turn, comes down to adapting a story or narrative and adapting it in numerous forms of media: film, literature, television, and digital media (Straumann, 2015). In transmedia, the different media provide a different layer to the story, creating a more total experience of the story, so that neither version of the story repeats itself but instead adds to the other, making the story richer and even more expansive (Bovcon & Vaupotič, 2018).

Intertextuality is vital to the context of the Shakespearean tragedies in creating the richness of the works (Huertas-Martín, 2023). Shakespeare relied on the available myths, historical occurrences, and classical works extensively, and he added a certain level of meaning that would appeal to the knowledge of his audience about the previously existing narratives (Greenhalgh, 2022). As an illustration, in Macbeth, the motifs of ambition and fate are enriched with intertextual allusions to historical personalities and mythological archetypes. In a similar manner, transmedia adaptation has enabled the Shakespearean tragedies to go beyond the original stage productions and be rediscovered in other forms of contemporary

productions (Mokrani, 2025; Weedon, 2021). For instance, *The Lion King* can be regarded as a replication of *Hamlet*, whereas modern interpretations of the story, such as *Throne of Blood* and *Ran*, present a modern twist on the traditional Shakespearean text by presenting it in a new cultural context (Iyengar & Jacobson, 2019). These interpretations preserve not only the original essence of the themes portrayed in the work but also introduce additional dimensions into them.

In its essence, storytelling, especially when it is related to the Shakespearean tragedies, is built around the idea of performance on the stage, where the audience is nothing more than a passive listener receiving the story through dialogue, performance, and visual performance (Fan, 2024; Milton & Cobelo, 2023). Shakespeare provided the viewers with the experience based on the development of the characters and themes that come alive because of the actors (Yang, 2020). However, nowadays, with the development of modern interactive display, storytelling has acquired a whole new meaning (Schiller, 2018). Thanks to video games, interactive movies, like *Bandersnatch*, and online stories, audiences no longer remain passive consumers, who follow the events happening before their eyes. Instead, they become active participants in the unfolding of the plot. Such a shift in the storytelling process enables various adaptations of classic works, where the interaction between the viewers and the content makes the adaptation possible and helps to engage in the content at a higher level, allowing the viewer to make decisions that immediately affects the process of narration (Abraham, 2025; Jones, 2023).

This research will contribute to the literature by analyzing the interaction between intertextuality and transmedia adaptation in Shakespearean tragedy and the role played by both in making it possible for Shakespearean works to evolve and resonate in today's interactive world. The current study, relying on examples of effective and ineffective adaptations, brings out the challenges and opportunities posed by interactive media in adapting classic literature. In addition, the paper highlights the basic principles of storytelling in the future digital age.

The article will be structured as follows: Section II of the paper deals with intertextuality in the tragic works of Shakespeare, focusing particularly on classical and historical references. Section III examines the Shakespearean adaptation across various media in the transmedia format. Section IV highlights the significance of intertextuality in modern interactive media. Section V presents case studies of both effective and ineffective adaptations and comparative analysis. The conclusion is provided in Section VI.

Intertextuality in Shakespearean Tragedy

The application of intertextuality on the part of Shakespeare lies at the heart of the complex and rich nature of the tragedies (Stevanato, 2024). The classical literature and myths, together with historic events were used to make Shakespeare's stories in many instances that he applied in his plays, adding more levels of meanings (Casey, 2023). As for *Macbeth*, besides references to such historical persons as King Duncan, the play includes appeals to the myths of destiny and prophecies, giving the sense of inevitability of what is happening in the story. The same refers to *Hamlet* as well where Shakespeare made allusions to Ovid's "*Metamorphoses*" and Hercules myth (Desmet et al., 2020).

Shakespeare extensively used historical events in his tragedies, where he would use them in his plots to bring out a sense of realism, besides using timeless themes (Kębłowska-Ławniczak, 2021). To illustrate, *Julius Caesar* is based on *Lives* by Plutarch to give a dramatized version of the political unrest that surrounded the assassination of Caesar, where history serves to express the philosophical issues of power, betrayal, and fate. Through the blending of historical figures and historical events, Shakespeare encourages

the viewer to approach these plays both as literature and history, as well as to have a greater attachment to the topics of ambition, tyranny, and moral conflict (Mayer, 2024).

Table 1: Comparison of Shakespearean Themes in Film and Interactive Adaptations

Theme	Shakespeare's Original	Film Adaptation (e.g., <i>The Lion King</i>)	Interactive Adaptation (e.g., <i>Bandersnatch</i>)
Revenge	Hamlet's desire for revenge	Simba avenges his father's death	Player chooses to seek or avoid revenge
Ambition	Macbeth's unchecked ambition	Scar's desire for power	Players' choices influence ambition and outcomes
Fate	The inevitability of destiny	Mufasa's death as fate	Players' decisions alter the perception of fate

Table 1 makes a comparison of essential themes of Shakespeare in traditional and interactive adaptations. In Revenge, the urge to avenge in Hamlet is reflected in The Lion King, Simba avenging Mufasa, and in Bandersnatch, the player is given an option to seek revenge or not. Macbeth and The Lion King feature ambition, with Scar being power hungry, and Bandersnatch allowing the player to affect the results of ambition. In Hamlet, fate is unavoidable, as in The Lion King, when Mufasa dies, or in Bandersnatch, where choices made by the player change the perception of fate.

Intertextuality in Shakespeare makes his characters and plots more complicated so that the story can be approached as more complex and multifaceted (Hatchuel & Vienne-Guerrin, 2021). The use of allusions to classic literary works and events in history provides the audience with background information through which the behavior and motivations of the characters can be understood within a greater cultural and intellectual framework. For example, in the play King Lear, the use of allusions to Greek mythological figures and the concept of divine justice enhances the tragic elements of the play while offering an insightful perspective on the question of human suffering, power, and salvation. The fact that Shakespeare's characters are drawn from cultural icons that are familiar also enables him to enrich their psychological profiles as well as broaden the themes of his tragedies.

Transmedia Adaptation of Shakespearean Tragedy

Adaptation Across Various Mediums

The works of Shakespearean tragedies have been translated and reinterpreted in a broad scope of media, such as film, television, literature, and even digital formats, which have given the opportunity to interpret and reinterpret his works in different ways (Karpinski, 2023). Shakespearean tragedies are particularly well adapted to transmedia due to the flexibility of his subjects, characters, and stories. To take a few examples, movies such as Throne of Blood (based on Macbeth) and West Side Story (based on Romeo and Juliet) reinterpret Shakespearean works in various contexts of time and place, but the themes of ambition, love, and war remain identical. On TV, like in the Hollow Crown (with Richard II, Henry IV, and Henry V), Shakespeare's history plays are presented to the modern reader in lavish production and detailed character development.

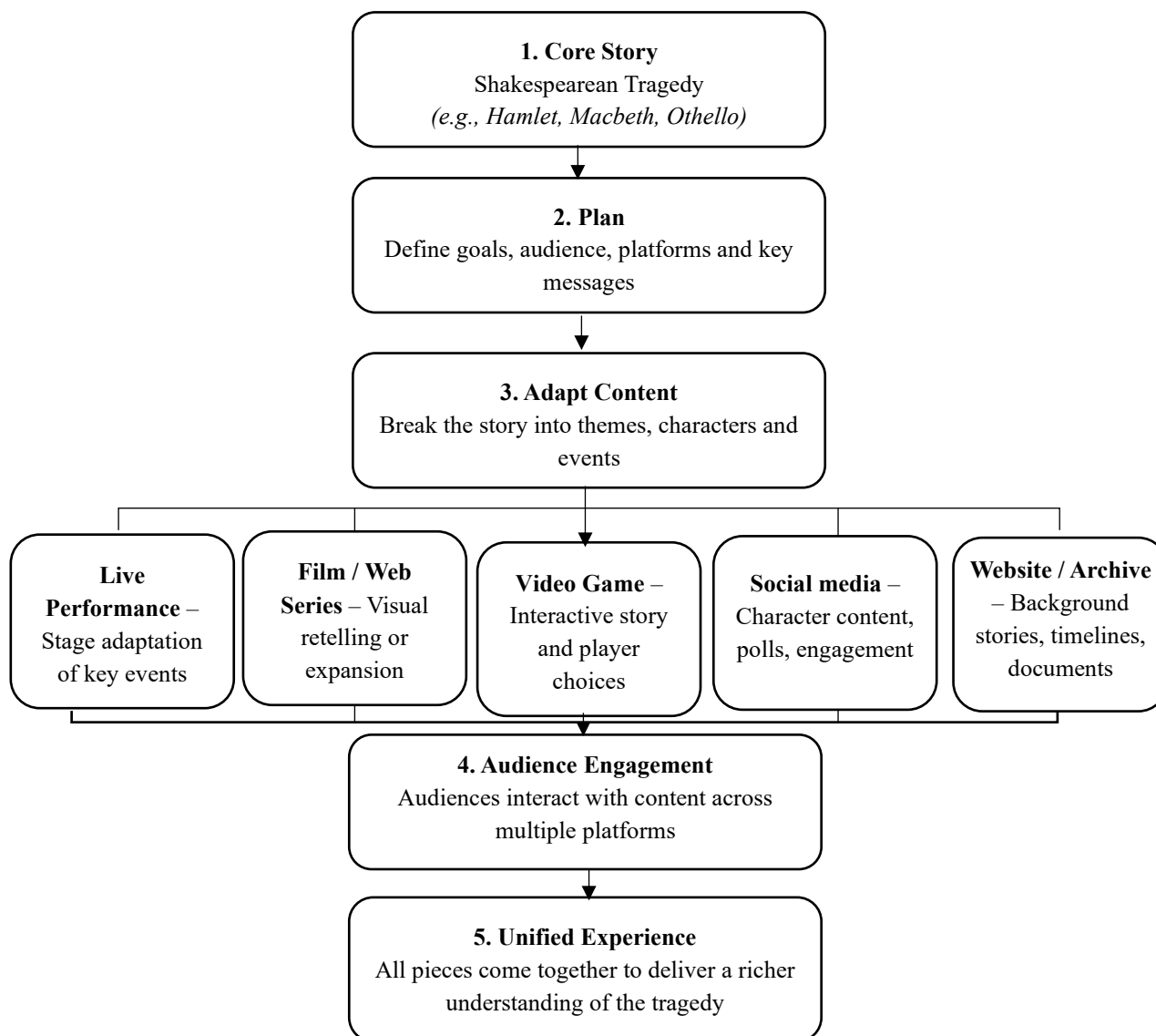


Figure 1: Transmedia Adaptation Flowchart

Figure 1 shows how adaptation of a Shakespearean tragedy begins with the original storyline, transitioning through planning, content breakdown, and adaptation to various media such as live performances, movies, video games, social media, and web services. Both platforms have a distinctive experience, including immersive theater and choices in the video game. Interaction among audiences in these media results in a cohesive experience and a deeper insight into the tragedy. This flow chart illustrates that Shakespearean literature could be repurposed through various media to make a multi-layered story.

Comparison of Different Transmedia Adaptations

One of the most interesting parts of transmedia adaptation is the analysis of the various adaptations of the same Shakespearean play in different media. *Hamlet* has been adapted into a film multiple times, with renowned adaptations, such as the 1948 film of *Hamlet* by the hands of Laurence Olivier, the 1996 film adaptation directed by Kenneth Branagh, and the 2000 film *Hamlet* starring Ethan Hawke. Both adaptations make free choices on the original text, focusing on different themes, characters, or settings to fit both the medium and the socio-political environment of the period. An example of this is the version of *Hamlet* by Olivier, which concentrates on the psychological complexity of *Hamlet*, whereas the uncut version by Branagh attempts to present a fuller picture of the original play, adding to it an epic cinematic fairy tale.

Comparing these adaptations, one can easily see the influence of the medium on the story and how the visual nature of the film makes the story richer, and how the immediacy and closeness of the stage adaptations are a different experience.

Contribution to Reinterpretation of Shakespeare's Works

Transmedia Shakespearean tragedies are of great importance for not only keeping, but also rewriting his plays. Transmediation makes Shakespeare's ideas more understandable and up-to-date for contemporary readers and viewers, providing him with opportunities to find a new audience. For instance, such re-interpretations of Shakespeare in the modern context (as it is seen in 10 Things I Hate About You or in the movie "The Taming of the Shrew" as well as "Hamlet" in "The Lion King") help his plays reach the audience in a different way. In fact, such re-contextualization's usually add a number of new meanings to the play while still being faithful to it, showing how Shakespearean tragedies can be re-written without losing their primary effect. By means of transmedia, Shakespeare's plays can serve as a source for adaptation, which helps to rewrite his plays over and over again.

Modern Interactive Platforms and Intertextuality

Incorporation of Intertextuality in Modern Interactive Platforms

Intertextual references are more and more used in modern interactive sites, including video games and interactive websites, to enrich storytelling. These platforms enable the creators to integrate the aspects of classical literature, such as Shakespearean tragedies, into the storyline. An example of this would be the video games such as The Witcher 3 and the Assassin's Creed series, all of which have references to Shakespearean themes and characters, with allusions to betrayal, ambition, and fate. Similar intertextual relationships are seen in interactive websites or platforms, including Bandersnatch, and they are based on Shakespearean tropes, including choice, fate, and moral dilemmas. These platforms are non-linear, which can be more thoroughly explored by intertextual references, making them available and effective to a contemporary audience, which is interactive. Such media use Shakespearean themes in a manner that would be acceptable to modern taste but still retains the philosophical questions of Shakespeare's work.

Influence of Interactivity on Audience Engagement

Interactivity plays an important role in affecting the way audiences receive intertextuality in media forms. As opposed to conventional media, where there is one-way communication from the sender to the receiver, interactivity allows audiences to take part in making decisions about what happens next, thereby engaging further with the story and making use of the intertextuality embedded within. In interactive media such as video games, films, or narrative-driven websites, players can navigate through the moral questions that the character in the game poses; the fates vs. free will question posed in the Shakespearean tragedy becomes very real at this point. The player's decision may parallel decisions by characters who faced similar dilemmas as those portrayed in Macbeth or King Lear, thus giving him or her insight into the same dilemma in a much deeper manner.

Challenges and Opportunities in Adapting Shakespearean Tragedy

On the other hand, adapting Shakespearean tragedies for the modern, interactive medium involves challenges along with numerous possibilities. The first challenge relates to finding a balance between the richness of Shakespearean characters and themes on one hand and the interactivity on the other. Psychological aspects and moral questions typical of Shakespeare's tragedies, for instance, those found in plays like Macbeth or King Lear, might prove hard to render in an interactive form due to the emphasis

placed on player choices rather than the complex plot. Moreover, there might arise problems with including the author's distinctive and poetic style into the action-driven medium. However, there are many opportunities associated with the use of interactive media when it comes to discussing various themes in Shakespearean works. The concept of fate, destiny, and free will introduced by Shakespeare can be employed in the design of interactive games. The freedom of choice with regard to the story line and the manner in which it develops makes it possible for individuals to participate in decision-making that Shakespeare considered in his plays.

Case Studies

Successful Transmedia Adaptation of a Shakespearean Tragedy

The Lion King movie is a perfect example of successful transmedia adaptation because it is strongly inspired by Hamlet. In this movie, all essential components of Shakespeare's play, including revenge, power struggles, relations between fathers and sons, have been preserved but transferred to a different culture and family. The structure of the narrative itself is analogous to Hamlet's one, and the plot involves a similar development of the main character – Simba – as Hamlet. Moreover, this story has developed into several products – both movies and video games, which were created based on the ideas from the initial adaptation. Thus, The Lion King shows the possibility of successful transmedia adaptation when all significant features and motifs are preserved while creating a story in a different format.

Failed Transmedia Adaptation of a Shakespearean Tragedy

However, Shakespeare in Love is a movie that, despite being a popular romance during a particular period in time, can still be seen as a failure to adapt Shakespearean tragedy successfully to an interactive medium today. The movie does use elements from the life and work of Shakespeare, but the process of turning Shakespeare into a romanticized figure is quite extensive; in essence, the movie moves away from the true essence of Shakespearean tragedies. In terms of the interactive nature of the modern adaption, the film version of Shakespeare in Love cannot boast of interactivity because it does not allow for any interaction on the viewer's side. The failure of this adaptation lies in its inability to take full advantage of interactive platforms' potential to engage audiences in the moral and existential dilemmas present in Shakespeare's tragedies, offering instead a more lighthearted, fictionalized portrayal.

Figure 2 represents the growing popularity of traditional as well as interactive adaptations from the year 1990 till the year 2025. It is observed that traditional adaptations (blue line) grow continuously, whereas interactive adaptations (green line) experience a steeper growth pattern. By the end of 2025, interactive adaptations will exceed traditional adaptations.

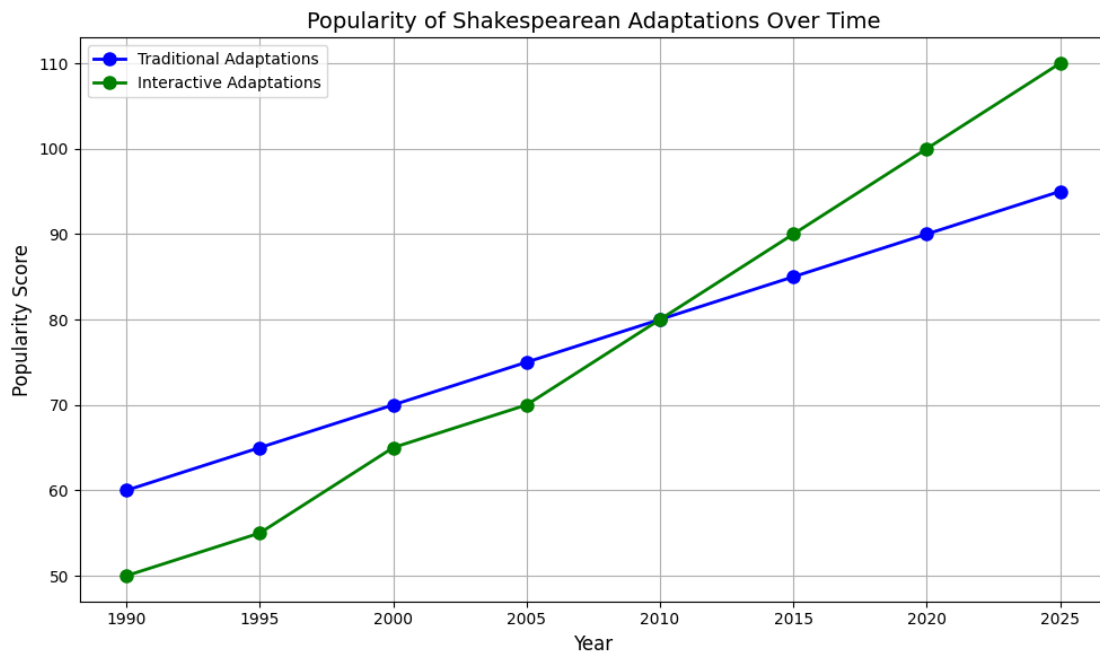


Figure 2: Popularity of Shakespearean Adaptations Over Time

Comparison of the two case studies

When analyzing *The Lion King* and *Shakespeare in Love*, a number of conclusions can be made on the strategies that should be used to create transmedia adaptations of Shakespearean tragedies. *The Lion King* proves that it is possible to adapt Shakespeare successfully by preserving his themes and characters while putting them into a completely different setting to attract more contemporary audience members. Being one of the best examples of a transmedia adaptation of *Hamlet*, the story in question shows the possibility of using a variety of media to promote Shakespearean tragedies. At the same time, the analysis of *Shakespeare in Love* allows making a conclusion that the movie under analysis is entertaining but fails to adapt Shakespeare in an interactive manner. Shakespearean plays are rich with moral issues and challenges; hence, the creation of a transmedia adaptation based on the tragic aspects of his stories is important.

Table 2: Case Study Comparison - Successful vs. Failed Adaptations

Aspect	Successful Adaptation (<i>The Lion King</i>)	Failed Adaptation (<i>Shakespeare in Love</i>)
Faithfulness to Source Material	Retains core themes of <i>Hamlet</i>	Strays from tragedy focus, focusing on romance
Audience Engagement	Deep, immersive, multi-platform	Passive, non-interactive
Interactivity	Explores moral dilemmas through engagement	Lacks interactivity and audience agency
Cultural Relevance	Relevant to contemporary audiences	Limited to historical context

Table 2 depicts an example of a transmedia story that worked (*The Lion King*) alongside an example of a transmedia story that did not work (*Shakespeare in Love*). The reason for the success of *The Lion King* is that the story has maintained the core elements of the story of *Hamlet*, provides immersion into the story through multiple platforms and is interactive with regards to issues that can be solved in the context of morality in life.

Conclusion

Interactivity and intertextuality have been considered in regard to Shakespearean tragedies in order to understand the importance of adapting these terms so as to make Shakespeare's literary pieces relevant to today's media world. In this case, it should be noted that several key terms used by Shakespeare include revenge, ambition, and fate. A good adaptation of Shakespearean tragedy is characterized by the possibility of maintaining the elements of the plot and extending it into other media, including film, TV shows, computer games, and interactive media. One example of such a transmedia story is *The Lion King*. Nevertheless, not all the attempts of transmediation were successful, and a lot of adaptations lack certain elements which would enable them to generate something new using the interactivity techniques. For instance, *Shakespeare in Love* is not considered a good adaptation as it deviates a lot from the original tragedy. With the inclusion of Shakespearean tragedies within current interactive media, there is the potential to produce an interactive environment that would enable the retention of these elements, along with their relevance to future generations. Future research may involve a study on the connection between the Shakespearean tragedy genre and other current media, such as virtual and augmented reality, to ensure higher levels of interactivity and immersiveness within the experience of classical media. It may also prove fascinating to analyze the Shakespearean tragedies in a transmedia way.

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