Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in an Era of Textual Exhaustion

*Shakespeare’s Hamlet in an Era of Textual Exhaustion* examines how postmodern audiences continue to reengage with *Hamlet* in spite of our culture’s oversaturation with this most canonical of texts. Combining adaptation theory and performance theory with examinations of avant-garde performances and other unconventional appropriations of Shakespeare’s play, this volume examines Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as a central symbol of our era’s “textual exhaustion,” a state in which the reader/viewer is bombarded by text—printed, digital, and otherwise.

**Sonya Freeman Loftis** is an Associate Professor of English at Morehouse College.

**Allison Kellar** is an Assistant Professor of English and Director of Honors at Wingate University.

**Lisa Ulevich** is a Visiting Instructor of English at Georgia State University.
17 Shakespeare, Cinema, Counter-Culture
   Appropriation and Inversion
   Ailsa Grant Ferguson

18 Shakespeare’s Folly
   Philosophy, Humanism, Critical Theory
   Sam Hall

19 Shakespeare’s Asian Journeys
   Critical Encounters, Cultural Geographies, and the Politics of Travel
   Edited by Bi-qi Beatrice Lei, Poonam Trivedi, and Judy Celine Ick

20 Shakespeare, Italy, and Transnational Exchange
   Early Modern to the Present
   Edited by Enza De Francisci and Chris Stamatakis

21 Shakespeare and Complexity Theory
   Claire Hansen

22 Women and Mobility on Shakespeare’s Stage
   Migrant Mothers and Broken Homes
   Elizabeth Mazzola

23 Renaissance Ecopolitics from Shakespeare to Bacon
   Rethinking Cosmopolis
   Elizabeth Gruber

24 Shakespeare’s Lost Playhouse
   Eleven Days at Newington Butts
   Laurie Johnson

25 Shakespeare’s Hamlet in an Era of Textual Exhaustion
   Edited by Sonya Freeman Loftis, Allison Kellar, and Lisa Ulevich
Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in an Era of Textual Exhaustion

Edited by
Sonya Freeman Loftis, Allison Kellar,
and Lisa Ulevich
Contents

List of Figures vii
Acknowledgements ix
Notes on Contributors xi

1 Introduction: Post-Hamlet 1
SONYA FREEMAN LOFTIS, ALLISON KELLAR, AND LISA ULEVICH

SECTION I
Post-Hamlet Appropriations 27

2 Post-Human Hamlets: Ghosts in the Machine 29
TODD ANDREW BORLIK

3 Or Not to Be: Dancing Beyond Hamlet in Christopher Wheeldon’s Misericordes/Elsinore 46
ELIZABETH KLETT

4 “It’s the Opheliac in me”: Ophelia, Emilie Autumn, and the Role of Hamlet in Discussing Mental Disability 59
CHLOE OWEN

5 “I the matter will reword”: The Ghost of Hamlet in Translation 73
JIM CASEY

6 Locating Hamlet in Kashmir: Haider, Terrorism, and Shakespearean Transmission 87
AMRITA SEN
vi Contents

SECTION II Post-Hamlet Performances

7 “Denmark is A Prison”: *Hamlet* for Inclusive and Incarcerated Audiences
   SHEILA T. CAVANAGH
   103

8 Revisionist Q1 and the Poetics of Alternatives: Vindicating *Hamlet*’s “Bad” Quarto on Page and Stage in Japan and Beyond
   YI-HSIN HSU
   119

9 “Poem Unlimited, Space Unlimited”: The Case of the *Naked Hamlet*
   ADAM SHEAFFER
   137

SECTION III Post-Hamlet Classrooms

10 After Words: *Hamlet*’s Unfinished Business in the Liberal Arts Classroom
   DENEEN SENASI
   155

11 “Read freely, my dear”: Education and Agency in Lisa Klein’s *Ophelia*
   VICTORIA R. FARMER
   170

12 To Relate or Not to Relate: Questioning the Pedagogical Value of Relatable Shakespeare
   ERIN M. PRESLEY
   184

SECTION IV Post-Hamlet Post-Script

13 DIE-JESTING stURNe's BURIALLs: Publication, Plagiarism, Pseudonymity, Pseudography, Cenography, Palimpsestuosity, Posthumography, and the Propriety or Pathos of Posterity
   RICHARD BURT
   199

Index

245
List of Figures


2.2 *Manga Hamlet* © SelfMadeHero 2007, art by Emma Vieceli and text adaptation by Richard Appignanesi

2.3 “Baxter Cam.” *Machine-Hamlet*. Source: Image courtesy of Louise LePage

8.1 Official flyer of Wakayama touring performances. Source: Courtesy of Theatrical Group EN

8.2 Hashitsume as Hamlet. Source: Courtesy of Theatrical Group EN

8.3 The duel scene on a minimalist stage (Tokyo). Source: Photo by Toshihiro Shimizu. Courtesy of KUNIO

13.1 The Late Mr.——— &c., &c. at Laurence Sterne’s unkempt grave, July 2016. Photo by the author


13.3 “Alas, poor YORICK” cited twice opposite the black page, as printed in the third edition of *Tristram Shandy*. By permission of University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections

13.4 “Alas, Poor Syntax”; William Combe, *Tours of Doctor Syntax*

13.5 and 13.6 Sterne’s first headstone with detail showing that the words “Alas poor Yorick” are barely legible. Photos by the author

13.7 The first page of “The Skull” in *The Shandean*. © The Laurence Sterne Trust

13.8 Sterne’s old headstone, now inside St. Michael’s, next to the grave newly opened to hold Sterne’s skull, missing from the photograph. © The Laurence Sterne Trust
List of Figures

13.9 and 13.10  Two photographs of the two headstones for Sterne’s grave; the first one circa 1768 at the back, and the second, from 1843, reproduced in “The Skull.” © The Laurence Sterne Trust 217

13.9 and 13.10  Two photographs of the two headstones for Sterne’s grave; the first one circa 1768 at the back, and the second, from 1843, reproduced in “The Skull.” © The Laurence Sterne Trust 218

13.11 “NOTE” as headstone surrounded by asterisks in “The Skull.” © The Laurence Sterne Trust 219

13.12 Unburied skull thought to be Sterne’s, located at Cambridge University. Jenna Dittmar. Reproduced from Dittmar and Mitchell, 2016 221

13.13 Table of contents of The Shandean commemorative issue dedicated to Kenneth Monkman. © The Laurence Sterne Trust 223

13.14 Tristram Shandy’s mutilation by asterisk 225
First and foremost, thank you to our wonderful contributors: this collection would not have been possible without their hard work. In addition to contributing strong and sharp new readings of *Hamlet*, they made revisions and responded to queries with amazing speed. Special thanks to Fran Teague for her insightful comments on the volume’s introduction. Thanks to Sujata Iyengar, Christy Desmet, Scott Newstok, and Sheila Cavanagh, who all hosted Shakespeare events at their home institutions in 2015–2017 (The *Borrowers and Lenders* Anniversary Conference at the University of Georgia, Rhodes College’s 1616 Symposium, and Emory’s Year of Shakespeare, respectively) that allowed the editors to network with other Shakespeareans from around the world. Allison would like to thank Wingate University for the Spivey Instructorship, endowed by Mr. and Mrs. James L. Spivey, for supporting her work on the edited collection. Finally, special thanks to Richard Burt for an essay that made us think (and laugh) and for the many amusing email exchanges and revisions that created this truly unique piece.
This page intentionally left blank
Notes on Contributors

Todd Andrew Borlik is a Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Huddersfield. He is the author of *Ecocriticism and Early Modern English Literature* (Routledge, 2011) and over a dozen scholarly articles on Shakespeare and his contemporaries. His work has appeared in journals such as *Shakespeare, Shakespeare Survey, Shakespeare Quarterly, Shakespearean International Yearbook*, and *Shakespeare Bulletin*. Recent publications have examined *The Tempest* and the draining of the fens; *Doctor Faustus* and Renaissance aviation disasters; and Renaissance fairy-lore as enchanted entomology. He is currently preparing an anthology of early modern environmental writing and a comparative study on the staging of nature at the Rose and Globe.

Richard Burt is Professor of English and Loser Studies at the University of Florida. He is the co-author, with Julian Yates, of *What’s the Worst Thing You Can Do to Shakespeare?* (Palgrave, 2013) and the author of *Medieval and Early Modern Film and Media* (Palgrave, 2008); *Unspeakable ShaXXXpeares: Queer Theory and American Kiddie Culture* (Palgrave, 1999); and *Licensed by Authority: Ben Jonson and the Discourses of Censorship* (Cornell UP, 1993). He is also the editor of *Shakespeares after Shakespeare: An Encyclopedia of the Bard in Mass Media and Popular Culture, Shakespeare after Mass Media* (Greenwood, 2006); and *The Administration of Aesthetics: Censorship, Political Criticism, and the Public Sphere* (U of Minnesota P, 1994). He is the co-editor of *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England, Shakespeare the Movie: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, and Video* (Cornell University Press, 1994), and *Shakespeare the Movie, Part II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video, and DVD* (Routledge, 2003). Burt has published more than forty articles and book chapters on topics including Shakespeare, Renaissance drama, literary theory, film adaptation, the Middle Ages in film and media, the erotics of pedagogy, stupidity, cinematic paratexts, biopolitics, posthumography, and censorship.
Jim Casey is an Assistant Professor at Arcadia University in Philadelphia. He earned his Ph.D. from the Hudson Strode Program in Renaissance Studies at the University of Alabama, where he was the first Strode Exchange Scholar to study at The Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon. Although primarily a Shakespearean, he has published on such diverse topics as fantasy, monstrosity, early modern poetry, medieval poetry, textual theory, performance theory, postmodern theory, adaptation theory, old age, comics, masculinity, Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Battlestar Galactica.

Sheila T. Cavanagh is Professor of English at Emory University and held the Fulbright/Global Shakespeare Distinguished Chair in the UK. She is the founding director of the World Shakespeare Project (www.worldshakespeareproject.org) and was Director of Emory’s Year of Shakespeare. She also held the Masse-Martin/NEH Distinguished Teaching Professorship. Author of Wanton Eyes and Chaste Desires: Female Sexuality in the Faerie Queene and Cherished Torment: The Emotional Geography of Lady Mary Wroth’s Urania, she has published widely in the fields of pedagogy and of Renaissance literature. She is also active in the electronic realm, having directed the Emory Women Writers Resource Project (womenwriters.library.emory.edu) since 1994 and serving for many years as editor of the online Spenser Review.

Victoria R. Farmer (Ph.D. English, Florida State University) is a former Adjunct Instructor in Humanities and Social Sciences at Crown College in St. Bonifacius, Minnesota. She currently works as Senior Manager of Audience Development at Public Radio International in Minneapolis.

Yi-Hsin Hsu is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University. She holds an MA in “Shakespeare in History” and a Ph.D. in English from University College London (UCL). She is currently engaged in two research fields: literature and partisan politics in the long eighteenth century as well as Shakespeare adaptations on page and stage in Japan and Korea. Her most recent publications appear in REAL: Review of English and American Literature (2015) and Asian Theatre Journal (2017).

Allison Kellar is an Assistant Professor of English and the Honors Program Director at Wingate University. She specializes in early modern drama, performance, and appropriation. Her publications include an essay on undergraduate research and digital literacy in the CEA Critic and an article on the American Shakespeare Center’s Actors’ Renaissance Season in Shakespeare Bulletin. Her current book project explores actors’ parts and collaboration on the early modern stage.
Elizabeth Klett is an Associate Professor of Literature at the University of Houston—Clear Lake, where she teaches courses on Shakespeare, early modern and modern drama, and women’s literature. She is the author of Cross-Gender Shakespeare and English National Identity: Wearing the Codpiece (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). She has published articles on Shakespeare and performance in Theatre Journal, Shakespeare Bulletin, Literature/Film Quarterly, and Early Modern Studies Journal, as well as the collections Shakespeare Re-dressed and Retroversions. She is currently writing a book on dance adaptations of Shakespeare, and has work on this topic published and forthcoming in Shakespeare, The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance, Shakespeare Bulletin, and Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation. She recently served as a guest lecturer for the Houston Ballet’s 2014–2015 season of Shakespeare-inspired ballets and wrote the Playbill essay for their production of John Cranko’s The Taming of the Shrew.

Sonya Freeman Loftis is an Associate Professor of English at Morehouse College. She specializes in early modern drama, Shakespeare and appropriation, and disability studies. She is the author of two monographs: Shakespeare’s Surrogates (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and Imagining Autism (Indiana UP, 2015). Dr. Loftis currently serves on the editorial board for Disability Studies Quarterly, and her work on Shakespeare and appropriation has appeared in journals such as Shakespeare Bulletin, SHAW: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies, The South Atlantic Review, and The Brecht Yearbook.

Chloe Owen completed her BA and MA in English Literature at the University of Exeter and is currently working towards an MA in Shakespeare Studies, split between King’s College, London and Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre. Her main research interests are early modern theater history and adaptation studies, queer and feminist theory, and death studies. She has given conference papers on Derek Jarman’s Edward II, skull and anatomy in early modern drama, and Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra, and is working on papers on ghosts and sleep paralysis and the relevance of Hamlet in mental health discussions.

Erin M. Presley is an Associate Professor of English at Eastern Kentucky University, where she teaches courses in writing, literature, and Appalachian Studies. She has published on Shakespeare and popular culture in Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation and in Alicante Journal of English Studies. Her current research examines the role of Shakespeare in contemporary Appalachian Literature, specifically the recent work of Ron Rash and his use of Macbeth in fashioning the titular character in his novel Serena.
Amrita Sen is an Associate Professor of Humanities at Heritage Institute of Technology and affiliated faculty Heritage College, University of Calcutta. She was previously an Associate Professor of English at Oklahoma City University. She has published on East India Company women, Bollywood appropriations of Shakespeare, and early modern ethnography. She is co-editing a special issue of the Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies on the “Alternative Histories of the East India Company,” as well as a collection of essays on civic pageantry tentatively titled Civic Performance: Pageantry and Entertainments in Early Modern London. She is currently working on a book-length project that looks at representations of the East Indies in early modern drama.

Deneen Senasi is an Associate Professor of English at Mercer University, where she also serves as the Director of the Writing Program for the College of Liberal Arts. At present, her research in early modern British literature and culture explores points of transhistorical convergence between pre-modern and modern or post-modern phenomena. Her work has appeared in Renaissance Papers, Viator, The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies, Religion and Literature, Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England, Comparative Drama, as well as The Desire of the Analysts: Psychoanalysis and Cultural Criticism in the New Millennium, and Beauty, Violence, Representation. She is currently completing a book project titled “To the Great Variety of Readers”: A Cultural History of Shakespeare’s Readers.

Adam Sheaffer is a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland, where he is working on his dissertation, focusing on the New York Shakespeare Festival’s early history and the varied civic, artistic, and spatial meanings of “public.” His project spans the early life of the company as they grew from workshop to festival to off-Broadway institution, and interrogates their evolving relationship to New York City and its public(s). His project offers insight into the ongoing and complex process of defining theatrical publics amidst the tumult of the 1960s and early 1970s in New York City. Along with Shakespeare in performance, Adam maintains an interest in outdoor performance, urban history, and philosophy and performance. In addition to his scholarly pursuits, Adam works with the Shakespeare Society in fostering knowledge and appreciation for Shakespeare’s historic place in New York City’s cultural landscape.

Lisa Ulevich received her Ph.D. from Georgia State University in 2016. Her research interests include the poetics of allusion, narrative theory, and the mediation of identity through poetic and other formal structures. Her work has appeared in Renaissance Papers and Disability, Health, and Happiness in the Shakespearean Body (Routledge, 2014). Dr. Ulevich’s current book project explores the strategies of versifying and adaptation that shape closure in early modern lyric poetry.
1 Introduction

Post-Hamlet

Sonya Freeman Loftis, Allison Kellar, and Lisa Ulevich

I’m not Hamlet. I don’t take part anymore. My words have nothing to tell me anymore. …My drama doesn’t happen anymore. Behind me the set is put up. By people who aren’t interested in my drama, for people to whom it means nothing. I’m not interested in it anymore either.

The Actor Playing Hamlet, _Hamletmachine_

Would I had phrases that are not known, utterances that are strange, a new language that has not been used, free from repetition, not an utterance that has grown stale, which men of old have spoken.

Khakheperraseneb, 2000 B.C.E.

The computer is not the enemy of the book. It is the child of print culture. …

Murray, _Hamlet on the Holodeck_

At the Shakespeare Association of America Annual Conference in 2015, we enjoyed a coffee break between panels by devouring a cookie with Hamlet’s face on it. (He was delicious.) Grateful to Bedford/St. Martin’s for providing her with an opportunity to eat the face of Christopher Eccleston, who was depicted in sugar frosting, staring soulfully into the empty eye sockets of Yorick, Sonya couldn’t help but wonder if our cultural obsession with _Hamlet_ has finally reached ludicrous proportions—or perhaps even an absurdist endpoint. As we partook of this strange Eucharist, we talked about Hamlet: we wondered if Shakespeare’s melancholy prince was dead, or still among us, or maybe just being culturally transfigured by some weird transubstantiation. We wondered if Shakespearean performance and adaptation might be yielding to a sense of textual exhaustion—“destroying” _Hamlet_ because audiences and directors increasingly feel that there are no more Hamlets left to make. We wondered if our students weren’t the only ones getting bored and frustrated with the endless reiterations of _Hamlet_.

We are living in a historical moment that fears the end of _Hamlet_—or at least one which fears that we have exhausted the interpretive possibilities of Shakespeare’s most popular tragedy. As the most frequently
performed, written-about, and taught play in the Shakespearean canon, *Hamlet* has acquired both a place of indisputable power as an icon defining “literature” in our culture and a jaded sense of scholarly (and sometimes not-so-scholarly) ennui. This collection explores the ways that our culture is “finished with” the Dane—the ways in which recent reiterations and homages to Shakespeare’s play have moved beyond *Hamlet* in its “original” textual context and interpretive history, and also those ways in which we may not be finished with him yet—the various ways we have kept Shakespeare’s text alive by remaking it. Using adaptation theory to approach this most adapted and performed of all English plays—the urtext of Western theatrical adaptation—the essays in this volume approach the imagined death of *Hamlet*, the idea of being post-*Hamlet* (or perhaps even the ultimate impossibility of envisioning English literature without *Hamlet*) through a variety of lenses, including adaptation, performance, and pedagogy.

The *Hamlet* Apocalypse

It isn’t surprising that *Hamlet* is one of the world’s most frequently adapted texts. After all, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is fundamentally a play about belatedness. It is a text interested in what happens later, a play whose main character has his eyes on that which happens after—after the action of the play has ended, after he himself is dead. The prince is alive, but his mind is already on the “undiscovered country” (3.1.79). Throughout the play, Shakespeare’s Dane is primarily concerned with those things that are “post”—with that which is (whether it is an ephemeral ghost, or rotting flesh, or disinterred skull [post-king, post-life, post-human]) already gone. Indeed, *Hamlet* expends a fair number of lines questioning and contemplating a future fictional world that is post- *Hamlet* (a world without himself, in which he will “not be”). The melancholy prince’s self-destructive impulse, the desire to imagine a future world in which his “too too solid” flesh will rot and “melt” (1.2.129), becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the past that has literally haunted him (dead kings, freshly dug graves, and “Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay” [5.1.202]) eventually becomes the future (eight bodies, all told). The play ends with his funeral arrangements (“Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage” [5.2.379]) just as his soliloquies told us that it would, and we have no way of knowing what comes after (there’s the rub). If one of the fundamental questions posed by *Hamlet* is what comes after *Hamlet*, it is one that the play does not, and cannot, answer.

But we have been answering it—for more than four hundred years now. While the late 1800s and early 1900s were primarily interested in the character of *Hamlet* as a psychological exploration of the human (in retrospect, Prince *Hamlet* himself has become the paragon of paragons, the ultimate “quintessence of dust” [2.2.278]), more recent decades find us
mostly interested in the “Not-Hamlet,” the Hamlet who is not to be, the places around, behind, before, and after this overshadowing and verbose protagonist. Thus, we have more and more adaptations about Ophelia. Adaptations in which Hamlet is a robot. Adaptations with Hamlet and space aliens. Adaptations, à la Hamletmachine, in which Hamlet publicly declares himself “not Hamlet” This desire to undress, undo, destroy, dig into the textual space that is not Hamlet—this is perhaps the desire not so much to rewrite Hamlet as to unwrite Hamlet. And as our various Hamlets become more and more outlandish (more destructive, more creative, more subversive), less human (animal Hamlet, computer-generated Hamlet), and more commercial (tote bag Hamlet, T-shirt Hamlet, cookie Hamlet), it might be fair to wonder if Hamlet is, in some sense, a cultural text that is becoming increasingly exhausting and exhausted, used up, overdone. If audiences become tired of Hamlet, will we stop performing it? If students become tired of Hamlet, will we stop teaching it? Paradoxically, the fear that Hamlet is used up may actually cause us to produce more Hamlet—in order to defend this quintessential Shakespearean text, our Hamlets must become more and more experimental, avant-garde, and radical. Indeed, if a director or writer is seeking to do experimental work, Hamlet has become the play to experiment with—not just because the text is so well-known, but also because we are, on some level, trying to remake and thus “save” this symbol of the humanities and humanism from imagined depletion.

In addressing the “textual exhaustion” of Hamlet in this volume, we intend a variety of interrelated potential meanings. First, we use the term “textual exhaustion” to indicate cultural anxieties regarding the potential end of Hamlet. As artists, scholars, and teachers, we may become fearful that the literary source text may somehow run out or be used up—that the sheer ubiquity of Hamlet will eventually cause audiences and readers to tire of it. Thus, we are currently creating adaptations, performances, and even lesson plans in the margins of Hamlet’s imagined apocalyptic moment. This increasing sense of Hamlet’s textual exhaustion is quite similar to declarations proclaiming the death of the novel in the late 1960s. In his 1967 essay “The Literature of Exhaustion,” John Barth discusses the cultural anxiety surrounding the supposed exhaustion of the novel as a literary form. The artistic possibilities of the genre, of course, have never really been (and are not currently) exhausted. However, in the wake of high modernism’s experimental excess (e.g., novels that abandoned plot and experimented with point of view, forsaking established norms of language and syntax), artists and critics began to feel a sense of anxiety about the continued longevity of the novel as a genre:

Suppose you’re a writer by vocation ... and you feel, for example, that the novel, if not narrative literature generally, if not the printed word altogether, has by this hour of the world just about shot its
brot. ... Whether historically the novel expires or persists as a major art form seems immaterial to me; if enough writers and critics feel apocalyptical about it, their feeling becomes a considerable cultural fact, like the feeling that Western civilization, or the world, is going to end rather soon.

(Barth 71)

We aren’t arguing that Hamlet has outlasted its interpretive possibilities or that it has outlived its life on the stage. The practices of publishing on, performing, and teaching Hamlet won’t stop. This “Post-Hamlet” introduction we are writing will be followed by many, many more reiterations of Hamlet (the king is dead, long live the king). What matters is that those of us engaged with Shakespeare—scholars, artists, actors, writers, teachers—are afraid that Hamlet might be exhausted. As Kathleen Fitzpatrick argues regarding Barth’s literature of exhaustion: “That these ultimacies are merely ‘felt’ rather than material makes them no less real” (528). That such anxiety is widespread is clear. Simon Russell Beale, who played Hamlet at the National Theatre, London in 2000, described the anxiety of performing Hamlet:

There has never been a time when there aren’t 800 Hamlets. ... You are aware consciously that there is a history about it. You see this list of Hamlets and you think “Oh, my God, no. And there’s Adrian [Lester] opening in five minutes. There’s Olivier. There’s Gielgud. ...” (qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 2)

This fear of textual exhaustion has a powerful artistic and aesthetic effect: in reaction to this anxiety, performances of Hamlet have become increasingly experimental in recent years. Experimentation begets exhaustion, which begets yet more experimentation. The more experimental and far-flung our Hamlets become, the more concerned we become that we have worn out Hamlet’s interpretive possibilities—in response, we must make even more bizarre, surprising, and shocking Hamlets. The fear of textual exhaustion is producing all kinds of fascinating productions, works of art, films, critical articles, and lesson plans. As Barth explains regarding the “death of the novel”:

If you took a bunch of people out into the desert and the world didn’t end, you’d come home shamefaced, I imagine; but the persistence of an art form doesn’t invalidate work created in the comparable apocalyptic ambience. That is one of the fringe benefits of being an artist instead of a prophet.

(71)

The traditions of performing and adapting Hamlet are alive and well: however, the radical adaptations that have proliferated on both stage
and page tell us something about the cultural ambience in which such works were produced. Our reactions to Hamlet are becoming increasingly “Post-Hamlet,” as directors, writers, and even teachers respond to a looming sense of textual exhaustion.

Exhaustive reading, exhaustive interpretation, and exhaustive footnotes create another form of textual exhaustion that constructs an interpretive framework around Shakespeare’s Hamlet. Although all of Shakespeare’s plays have attracted extensive commentary, Hamlet has attracted a body of critical commentary like no other. Although exhausting the possible critical articles that could be written about Hamlet isn’t any more possible than exhausting its possibilities in performance, it doesn’t mean that scholars haven’t worried about it. In 1908, Horace Howard Furness begged the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard to stop writing on Hamlet (Thompson and Taylor 1). Furness’s rationale was that too much had already been written on the play: he argued that the library stacks, even over one hundred years ago, were clogged and glutted with too much Hamlet (Thompson and Taylor 1). As Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor explain:

By the 1990s the average number of publications every year on Hamlet, as recorded in the Shakespeare Quarterly Annual Bibliography, was running at well over 400 ... We must therefore begin by acknowledging the extraordinary size of “the Hamlet phenomenon” and the challenge it represents to everyone who confronts it. The sheer depth and breadth of the tradition weigh heavily on those who tackle Hamlet, whether as actor, director, editor, or critic. (1–2)

This kind of textual exhaustion—the incredible plethora of critical readings of Hamlet—creates the canon of accepted interpretive possibilities by which Hamlet is received and understood as Hamlet, outlining the boundaries of those adaptations and performances that may be accused of not being “Hamley” enough. Such textual exhaustion functions to tell us what kinds of interpretations are generally expected and are considered acceptable—what is and isn’t a part of the scholarly mainstream. As Catherine M. Chin writes of exegetical exhaustion in Biblical commentary: “The work of textual exhaustion … is not purely philosophical ... [it] also clearly participate[s] in the projects of establishing the limits of acceptable language and of ‘imposing’ those limits on their readership” (427). When audiences and readers perceive an adaptation of Hamlet as too radical or strange (as a way we think the play shouldn’t be adapted), it tells us something about those productions that seem more typically mainstream (the way we think the play should be adapted). When we are reading/interpreting Hamlet in a way we think it shouldn’t be read, it tells us something about our assumptions about how we think it should be read. Ironically, this kind of exhaustive annotating and
reading, which produces a copious catalogue of potential approaches to the play, creates a plenitude of artistic possibilities in the face of imagined/threatened exhaustion.

A third possible meaning of “textual exhaustion” is the imagined threat of technology to the book itself. We live in a world in which we are bombarded with textual media: billboards, pop-up ads, social media posts, text messages. Aided by the rise of the computer, this proliferation of text has, to many scholars, seemed to be a potential threat to the future of the physical book itself (Fitzpatrick 519). Fitzpatrick describes this phenomenon as “literary culture’s conviction that, for good or ill, new computer technologies have changed our relationship to the written word in general” (519). This specific brand of textual exhaustion, particularly prevalent in the 1990s and 2000s, is similar to the feared exhaustion of the novel that academics wrestled with back in the 1960s (520). This “concern is a peculiarly technology-focused version of an anxiety with a long cultural history,” but “the technological turn … reveals a new spin … made possible by the ways that the computer is actually intervening in text, both in terms of delivery and in terms of production” (520). As with other kinds of textual exhaustion, the extreme proliferation of texts leads to a paradoxical fear of a certain kind of text’s ultimate demise. Fitzpatrick describes this as “the irony of the computer age itself, in which text has become increasingly ubiquitous and yet print-on-paper seems destined to go the way of the horse-drawn carriage” (519). If we are afraid that the book is dying, many readers will do all that they can to save it—and by extension, to “save” the larger institutions (such as libraries and bookstores) that the existence of the book seems to support (523). Ironically, William Shakespeare, a playwright, has become the ultimate symbol for the book in the English-speaking world. His power as a cultural icon, his place at the top of the literary canon, and his status as the staple of the English curriculum mean that worries about the future of the book become worries about Shakespeare. And Hamlet, that most popular and ubiquitous of Shakespearean tragedies, is frequently allowed to stand in as the ultimate symbol for all of Shakespeare (and thus, the symbol for the entire literary canon). As Ivo Kamps notes, “in the body of canonical literature, no text is more canonical than Hamlet” (22). Indeed, Lee Edelman describes Hamlet as “the paradigmatic literary work of modern Western culture” (155). Of course, the fear that technology will supplant the literary text is as misplaced as any other belief in textual exhaustion. As Joseph Tabbi points out, “new technological achievements do not have to mean the forceful displacement of older media” (n.p.). When computers and texts are combined, “the result need not be conflict; instead, the relationship could prove symbiotic” (Fitzpatrick 521). In short, our era is worried about the future of the book, and Hamlet is often allowed to stand in as the ultimate symbol of the written word.
By extension, the fight to save Hamlet from potential exhaustion becomes a project to save both the humanities and humanism itself. As Neil Postman explains:

Surrounding every technology are institutions whose organization—not to mention their reason for being—reflects the world-view promoted by the technology. Therefore, when an old technology is assaulted by a new one, institutions are threatened. When institutions are threatened, a culture finds itself in crisis.

If the book, if Shakespeare, if Hamlet, is central to an education in the humanities, what happens when such culturally loaded texts (and all they represent) are perceived to be threatened? In an era of heady technological innovation, it is possible that “the book … is no longer the axis of our intellectual culture” (Birkerts 152). We are, of course, afraid of the “axis of our intellectual culture” changing, and this fear may explain why we posit the death of various media and texts only to strive to prove that they are not dead. The fear of losing Hamlet is more than just the fear of losing a 400-year-old play text; it is the fear of losing the humanities—and perhaps even what it means to be human. According to Marjorie Garber, Shakespeare is “the fantasy of originary cultural wholeness, the last vestige of universalism” (243). Hamlet is a play of special symbolic cultural import, even among Shakespeare’s plays. As Terence Hawkes points out, “Over the years, Hamlet has taken on a huge and complex symbolizing function and, as a part of the institution called ‘English Literature,’ it has become far more than a mere play by a mere playwright” (4). Harold Bloom advances Hamlet to a status near that of Godhead: Hamlet’s “effect upon the world’s culture is incalculable. After Jesus, Hamlet is the most cited figure in Western consciousness; no one prays to him, but no one evades him for long either” (xix). In Western culture, Hamlet is not just a book; it is the book—the text that symbolically stands in for the literary canon itself. To lose this all-important text—this symbol of the book itself—prefigures larger fears about the limits and future of the human. Christopher Keep has argued that there is “an intimate connection between the loss of the book and the loss of the self; as our cultural experiences become more technologized, they seem to many to become less human” (qtd. in Fitzpatrick 521). In an age when Bloom can claim that Shakespeare invented the human, to lose Shakespeare (and especially Hamlet) is thought to be a fundamental blow to the integrity of that which is human. Thus, the death of Hamlet—the death of the book—would mean “the death of the traditional humanities … Hence the ‘end of civilization as we know it’ tone that much of this eulogizing takes on” (Fitzpatrick 521). The “Post-Hamlet” phenomenon explored in this collection is a combination of these various cultural anxieties: the fear
that performances of *Hamlet* have been exhausted, the fear that interpretations of *Hamlet* have become too copious, and the fear that the book is dying (with *Hamlet* as the quintessential representation of the literary canon). These combined anxieties drive our particular historical moment further and further into stranger and stranger *Hamlets*.

In labeling the productions, films, and critical approaches in this collection as “Post-Hamlet” artifacts, we are not asserting that *Hamlet* is dead—quite the contrary. Paradoxically, the fear of cultural exhaustion is the endpoint at which things begin anew. Of course, “formal experimentalism” in the theater may eventually be “destined to burn itself out” (Fitzpatrick 525). But even an abandonment of the more radical production trends of recent decades doesn’t really predict the end of *Hamlet*. Barth’s commentary on the larger trajectory of Samuel Beckett’s career provides a useful analogy here:

Beckett has become virtually mute, muse wise, having progressed from marvelously constructed English sentences through terser French ones to the unsyntactical, unpunctuated prose of *Comment C’est* and “ultimately” to wordless mimes. One might extrapolate a theoretical course for Beckett: language after all consists of silence as well as sound, and mime is still communication … but by the language of action. But the language of action consists of rest as well as movement, and so in the context of Beckett’s progress, immobile, silent figures still aren’t altogether ultimate. How about an empty, silent stage, then, or blank pages—a “happening” where nothing happens. … But dramatic communication consists of the absence as well as the presence of the actors … and so even that would be imperfectly ultimate in Beckett’s case. Nothing at all, then, I suppose; but Nothingness is necessarily and inextricably the background against which Being, et cetera.

(68)

Although Beckett’s work became increasingly minimalist throughout his career (*Waiting for Godot* has characters even if it has no plot; Beckett’s later plays reduced characters to a solitary mouth on the stage or attempted to stage plays with no human figures at all), his theater displayed a radical experimentalism that, had he lived long enough, would have eventually reached the point of negation—an empty stage; no artistic creation whatsoever. But as Barth points out, this radical reduction of text, player, and playing space would only lead to the formless empty dark that is ripe for new creation—a void that is hungry for the new word to be spoken. As Chin explains this paradox, “in an interpretive sense, the fullness of meaning is both the end point and the beginning of interpretation, although it is necessarily experienced by the interpreter as an exhaustive experience over time” (427). As we pile up more meanings, we are driven by the fear of textual exhaustion to pile up more and more and more:
Introduction

the inevitable effect of textual exhaustion is to produce more text. In her analysis of novels, Fitzpatrick finds that “the primary effect of the writer’s concern about the death of print is the production and distribution of more print” (522–23). Of course, the primary effect of our culture’s concern about the death of Hamlet is the production and distribution of more Hamlet. Thus, Hamlet is insulated against textual exhaustion by fears of textual exhaustion. Ultimately, it doesn’t matter if the cultural anxiety regarding the potential death of Hamlet is well founded—it only matters what kind of art and scholarship that anxiety has (and is) generating and what kinds of “new” Hamlets it is producing. We can only assume that the perceived death of Hamlet will prove as illusory as the death of the novel: “Of course, as Paul Mann trenchantly points out, literary forms and modes often thrive on these intimations of imminent doom; writing about the end of the novel is, after all, still writing” (Fitzpatrick 529). We must conclude that the rest is ... probably not silence.

The Undead Dane: Postmodern Objects of Play

With the fear of finding the end to Hamlet also comes the hope that Hamlet, in his many forms and fashions, still resonates with performers, audiences, readers, and writers today. Indeed, the fear of Hamlet’s ending strongly ties to the play’s protagonist’s own preoccupations and fears, as his words show a hyperfocus on future versions of how his actions will be understood and narrated, post-Hamlet. Even as Hamlet dies, he seeks to control the future:

O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,  
Things standing thus unknown, shall leave behind me!  
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,  
Absent thee from felicity awhile,  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,  
To tell my story.

(5.2.327–32)

Hamlet’s concern is that those who tell his story will change his intent. And yet readers, writers, and audience members of Hamlet and its various appropriations change the story to reflect our own philosophical questions and contemporary concerns. Are we the Horatios who are asked to honor Hamlet’s memory? How much of what we write, read, view, and consume is controlled by Hamlet’s words and pleas, and to what extent are we free agents interpreting the text, plot, and characters, including Hamlet, as we see fit for our own purposes and entertainment? Despite our anxiety, or perhaps because of our anxiety, we will never be finished interpreting, analyzing, interrogating, recreating, and reconfiguring the Dane (or Shakespeare).
Paul Menzer describes the anecdotal performance history of *Hamlet*:

As a body, *Hamlet*'s anecdotes dilate the distance between exemplarity and anonymity, which Yorick's skull celebrates. ... They [the anecdotes] gather not just to mock death or allay the shame of mock-death but to protest. And what they seem intent on protesting is the real meaning of *Hamlet*. The real meaning of *Hamlet* is that it ends.

(65)

While *Hamlet* the play, like all plays, ends, thoughts, stories, and adaptations of *Hamlet* (these “protestations” of ongoing Shakespearean life) reassure us that there is no end to our discussions and recreations of *Hamlet*. Adaptations and appropriations of *Hamlet* can help the beholder remember Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and even a specific production of it. In *Shakespeare’s Hamlet in an Era of Textual Exhaustion*, we argue that these works sometimes insist on existing beyond and possibly even without Shakespeare’s Hamlet—while simultaneously speaking back to the play and opening up new sites of interpretation. Postmodern objects of play, such as *Plants vs. Zombies’* Shakespeare Zombie, Alawar Entertainment’s *Hamlet* app game, and Wentworth’s *Hamlet* puzzle function as literary *memento mori*, reminders of the death or absence of Hamlet or *Hamlet* that also seek to keep the Dane and the idea of play (with or without a performance or reading of the play) alive—or at least undead.

Shakespeare Zombie exists on the outskirts of *Plants vs. Zombies*’ gardens. A spin-off of the popular app game, the Shakespeare Zombie first appeared on the animated game’s Facebook page in 2013. In the app, developed by PopCap Games, players engage in gardening warfare to battle starving zombies. The game’s play space, or yard, simultaneously functions as both a graveyard and a place of renewal, as gamers protect their homes by planting new life that will dismember the hordes of encroaching undead that threaten the game’s suburban landscape. The Shakespeare Zombie, while developed to advertise the game online, never appears in the game itself. Thus, Shakespeare Zombie exists both outside of *Hamlet* and outside of the apocalyptic game it was created to promote—yet the figure resurrects the Bard, *Hamlet*, and the app game itself, showing that Shakespeare and Hamlet remain “undead” for fans of both the game and Shakespeare.

The zombie image clearly conflates Shakespeare and Hamlet. The undead Bard clutches a skull in his left hand: Yorick’s skull (or the skull we are assuming is Yorick’s) is missing a jaw and has only three teeth. No words emerge from Shakespeare Zombie’s mouth (true to his zombie form), but the Facebook caption evokes Hamlet: “To brain or not to brain. That is the question. The answer is ‘yes’”—this parody simultaneously mocks Hamlet and lovers of *Hamlet* as well as inviting us to play.
green, it is comforting that his goatee and mustache are intact. His dou-
blet, vest, and ruff collar are mixed with contemporary business dress
(Shakespeare’s red and white tie links him to the zombies in the original
game who also appear in business-casual attire). His purple hat with a
white feather sits awry on his green, balding head—even though he is
a zombie, he still has some of his hair (although a little less voluminous
than shown in the Chandos portrait) (Taylor). Thus, the image is simul-
taneously recognizable as both Shakespeare and Hamlet.
Although the zombie Bard himself stares out from the Internet with
an expression that could be read as surprise, fear, or disgust, Shake-
speare Zombie received over three thousand one hundred likes, two
hundred twenty shares, and one hundred three comments on Facebook.
While a few of the comments briefly referenced the Renaissance, Yorick,
Hamlet’s “to be or not to be” speech, or the skull Shakespeare Zombie
holds, many comments were enthusiastic remarks of anticipation about
the Plants vs. Zombies 2 Dark Ages world. The Dark Ages Preview for
this level advertises: “Bring out your undead to the year 948! Harvest
mushrooms in the dark of knight and get medieval on zombies from the
days of yore” (Plants vs. Zombies 2). (No one in the comment section
corrected other fans about the time period being several hundred years
off for the Shakespeare Zombie.) Yet the playwright’s “zombified” im-
age clearly sparked the excitement of these players, regardless of whether
they also recognized the figure as the undead Dane. The Shakespeare/
Hamlet Zombie lurks on in the digital world, ready to eat the brains
of players and fans—and he will live on in the digital sphere and in the
imaginations of those who play Plants vs. Zombies, as well as those
who have consumed the image without having played the game. For the
purposes of the Facebook post itself, Shakespeare is simply propaganda
that sells a video game. But Shakespeare Zombie may also remind both
gamers and non-gamers alike that, while Shakespeare and Hamlet are
dead, they are also culturally undead, as much a part of today’s land-
scape of play as they were in the early modern theater.
The zombie Facebook post playfully engages with anxieties about the
death of Hamlet—the fear of audiences tiring of Hamlet productions,
the fear of exhausting interpretations of Hamlet, and the fear of the end
of reading the book (Hamlet) itself. Ultimately, this is an image of
Hamlet that is not an image of Hamlet—for the dead figure of Hamlet
is supplanted by both the image of Shakespeare and the image of the
zombie. In the cartoon image, Shakespeare Zombie functions as an as-
semblage of Hamlet, the gravedigger, and Yorick. It is oddly appropriate
that his digital life is only outside of the Plants vs. Zombies game. By
never appearing in the game, the Zombie Shakespeare fails to play the
role prepared for him by his makers—just as Hamlet wrestles with his
failure to play his part as revenger and act on his grief. He, like Shake-
speare Zombie, is isolated from the main action of (the) play while we
write about him, ponder Shakespeare’s words, and toy with his appropriation. His appearance as a zombie reminds us of both Hamlet’s fictional death and Shakespeare’s actual death. And yet, Hamlet as Shakespeare Zombie signifies that Hamlet lives on beyond the play and the stage and that *Hamlet* will remain a part of our culture, despite our anxieties about whether Shakespeare Zombie or Hamlet plays a complex role in the game, a player’s thoughts, or the act of appropriation. Clearly, (digital) players are still finding ways to play with Shakespeare’s (undead) Hamlet.

Alawar Entertainment’s *Hamlet: or the Last Game without MMORPG Features, Shaders and Product Placement* also takes a post-*Hamlet* approach to adapting Shakespeare. In this app game, Hamlet has inadvertently been incapacitated, crushed by a man in a time machine who must then finish Hamlet’s quest for revenge against Claudius, who has murdered Gertrude and Old Hamlet and taken Ophelia as a wife, with Polonius’s help. While the space hero from the future is not a Shakespearean character, the altered plot and game involves the play’s other characters. Instead of engaging Hamlet, the game focuses on the actions of the post-*Hamlet* alien hero. Thus, Hamlet, a broad-chested blond prince in the game, is thrice removed from completing his revenge: the protagonist’s crash landing prevents Hamlet from fighting Claudius; then, the weaker-looking hero serves as Hamlet’s surrogate in seeking revenge; and finally, Hamlet and the hero must rely on the adeptness of the game player to move the alien forward in his quest. Even while this *Hamlet* game seeks to go beyond Hamlet’s story, the app still reveals the Dane’s (and the reader or player’s) time-honored frustration with delay. In playing this *Hamlet* adaptation, both Allison and Lisa, who were disappointed by Hamlet’s absence from the game and exhausted by the Hamlet surrogate’s passive stance and excessive thought bubbles, were even more exasperated with their own ineptitude as gamers. Among other challenges faced in completing the game, the player must tap the screen to electrify both Polonius and Laertes, cause Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to be seized by an octopus on a ship, and defeat Claudius with his own machine (a menacing, many-armed affair of gears, levers, pincers, and hooks). The player, aided by the Grim Reaper, even has to revive the alien hero from a premature death. The player’s handiwork saves the day, while the alien hero mostly stands aside until each problem is complete, and he passes on to the next level, or “act” (the game, of course, has five acts). In the frame before Act Five, the alien hero smiles down at a skull whose thought bubble emits: “TO BE, OR NOT TO BE.” Hamlet’s famous words are reassigned to death’s maw, and the game’s narrative playfully asks, “But will there be, or not be, a happy ending? That is the question” (Savvinykh, Plotnikov, and Egoshin). Hamlet and Ophelia are alive and reunited at the end, and the alien hero travels back “to his time, forgetting about why he originally visited the past” (Savvinykh, Plotnikov, and Egoshin). Hamlet has no part in the action; he
is entirely absent from the game, appearing only in the narrative frame at the beginning and end of the app. Like Shakespeare Zombie, he exists on the outskirts of play, allowing the alien hero and gamer to seek victory over Claudius. Yet the alien hero’s lack of action (without the player’s help) and fate are closely tied to Hamlet’s concerns over his acts and how his story will be told. As in Shakespeare’s Hamlet, a failure of memory is central; in the end, the alien hero forgets his quest.

From the gift shops of the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Folger Shakespeare Library, and Shakespeare’s Globe to online vendors like Amazon or Etsy, fans can purchase mementos that commemorate Shakespeare, Hamlet, and other plays.26 One example of such a memento is Wentworth Puzzles’ forty-piece puzzle of Hamlet.27 The puzzle pieces shape, challenge, and toy with our understanding of Hamlet as players interact with the wooden game. Aside from the printing of characters’ names and Elsinore Castle, the play’s text is completely absent from the puzzle (which may foster an anxiety that this absence, or death, of the text diminishes the puzzle’s connection to the play’s lines): Hamlet’s story is staged on a two-dimensional 125 × 87 mm frame that depicts the Dane’s final action instead of his words, and yet the puzzle includes objects in its pieces and symbolic shapes that reference some of Hamlet’s most compelling images as well as some of Hamlet’s more obscure lines.28

As Sujata Iyengar has observed, Shakespeare craft objects simultaneously both evoke and deny literary nostalgia:

Crafters freely appropriate Shakespearean tags or quotations in different print media … [A]lthough they often use words from Shakespeare, the words themselves in Shakespearean context are often irrelevant or even at cross-purposes to what is being communicated, namely literacy, nostalgia, and beauty.

(360)

Unlike the crafts that Iyengar classifies as appropriations of Shakespeare, the puzzle is an adaptation, but Wentworth’s quotation-less puzzle both evokes and rejects the text of Hamlet, denying the verbose prince his “words, words, words” (2.2.192). However, the puzzle’s images and shapes stitch together parts of the text in ways that speak back to lines in Hamlet, resurrecting sites of meaning, as Hamlet’s words are not actually dead, but encapsulated within the puzzle’s images. For many Shakespeare crafts,

Text turns into transmedial … treasure, but whether or not these intermedial objects are also adaptations here depends upon the knowledge and self-consciousness of the purchaser … they register as intermedial only when we pause to consider the Shakespearean back-story, but as we do so, we create a new kind of medium or art form.

(Iyengar 357)29
For the Wentworth *Hamlet* puzzle, the player’s understanding of the text develops a connection with the artist’s clever allusions and creates a new interpretation of the puzzle’s “performance” of *Hamlet*.

The puzzle’s placement of each character has been carefully staged. In the frame, Hamlet is surrounded by Horatio, Gertrude, Ophelia, Elsinore Castle, and Old Hamlet’s ghost, while Claudius is banished to the edge of the right side of the puzzle, as far away from Hamlet as possible. Hamlet and Horatio appear at the center of the puzzle’s frame. Yorick’s skull floats above the castle walls, neatly fitting between two towers as if the castle itself were his coffin. Old Hamlet’s ghost hovers menacingly above Claudius, Laertes, and Horatio, with his head close to Hamlet’s and to the castle; his pointing finger almost touches Claudius’s disheveled hair and aligns directly parallel with Hamlet’s piercing sword.

The objects in the scene that surround the characters playfully encourage puzzle players to ponder Shakespeare’s lines while piecing together the human figures’ actions. For example, a black rat, yellow stars, and violets fill the space in between the characters. The image of the rat echoes Hamlet’s cry of “How now? a rat? Dead for a ducat, dead!” (3.4.24) as he mistakenly kills the hiding Polonius. But Polonius is not in the frame. Instead, the black rat, perched at Claudius’s booted foot, looks up at the dying Claudius’s gaping wound (eagerly anticipating dinner, perhaps). A less menacing image surrounds Ophelia: vines of violets curl around the peaceful Ophelia’s body and dress, honoring Laertes’s wish that “And from her fair and unpolluted flesh / May violets spring” (5.1.228–29). Claudius’s rapier, which he has dropped, nestles into Ophelia’s hair, suggesting that the dead bodies and objects will become one, not just in the puzzle, but also beyond the grave. The yellow stars seem to brighten the scene until readers of *Hamlet* think of the ways in which Shakespeare uses stars in the play. 30 Old Hamlet’s ghost tells Hamlet, “I could a tale unfold whose lightest word / Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, / Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres” (1.5.15–17). Polonius, speaking with Gertrude and Claudius, imparts that he admonished Ophelia that “Lord Hamlet is a prince, out of thy star. / This must not be” (2.2.141–42). Hamlet’s mentioning of stars in Act Five communicates his mourning for Ophelia, his frustration at Laertes’s performance of grief, and the grim aspect of preparing for his own death:

> What is he whose grief
> Bears such emphasis? whose phrase of sorrow
> Conjures the wand’ring stars, and makes them stand
> Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,
> Hamlet the Dane.

(5.1.243–47)
When he prepares to duel Laertes, Hamlet remarks, “I’ll be your foil, Laertes. In mine ignorance / Your skill shall, like a star i’ th’ darkest night, / Stick fiery off indeed” (5.2.233–35). The stars speak back to lines in the play that remind us that the characters see stars as light, fate, and “wonder-wounded hearers” of the characters’ suffering.

The puzzle further complicates the piecing together of the performance a step beyond the two-dimensional images of the characters and objects printed on the wooden pieces. The Wentworth puzzle artists designed and cut several symbolic images as puzzle piece shapes: a castle, a goblet, a skull, a ghost, and a bat. These objects’ shapes connect the dying characters’ fragmented bodies to one another as the puzzle is assembled. Most interestingly, the bat becomes a central focus in the puzzle’s composition: not only do two bat images flank Old Hamlet’s ghost, a bat-carved puzzle piece hangs upside down in the puzzle’s center. The bat-shaped piece reveals Horatio’s face as he peeks behind his hands at Laertes’s dying gasps. The bat shape’s ominous presence casts a darkness on Horatio’s part in the story: he becomes Hamlet’s “familiar” who must tell Hamlet’s story. We too become Hamlet’s narrators by piecing the puzzle together, instigators in the performance of his dying act. We piece together the fragmented bodies in the puzzle, acknowledging that they will be dismembered again when the puzzle is dismantled. But the pieces will always be there—ready to be resurrected from their cardboard graves to act out their deaths. The puzzle both performs Hamlet’s death and yet resurrects Hamlet and his connections to the play’s characters and objects each time the puzzle is pieced together. Hamlet, frozen mid-action in the puzzle’s frame, is preserved as simultaneously living and dying, forever undead.

Even the playing with and close reading of these objects of Hamlet and Shakespeare fancy may create anxiety about the imagined exhaustion of Hamlet, as one may wonder at first if anything could be said about Shakespeare Zombie, a Hamlet app game, and a Hamlet puzzle. Our reading could be seen as an example of what the postscript of this volume playfully describes as “too-close reading.” Perhaps this critical reading of Hamlet may be criticized by scholars for critical exhaustion of the margins of Hamlet. But it seems significant that Hamlet’s story is still being performed and told even in adaptations that kill Hamlet, omit Hamlet or Hamlet, or reduce Hamlet to fragments. Here, we have focused on three Hamlet adaptations that are preoccupied with the undead Dane, showing that even when Hamlet’s death is a forgone conclusion, in our imaginative and literary (and playful) worlds, we will continually resurrect him.

Post-Hamlet Artifacts

Although Hamlet has long been associated with Renaissance humanism, Todd Andrew Borlik’s essay, which begins the volume’s explorations of postmodern adaptations of Hamlet, argues that Hamlet has more
recently become associated with the post-human. Focusing on Nam June Paik’s *Hamlet Robot*, Heiner Müller’s *Hamletmachine*, Emma Vieceilli’s *Manga Shakespeare: Hamlet*, and Nick O’Donohoe’s *Too Too Solid Flesh*, Borlik argues that postmodern thinkers are using Shakespeare’s quintessentially humanist play to “unthink the human.” As he places Hamlet’s ideas regarding body versus machine in conversation with Cartesian mechanics, Borlik considers early modern conceptions of man/machine and what those understandings of the human mean for the postmodern man/machine. Borlik sees parody and humor as central to the postmodern vision of *Hamlet*, arguing that “the play’s enduring relevance in the post-modern, post-Gutenberg, and post-human age may depend on … sardonic adaptations that infuse it in varying mixtures with the agony and ecstasy of the technological sublime.”

Elizabeth Klett’s essay also examines *Hamlet* in an unconventional medium. Her examination of *Hamlet* in Christopher Wheeldon’s 2007 ballet, *Misericordes/Elsinore*, focuses on the struggle of a choreographer who fundamentally felt that “*Hamlet* doesn’t make sense. …” Klett argues that Hamlet, in large part because of its textual exhaustion, was able to play multiple (and paradoxical) roles in the piece, for Klett finds in this ballet that Hamlet is both origin (and thus textual authority) as well as a block to artistic completion. In the final version of the ballet, allusions are both absent and present, visible and invisible, as one can watch the ballet without realizing that one is watching *Hamlet*. Klett argues that Wheeldon’s rejection of *Hamlet* was based in two convictions, both of which indicate that we are perhaps living in a “post-Hamlet” moment. First, he became convinced that the play does not make sense, due to its continual contradictions and questionings. Second, he concluded that its narrative complexity made it unsuitable for ballet. Ultimately, Klett concludes that, for this particular performance, “*Hamlet* is both an essential frame of reference and entirely superfluous.”

Further exploring how elements of *Hamlet* have been turned to new and distinctively twenty-first-century concerns, Chloe Owen analyzes the ways Ophelia and imagery related to her constitute an important part of representations of mental disability in the work of author and songwriter Emilie Autumn. Owen contends that Autumn’s novel, *The Asylum for Wayward Victorian Girls*, engages critically with a dangerous cultural preoccupation with Ophelia’s madness, isolation, and suicide. The “Opheliac” identity in Autumn’s works reflects the potential manipulation or abuse of people with mental disabilities. Owen concludes that by laying bare the unsettlingly romanticized aspects of Ophelia’s suffering, Autumn invites readers to question potentially damaging attitudes toward those with mental disabilities.
Jim Casey’s essay examines the ways in which we are increasingly becoming “post-Hamlet” on a global level. Drawing on adaptation theory, particularly Douglas Lanier’s “Shakespearean Rhizomatics” and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s conceptual rhizomes, Casey examines the “hyperreal” quality of international Shakespeare film (Feng Xiaogang’s 2006 Chinese wuxia film The Banquet). This chapter argues that film is increasingly bringing us into an era in which Shakespeare has become “post-textual.” Focusing on the ways in which these two films are haunted by “ghosts of Shakespeares past,” Casey argues that they manifest their postmodern aesthetics through what he describes as “anti-pastiche.” Although many have argued for the value of Shakespeare’s language as that which is fundamentally “Shakespearean” about Hamlet, Casey concludes that authenticity is as spectral as Old Hamlet’s ghost. As in The Banquet, the image of Shakespeare [...] is disconnected from any original reality [...]. Like Umberto Eco’s “Absolute Fake,” Baudrillard’s hyperreal simulacra, or Jacques Derrida’s spectrogenic ghost, this Fakespeare has supplanted the “real” Shakespeare and is more real than the real, even (perhaps especially) when in translation.

In Chapter 6, Amrita Sen returns us to Vishal Bhardwaj’s Haider. Offering a political reading of the film, she points out the many criticisms that scholars and activists of Kashmir have leveled at this controversial Hamlet adaptation. Concerned with Shakespeare and appropriation, but also with the political effects of Shakespeare as the figure who appropriates, Sen questions the motivations of Bhardwaj. Essentially, the filmmaker uses Shakespeare as an authorizing agent to appropriate tragic events in Kashmir. In addition, the film presents an uncomfortable conflation of character and geographical (and heavily politicized) space: as the filmmaker explained in an interview, “In my film, in a way, Kashmir becomes Hamlet.” Sen ultimately questions both the underlying motives and potential ethical outcomes of transforming a place into a “consumable theatrical object.” Perhaps this production is truly post-Shakespeare, as the cultural capital associated with the Bard is transformed from a source of appropriation into a force that appropriates.

Introducing the cluster of essays addressing “post-Hamlet” performances, Sheila T. Cavanagh’s essay explores unconventional performances of Hamlet that are simultaneously posed as both performance and rehabilitation. Drawing connections between performances of Hamlet in prison (for the purposes of “rehabilitation”) and performances of Hamlet for children on the autism spectrum (for the purposes of play “therapy”), Cavanagh’s essay reflects on the ways that both incarceration and inclusion may change our vision of Hamlet. Taking her examples from noted practitioners in the field, such as Curt Tofteland
(Shakespeare Behind Bars), Kelly Hunter (Flute Theatre), Scott Jackson (Shakespeare Notre Dame and Westville Correctional Facility), Steve Rowland (Monroe Correctional Facility and Shakespeare Central), and Jonathan Shailor (Shakespeare Prison Project, Wisconsin), Cavanagh explores how the inclusive programs she discusses “demonstrate the ways that active involvement with Shakespeare can enable individual participants access to new emotional, intellectual, and bodily knowledge.”

Developing the discussions of Hamlet in translation, Yi-Hsin Hsu’s chapter examines the history of Hamlet performances in Japan. Specifically, Hsu gives special focus to Anzai Tetsuo’s Hamlet Q1 (1983) and Sugihara Kunio’s KUNIO 11 HAMLET (2014)—adaptations that represent a dramatic change in Japanese productions of Shakespeare’s play. Performances that use the so-called “bad” quarto as a foundation have a productively subversive opportunity to provide “revisionist alternatives to established types of Shakespearean performances: intercultural Shakespeare, canonical Shakespeare, and experimental Shakespeare.” Non-Anglophone performances, Hsu argues, can “provide ideal sites for the productions of a non-canonical quarto whose dramaturgical merits often fall victim to its linguistic inferiority”: rather than focusing on Shakespeare’s linguistic merits—which may not come through in translation—these performances use Q1 as a resource for novelty, pragmatism, and accessibility.

In Chapter 9, Adam Sheaffer continues the discussion of unconventional performance by examining Joseph Papp’s Naked Hamlet—a drastically cut version of Shakespeare’s text that was performed in a variety of nontraditional theater spaces. Drawing on performance theorists and phenomenologists such as Marvin Carlson, Richard Schechner, Edward Casey, and Gaston Bachelard, Sheaffer addresses the ways that new types of performance venues provide a “vital component in illuminating and refreshing the meaning of Hamlet,” even though Papp’s radical rewriting may have threatened to exhaust it. Space is of central importance to Sheaffer’s reading of Naked Hamlet:

In the course of these perambulations around and in various architectural, educational, and recreational spaces, the Naked Hamlet—an admixture of Shakespeare’s text, contemporary gesture, music, scenic and costume design, and even actor biography—unfolded and stretched as the addition of contemporary materials and the reverberations of each space informed and expanded the production.

Combining archival theater research with a reading of Michel Foucault’s “Of Other Spaces,” Sheaffer examines the relationship between physical place, performance space, and textual exhaustion.

Introducing the volume’s discussion of Hamlet pedagogy, Deneen Senasi finds Shakespeare’s Hamlet to be a text obsessed not only with
death and with rituals of mourning, but with its own process of ending. Indeed, Senasi argues that this obsession with ending creates a play that “dramatizes the contingency of cultural memory, and envisions a sense of textual exhaustion that threatens to encompass all utterance, including the play itself.” Combining a close reading of *Hamlet* with modern appropriations she has presented to her own students (particularly *Hamlet* cartoons, which she sees as containing the tightly “compressed form of the meme”), Senasi questions the role of *Hamlet* appropriations in the contemporary college classroom. Do such appropriations build on students’ knowledge of Shakespeare’s text? Are allusions to *Hamlet* finally so ubiquitous in our culture that such appropriations can be taught as stand-alone texts? Combining stories of real-life classroom experiences with a fresh reading of Shakespeare’s text, Senasi’s essay considers the future roles that *Hamlet* may play in the liberal arts classroom and suggests that

> If we wish to think through what may become of readers in an age of textual exhaustion, *Hamlet* serves as a key case study, both in terms of how reading is represented in Shakespeare’s play and how that text is being read in the complex cultural matrices of the twenty-first century.

Turning from classroom education to the developmental representation of a “post-*Hamlet*” bildungsroman, Victoria R. Farmer explores the productively feminist rewriting of Ophelia’s story in Lisa Klein’s novel *Ophelia*. Considering damaging elements of Ophelia’s cultural significance—primarily as a stereotyped object of patriarchal oppression whose story is a monitory tale about thwarted female identity—Farmer proposes that Klein’s novel offers a moderating view of this figure’s symbolic power for twenty-first-century readers. Farmer’s discussion focuses on elements of the novel’s structure (including an appendix, “A Reading List from Ophelia,” which includes medieval and Renaissance texts on romantic relationships, motherhood, and self-fashioning) and its depictions of Ophelia’s scholarly and practical education. The novel’s progressive message about Ophelia’s agency, Farmer contends, is complicated by a lack of autonomy—Ophelia’s identity is conditioned by her relationships with other characters—but ultimately, this depiction represents a dynamic, “evolving person who contributes indispensably to those around her.”

In the concluding chapter on educational development and *Hamlet*, Erin Presley discusses the role of “relatability” in teaching *Hamlet* to a generation of college students who are decidedly “post-*Hamlet*.” While “relatability” is a difficult criterion to define, the term has become an increasingly important part of pedagogy conversations: addressing texts such as the Modern Language Association’s *Approaches to Teaching*
Shakespeare’s Hamlet and work from the National Council of Teachers of English, Presley finds the Danish prince’s “relatability” to be significant in the college classroom. Focusing on both the potential “relatability” of Shakespeare’s original character and also William Powers’s deliberate employment of “relatability” in Hamlet’s Blackberry, Presley argues that “through the structured use of appropriative works and carefully crafted lesson plans, relatable Hamlet can reinvigorate both classroom and scholarly discussions about the play and provide students with meaningful connections to Shakespeare and contemporary writers.”

Finally, the volume’s postscript draws attention to the performative aspects of Hamlet criticism (and to playing the role of the post-Hamlet critic) in an age overwhelmed by a plethora of Shakespearean scholarship. Fusing elements of creative writing, autobiography, and literary criticism to interrogate questions of authorship, naming, and memory, this chapter focuses particularly on the historical reconstruction (sometimes accurate and sometimes erroneous) of significant cultural texts. Effacing even his own name as author, the late Mr.—— contemplates the ways in which we read names, nicknames, and the erasure of identities and names. In doing so, he questions what counts as a cultural text and interrogates the processes by which we, as literary scholars, determine the weight and significance of such texts—and the names attached (or not attached) to them. (For example, does a scholarly journal from bygone days represent a text worthy of close reading in relation to Shakespeare’s Hamlet? And if so, what happens when we attempt to close-read it?) The unnamed author posits that, when it comes to reading the overread text (such as Shakespeare’s Hamlet), we may find ourselves forced to engage in acts of “too-close reading.” The possible dangers and potential rewards of a too-close reading of Hamlet become all too apparent in this postscript’s self-consciously postmodern construction—and especially in its playfully lengthy “works (not) cited.”

Notes
1 Thompson and Taylor list data showing that there are more scholarly publications on Hamlet than on any other Shakespearean play (1-2). Hamlet is also currently the most frequently taught Shakespearean play (see Presley’s essay in this volume for further data). Hamlet is also often cited as Shakespeare’s most frequently performed play (White 2).
2 For more on the theme of ending and that-which-comes-after in Hamlet, see Senasi’s essay in this volume. Senasi’s chapter explores the impossibility of complete endings in Hamlet. On the whole, this book is focused primarily on that which comes after such incomplete endings.
3 The Penguin edition gives “sullied flesh” rather than “solid flesh” for this famous textual crux.
4 Harold Bloom’s The Invention of the Human is perhaps the ultimate consummation of this line of criticism.
5 For more on adaptations focused on Ophelia, see Peterson and Williams.
6 Borlik’s essay in this collection addresses multiple robot Hamlets.

7 *Hamlet* app (Savvinykh, Plotnikov, and Egoshin).

8 For one account of “undressing” *Hamlet*, see Sheaffer’s essay on “The Naked *Hamlet*” in this volume.

9 On animal and computer-generated *Hamlets*, see Borlik’s essay in this volume.

10 Many have noted *Hamlet’s* special attraction for avant-garde artists. As R. S. White points out:

   Just as readily as *Hamlet* stands for many as a high-water mark of canonical art, it equally attracts rebels and experimenters, those avant-garde writers, dramatists, performers, and filmmakers who seek new ways of expressing innovative and challenging thoughts in the hope that they can change their own world.

(1)

11 The play has a “strange capacity to inspire extreme innovation in later writers, performers, and filmmakers” (White 2).

12 Hinden postulates a “theater of exhaustion” (although his analysis is limited to the works of Tom Stoppard). We would argue that the theater we are most exhausted with is *Hamlet*.

13 We are not claiming that *Hamlet* is the only Shakespeare play that has been the subject of experimental productions or far-flung adaptations. However, it seems clear that *Hamlet* has been the subject of more experimental productions in recent years (the more bizarre, the better, it sometimes seems) than the other plays.

14 Some readers might argue that the Bible is the ultimate canonical text. But since some claim the Bible as a sacred text, it means that the secular Western world may not regard it as a work that is equally owned by all readers. And for those for whom it is a sacred text, the Bible may be seen as impossible to exhaust because it is perceived as divine in origin. If what matters is perception, then what matters is that many think of *Hamlet* as the ultimate symbol of the literary canon (and *Hamlet* is certainly taught in the modern American classroom more often than the Bible itself).

15 We are inspired here by what Fitzpatrick describes as “the anxiety of obsolescence”:

   What I hope to explore is how the representation of concern about the present and future state of print—a concern that is part of the larger cultural phenomenon I refer to as the anxiety of obsolescence—serves paradoxically to protect print from the death it presumably predicts.

   (523)

16 As Jonathan Gil Harris writes, “Surviving Hamlet is Horatio’s fate, and in a fashion that suggests Benjamin’s überleben. But Horatio is also committed to making Hamlet live on in future narrations, a project that anticipates how *Hamlet* also survives, in the sense of *fortleben*, on stage, in film, in criticism, and in popular culture” (146). See also Edelman 168.

17 See, for example, Elizabeth Klett’s chapter in this volume, “Or Not To Be: Dancing Beyond *Hamlet* in Christopher Wheeldon’s *Misericordes/Elsinore*.”

18 For a discussion of medieval and Renaissance understandings of the *memento mori*, revenge tragedy, and *Hamlet*, see Henry E. Jacobs, “Shakespeare, Revenge Tragedy, and the Ideology of the Memento Mori.” Jacobs notes that, unlike other revenge tragedies, *Hamlet* preserves the integrity of the principles upon which it meditates:
Most important . . . is the degree to which his [Hamlet’s] articulated contemplations re-present and reinscribe the orthodox vision/version of the religious ideology encoded in the memento mori. Hamlet does not obliterate the authorized discourse; he does not deface the text of the skull, and he does not turn the memento mori into a memento vindictae.

See also Ailsa Grant Ferguson’s “‘Tis now the very witching time of night’: Halloween Horror and the Memento Mori in Hamlet (2000)” for how the memento mori is “recoded” in Almereyda’s Hamlet (131). While this introduction is more concerned with understanding specific adaptations as memento mori of Hamlet’s death (and life), the use of such devices in Renaissance revenge tragedies inspires this reading.

19 See “Promotional Zombies,” a webpage that lists information for Shakespeare Zombie as well other promotional zombies, on the Plants vs. Zombies Wiki Fandom page.

20 Allison is grateful to Adam Rzepka for a conversation after SAA’s Shakespeare, Memory, and Performance 2017 seminar about the undead and zombies and his paper on Romeo and Juliet.

21 The Facebook photo post’s comments demonstrate this. The Fandom site also preserves the image and its life outside the game.

22 See Laurie Osborne’s “iShakespeare: Digital Art/Games, Intermediality, and the Future of Shakespearean Film” for how Shakespeare’s characters and films have been adapted for digital games. Osborne discusses Branagh’s Hamlet: A Murder Mystery (1997), but unlike the Hamlet app, Hamlet is still a part of this game: “the player’s alternative goal for Hamlet—to revenge the father and win the throne—represents a reworking of the plot that apparently offers both agency and immersion in the world of Hamlet” (50-51). Drawing on Bernstein and Greco, Osborne questions how much “agency and immersion” the game affords. Other digital games covered in the article, like Hamlet: the Text Adventure, also present the player as one of the main characters, unlike Zombie Shakespeare, which would actually be the player’s enemy in a game or the Hamlet app game in which Hamlet has been sidelined by another figure. For games and education, see Michael Best’s “Electronic Shakespeares: Which Way Goes the Game?,” which examines Shakespeare games’ interaction, or lack thereof, with teaching Shakespeare and hopes for future games that are advanced in study and game technology.

23 For more on Videogame Shakespeares, see Gina Bloom’s “Videogame Shakespeare: Enskilling Audiences through Theater-Making Games.” Bloom places the Hamlet app game in the category of drama-making games, in which the player essentially inhabits or controls a Shakespearean character; in drama-making games, the gamer does not impersonate the character in the guise of an actor, but rather becomes the character usually to change its outcome in a dramatic plot.

24 The game refers to the hero as a human from the future. It fails to clarify which planet the human and the characters hail from, but the hero does have a light bulb protruding from his head, which may suggest an alien nature.
Big Fish Games’ blog provides an online “Hamlet Walkthrough” for gamers who would like to and need help completing the game’s five acts. See www.bigfishgames.com/blog/walkthrough/hamlet-walkthrough/.

See Sujata Iyengar’s “Upcycling Shakespeare: Crafting Cultural Capital” for an in-depth analysis of Etsy shops, Shakespeare commerce, and what Iyengar terms “Shakescrafting.”

The puzzle cannot be found online when searching Wentworth’s website and so currently exists outside digital marketplaces.

While the puzzle is not a board game or digital game, it still could be categorized as a game. However, it does not neatly fit into one of Gina Bloom’s categories. It is only “theater-themed” if we consider the piecing together of the performance or puzzle as an act of staging the final scene, but the puzzle itself does not have rules that suggest that this is how the player should interact with the pieces. It is not a “drama-making game” because the player is not asked to play a character. While it could possibly be considered a “scholar-making game,” it depends on whether the puzzle player wishes to analyze the text’s connections to the puzzle’s objects. There are no rules included with the puzzle, so its function (beyond putting together the pieces) becomes the player’s preference.

This discussion occurs when Iyengar is describing Etsy shops, like “Ophelia’s Treasures,” that may sell items and use Shakespeare’s characters in ways that are more closely tied to appropriation than adaptation (357). Yet the claim still rings true for adaptations that do not include Shakespeare’s “text” in the creation of the new work.

Based on a word search using Internet Shakespeare Editions, Shakespeare uses the word “star” or “stars” ten times in the second quarto; we have not included all of these references.

As Jenkins notes, Hamlet’s list of “a paddock, from a bat, a gib” (3.4.190) could all be “familiar spirits of witches” (331).

Works Cited


Savvinykh, Stanislav, Kirill Plotnikov, and Alexander Egoshin. Hamlet: or the Last Game without MMORPG Features, Shaders and Product Placement.


