

# Haunting Emotions: Visualizing Hamlet's Melancholy for Students in Two Recent Graphic Novel Adaptations

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## Abstract

The study of emotion and Shakespeare and, in particular, emotion and *Hamlet*, is well established. Shakespeare's work enables us to experience emotions and their transformations as we try to understand them. From the opening of the play, Hamlet's emotions are all too clearly present; Shakespeare defines him as a passionate and emotional man plagued by melancholy. How is this human emotion interpreted and visualized by authors attempting to adapt *Hamlet* in the twenty-first century? In recent years, visual literacy has become a prominent aspect of classroom learning. In a changing, more visually dependent world, students need to learn how to read the visual as well as the textual. The medium of graphic storytelling can help students learn how to do this. This paper will examine two recent graphic novel versions of Shakespeare: *Kill Shakespeare* (2010-current), by Canadian writers Anthony Del Col and Conor McCreery (alongside Andy Belanger as head-artist), and Australian author Nicki Greenberg's *Hamlet* (2010). Each of these graphic novels includes the character Hamlet as the protagonist, and each of these texts approaches adapting the melancholy Dane (and Shakespeare's "text") in very different ways. Through comparisons with Shakespeare's canonical play-text, including Shakespeare's incorporation of humoral ideas of melancholy, we will analyze how this aspect of Hamlet's emotions are visually interpreted and developed in these two new media adaptations. The essay concludes that these adaptations of *Hamlet* work well as a text for K-12 students because the emotions Hamlet experiences are presented in a relatable way. The texts help these students to understand the emotions, and so relate to a character whose complex personality may otherwise be lost in the difficulty of the original text.

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For many K-12 students, the mention of the name Shakespeare inspires groans of complaint, looks of boredom and horrified concern, and protests like: "What's the point? He's been dead for hundreds of years."<sup>1</sup> These students often have difficulty relating to the nuances of Shakespeare's narrative form and language, as well as to representations of complex emotions, such as melancholy, and the multifaceted humoral theory behind the conception of such emotions in early modern dramatic texts like Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Unfortunately for many students, their

encounters with Shakespeare are not happy memories; they are, instead, ones of confusion and feelings of apathy, or worse, inadequacy, and of literally (for some) learning another language. The result is that the "poor old Bard" is pushed aside because his work is labeled as too hard and worse still, irrelevant.<sup>2</sup> Graphic novel adaptations of Shakespeare's work propel themselves off the page in exciting, appealing, and immediate ways. They demystify unfamiliar early modern language, wordplay, and theatrical conventions — not in a way that closes them off, but one that, instead, invites engagement through interpretation. Graphic novel versions of Shakespeare's work allow students to enter the world of a text, literally see the settings, and not only hear the characters speak in a voice they understand, but also recognize and feel their emotions. Although in the past they have been derided as "dumbing down" Shakespeare for students, graphic novel adaptations of Shakespeare's work are fast becoming an indispensable pedagogical resource for many teachers. This speaks to the changing sensibilities in how we approach teaching Shakespeare in the classroom, moving past issues of fidelity ("Is It Shakespeare?" is no longer the question) and embracing the exciting potential of what Douglas Lanier refers to as "Shakespop" (Lanier 2002, 1-21, especially pp. 19-20).<sup>3</sup> Although the aim of these graphic novels and comics is to introduce readers to the stories, characters, and themes found in Shakespeare's work in entertaining ways, as Marion D. Perret aptly notes, "they are not simply illustrated digests of plots and sketches of character" (Perret 2004, 73); these comic book and graphic novel versions of Shakespeare's plays "interpret as well as inform" (73). Every comic book and graphic novel version of a Shakespearean play offers an interpretation by the artist and the adapter, and thus a reader must be conscious and critical of the ways in which these texts "make meaning." This article is a detailed examination of how two recent graphic novels — *Kill Shakespeare* (2010-present) by Canadian writers Anthony Del Col and Conor McCreery (alongside Andy Belanger as head artist) and Australian author Nicki Greenberg's *Hamlet* (2010) — interpret and visualize the human emotion of melancholy, an emotion central to the humoral theory of early modern medical treatises, which is transformed and represented by William Shakespeare in *Hamlet*. This article is not intended to be a detailed examination of how Hamlet's physiological melancholy had its beginnings in early modern medical treatises. What we are interested in is what these texts constitute as the main features of melancholy; how Shakespeare incorporates and questions these ideas in *Hamlet*; and finally how these characteristics are visualized in *Kill Shakespeare* and Greenberg's *Hamlet*. More specifically, this article is a close reading of the appearances of the Ghost in each graphic novel and how these appearances are made visualized indicators of Hamlet's melancholy.

Graphic Novels as Multimodal Texts: Introducing *Kill Shakespeare* and *Hamlet*

The term graphic novel, popularized by cartoonist and writer Will Eisner with the publication of *A Contract With God* (1978), is not without controversy. Renowned comic book artist and author Alan Moore argues that the term has been corrupted by commercial usage, disparaging the term graphic novel as purely a "marketing term" that has now come to mean "expensive comic books" (Kavanagh 2000). In contradiction of Moore's claims, however, is the fact that generally a graphic novel/trade paperback is often either the same price as or cheaper than individual issues of a serialized comic. Will Eisner himself defines graphic novels broadly, as "a form of comic book" (Eisner 2008, 148) and "[l]ong-form works . . . which can encompass works of nonfiction in addition to works that are truly novelistic" (149). A graphic novel, as we refer to it within this article, is a long-form comic book, which if printed, is long enough to be bound as a trade volume.

Comics and graphic novels have often been viewed as a gateway medium into more "serious" learning, particularly for students with learning difficulties; and as scholar Dale Jacobs notes, as "a way station on the road to more higher forms of literacy and to more challenging, and by implication, worth-while texts" (Jacobs 2007, 20). Yet the dynamics of the classroom are changing; visual literacy has become a prominent aspect of classroom learning for a new generation of young people who have grown up on multimodal texts and must "manoeuvre through images constantly" (Dallacqua 2012, 69). We refer here to what the New London Group of literary scholars define as texts that engage in "multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning-making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial, the behavioral and so on" (The New London Group 1996, 64). Multimodal texts include much of the content on the internet, interactive multimedia, television, and film, and many other texts in our contemporary society, including comics and graphic novels. Ashley Kaye Dallacqua's work with fifth-grade students exploring reading engagement through the use of graphic novels offers exciting evidence of the effectiveness of using multimodal texts in the classroom.<sup>4</sup> Rather than simply illustrating action in the text, Dallacqua notes that using graphic novels in the classroom led to discussions where students "paid close attention to detail, made direct references back to the text, and offered explicit textual examples to support their claims" (Dallacqua 2012, 69), all of which are examples of students interpreting and reading the images with great skill and detail. These skills, Dallacqua notes, enhanced not only her students' reading engagement, but also their enjoyment of the text (Dallacqua 2012, 67). As Dallacqua's study shows, the effectiveness of comics and graphic novels as teaching tools lies precisely in their imitation of the way in which students experience Shakespeare through stage and screen adaptations — that is, as a predominantly visual and kinetic experience, with its basis in performance.

In his discussion on the practice of reading comics, graphic novelist Jeff Smith writes that the experience of reading images and words together allows comics to "take on a dimension of time and begin to perform" (Smith 2003, xi). Smith argues that the reason that children love comics is that the movement between panels by the reader "unlocks a private film in [their] imagination [. . .] a secret that only [they] can activate" (xi). Dallacqua's work with students, exploring reading engagement through using graphic novels in the classroom, confirms this assessment of the specific reading process that takes place when students engage with these texts. Dallacqua notes that the students "agreed that reading a graphic novel often felt like watching a movie" (Dallacqua 2012, 65), and during discussion of graphic novels, "would hold up their own invisible video camera, imitating . . . [a] camera zoom or angle" (67). In a 2010 interview with author Nicki Greenberg at Melbourne's Wheeler Centre, renowned Australian author Shaun Tan further connects this reading practice to performance, by describing graphic novels such as Greenberg's as akin to "storyboarding" a film (Shaun Tan quoted in Greenberg and Tan 2010).<sup>5</sup> Authoring a graphic novel, then, is like directing a film, where detail and "continuity is everything" (Shaun Tan, quoted in Greenberg and Tan 2010), and you are in charge of all the "performers." In line with Tan's comments regarding storyboarding, Dallacqua's students also "pointed out that visually, the format of panels within a graphic novel is similar to strips of film" (Dallacqua 2012, 68). Dallacqua adds that if "the blocks of images drawn on a page act as frames of film . . . the reader must be the projector" (68). We do not entirely agree with this assessment, since it makes the readers of graphic novels and comics more passive than they actually are, and more importantly, ignores the process of interpretation during the reading process, something which projectors are unable to achieve. The reader is instead the projector and the audience, as well as occasional director and performer, animating and interpreting, speeding up and slowing down, focusing on or ignoring, and adding and/or editing material, an idea confirmed by one of Dallacqua's students. This student labelled the reading process as a "mind movie"; the student didn't just read text off a page, he "watched" a graphic novel, actively filling in movement and action that happened between panels, and created each scene in his mind (Dallacqua 2012, 69). Reading Shakespeare through comics and graphic novels thus allows students to engage in a type of reading that closely emulates performance. Readers interpret these texts not only through written cues, but also through body language and facial expression, spatial placement, movement, artistic design, and framing, allowing them to relate better to the Shakespearean texts than by simply reading the plays on their own. As with stage and film performances, comics and graphic novels edit the full play text, or adapt and modernize the Shakespearean language completely. *Kill Shakespeare* co-creator Conor McCreery emphasises the performative aspect of comics and

graphic novels. McCreery notes that as in theater and film, the creation of comics is a collaborative process (McCreery 2013, 463). Furthermore, McCreery argues that both "visual depth" (461) and "kinetic energy" (456) are achieved in comics and graphic novels through using elements more commonly associated with stage and screen. Through using film techniques such as "close-ups, wide shots" (461), bold imaginative sets, costumes, and special effects, without any budgetary restraints (457), as well as a visual vocabulary unique to comics, such as "panel borders, panel placements," and "a small run of panels" (461), an artist can drastically alter a reader's visual experience, influencing aspects such as framing and pacing.<sup>6</sup> These are all aspects that inform our analysis of *Kill Shakespeare* and Nicki Greenberg's *Hamlet*.

*Kill Shakespeare* is a graphic novel series published by IDW, featuring some of Shakespeare's greatest heroes as they battle against some of Shakespeare's greatest villains.<sup>7</sup> The quest at the center of the series is one to track down and kill — or save — a reclusive wizard by the name of William Shakespeare. "The Prodigals," the name given to the group of heroes in the series, including the characters Juliet, Falstaff, and Othello, are rebelling against the unscrupulous rule of Richard III. They want to save Shakespeare, whom they see as their savior, from the tyrannical Richard III and the villains who support him. The villains, led by Richard III, want to claim Shakespeare's mighty power for their own. Richard III, with help from Lady Macbeth, manipulates Hamlet with promises of magically restoring his recently deceased father's life in return for Hamlet tracking down Shakespeare, something only he has the power to do as the prophesied "Shadow King" of this Shakespearean realm. To date, *Kill Shakespeare* has been collected into two trade volumes, Volume 1: *A Sea of Troubles* and Volume 2: *The Blast of War*.<sup>8</sup> *Kill Shakespeare* is a very unconventional Shakespearean adaptation. It does not make use of Shakespeare's language or meter and is set in a world where various characters and plots from Shakespeare's numerous plays (as well as Will himself!)<sup>9</sup> happily co-habitate and interact.<sup>10</sup> Hamlet can meet Juliet and get life advice from Falstaff. Lady Macbeth is in bed (literally and figuratively) with Richard III, and Iago can beg Othello for one more chance. We refer to *Kill Shakespeare* as an adaptation of *Hamlet*, since co-creators Anthony Del Col and Conor McCreery use plot elements from *Hamlet*, as well as the melancholy Dane himself, in order to bring together all these seemingly disparate works and characters cited within the graphic novel. *Kill Shakespeare* deals with Hamlet in exile from Denmark; after pirates attack, Hamlet washes up on shore in England, where he encounters King Richard III. Head artist Andy Belanger's comic art style is reminiscent of super-hero comics with which readers may be familiar, but has a detail and complexity about it that does not exactly fit the house styles of the larger comics' publishers, such as Marvel and DC. Belanger's art is "vibrantly

exaggerated, and unflinching in the violence department"; for example, "Belanger does not hold back when Richard III savagely gouges a soldier's eyes out" (Solis 2010). What we will particularly focus on in this article is Belanger's technique of using both montage and characters' body language in order to convey emotions.

Taking a vastly different approach from *Kill Shakespeare*, award winning Australian children's writer Nicki Greenberg's adaptation of *Hamlet* is described by the author as a production of *Hamlet* "staged on the page" (Greenberg 2010b).<sup>11</sup> The perspective of the graphic novel is of an audience watching a stage production of *Hamlet* performed by a cast of black animated inkblot "animal personages."<sup>12</sup> The action in Greenberg's *Hamlet* takes place in three dimensions: on the page, where the drama unfolds on "stage"; outside the frame in the imaginative realm of the mind; and "behind-the-scenes," where the characters are seen as actors outside of their on-stage roles (Jordan 2012, 3). These three dimensions often overlap and collide in spectacular fashion at the end of the graphic novel. This often profound and striking graphic adaptation of *Hamlet* achieves a delicate balance between image and word. Greenberg preserves the authenticity of the "original" Shakespearean text, making minimal edits to the "full text" of the play. Greenberg also widely uses creative visual metaphors and motifs to explain the meanings of words, emotions, and other thematic concepts.

Both *Kill Shakespeare* and Greenberg's *Hamlet* visualize characteristics of Hamlet's melancholy, characteristics that Shakespeare himself incorporated from early modern humoral theory, and thus offer a novel and an exciting way to introduce and explain complex humoral theory to a young audience.

### Early Modern Conceptions of Melancholy: Du Laurens, Bright, Burton, and Shakespeare

The language of the four humours, inherited from ancient Greek philosophers Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Galen, pervades Shakespeare's plays.<sup>13</sup> Shakespeare and his audience understood human personality in terms of the four bodily humours: blood (sanguine), yellow bile (choler), black bile (melancholy), and phlegm (phlegmatic). Physiological personality types were governed by the dominance of one or another of these humours. As Erin Sullivan notes, each humour was "linked to a particular emotional temperament, and it was believed that those with a preponderance of black bile were inclined towards melancholy and despondency" (Sullivan 2008, 884). Sullivan further elaborates that this melancholy could be a "temporary consequence of an occasional

imbalance" of black bile, or, for others, "a natural, permanent constitution that made them constantly subject to this sullen condition" (884).

Shakespeare was particularly interested in the melancholic humour — over seventy times, the word melancholy or words built upon its root appear in his works.<sup>14</sup> Our use of the term in this essay follows Lawrence Babb's definition, as:

a disease . . . due to the presence of a melancholy humour abnormal in quantity or quality [stemming from a variety of origins]. The melancholic malady is fundamentally a physical condition. Yet its symptoms are so largely physiological that it is ordinarily regarded as a mental disease. (Babb 1951, 23)<sup>15</sup>

For the early moderns, the melancholic humour, when found in over-abundance in a person, was capable of producing delusions and hallucinations (Babb 1951, especially 49-53), such as the Ghost that appears before Hamlet on the battlements of Elsinore. To read Shakespeare, and especially Hamlet, with the humours in mind, adds depth to our understanding of the play and the emotions of its protagonist. It was Samuel T. Coleridge who asserted that "the character of Hamlet may be traced to Shakespeare's deep and accurate science in mental philosophy" (Coleridge 1904, 343). Douglas Trevor adds that Hamlet "thinks in humoural terms throughout the play" (Trevor 2004, 64). The melancholy that Hamlet experiences in Shakespeare's play certainly has its origins in humoural ideas of melancholy, which are prevalent in what Bridget Gellart Lyons terms as "expository books" (Lyons 1971, 1-16). She refers to treatises that emphasized medical, ethical, or religious problems in various degrees. In this article we will focus particularly on English physician and clergyman Timothie Bright's *Treatise of Melancholie* (1586) and French anatomist André du Laurens's *A Discourse of the Preservation of Sight: of Melancholic Diseases; of Rheumes, and of Old Age* (English translation 1599; originally published in French in 1597), as these deal more specifically with the workings of the mind and its diseases.<sup>16</sup> It would be amiss not to touch briefly upon Robert Burton's opus *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). Although it was published after Shakespeare's death and so could not have directly influenced the writing of *Hamlet*. Burton's work is arguably the best known study of melancholy and, more generally, of humoural theory in the early modern period. Importantly, as with Shakespeare, Burton was also influenced greatly by Bright's writing and ideas concerning melancholy.<sup>17</sup> We acknowledge that many other expository books that were around at the time could have influenced Shakespeare to some degree,<sup>18</sup> but these works deal with melancholy more in its ethical rather than clinical aspect, and ethics is not the immediate focus of our analysis in this article.

In her work *The Melancholy Muse*, scholar Carol Falvo Heffernan sees "strong parallels between Shakespeare's perceptions of melancholic behaviour and those of Renaissance physicians" (Heffernan 1995, 122),<sup>19</sup> and argues further that Shakespeare's knowledge of the theory of humours "comes from familiarity with contemporary medical theory" (96). John Dover Wilson also agrees that Bright's treatise greatly influenced Shakespeare's writing of *Hamlet*.<sup>20</sup> When reading *Hamlet*, in particular, alongside the exposition of melancholy's characteristics in these books, we certainly come across intriguing coincidences that are hard to overlook. Our analysis will focus particularly on one major characteristic of melancholy, what actor David Tennant, in an episode about *Hamlet* in the recent television documentary *Shakespeare Uncovered*, refers to as "the machine of the play,"<sup>21</sup> the appearance of the Ghost.

The appearance of the Ghost is equally significant in both *Kill Shakespeare* and Nicki Greenberg's *Hamlet*. This is an unsurprising choice by the authors of these works, given that Robert Burton, in his well-known and much analyzed *Anatomy of Melancholy*, specifies ghostly visitations as a central symptom of those who are afflicted with melancholy:

Methinks I hear, methinks I see  
*Ghosts*, goblins, fiends; my phantasy  
 Presents a thousand ugly shapes,  
 Headless bears, black men, and apes,  
 Doleful outcries, and *fearful sights*,  
 My sad and dismal soul affrights.

All my griefs to this are jolly,  
 None so damn'd as *melancholy*. (Burton 1632; emphasis added)<sup>22</sup>

Burton goes on to elaborate further on this particular symptom in the main text of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, noting that one of the signs of melancholy is "corrupt imaginations," where those afflicted "dreame of graues still, and *dead men*, & thinke themselues bewitched or dead: [and] if it be extreme they think they heare hideous noyses, *see and talke with blacke men, & converse familiarly with divels, & such strange Chimeras and visions*" (Burton 1621, 247; emphasis added). Burton's writing echoes the earlier thoughts of Du Laurens, Bright, and William Shakespeare himself.

In his treatise *A Discourse on the Preservation of Sight*, André du Laurens notes that melancholy people were notoriously the victims of such corrupt imaginings:



Their imagination is troubled onely three waies: by nature, that is to say by the constitution of the bodie: by the minde, that is to say, by some violent passion, whereunto they have given themselves: and by the intercourse or medling of evill angels, which cause them oftentimes to fortell & forge very strange things in their imaginatios [sic]. (Du Laurens 1597, 100)

Timothie Bright's description of the symptoms of melancholy in his work the *Treatise of Melancholie* also includes sufferers being afflicted with delusions or apparitions: "This causeth not only phantasticall apparitions wrought by [sic] apprehension only of common sense, but fantasie . . . forgeth disguised shapes, which giue great terror vnto the heart" (Bright 1586, 103). What we see here is that as well as being staples of Senecan revenge tragedy, visions of ghosts (and other such "unworldly" presences) in early modern times were considered markers of emotional instability.<sup>23</sup> Shakespeare takes this convention and explores it through the character of Hamlet. When the Ghost appears and tells its horrifying story of "murder most foul" (1.5.27),<sup>24</sup> Hamlet distrusts the apparition he sees before him, since the corrupted imaginations of people suffering melancholy were known to produce such delusions and hallucinations. Hamlet confesses his doubt of the Ghost's words and the fear of his imagination in his soliloquy at the end of act 2:

The spirit that I have seen  
 May be a de'il, and the de'il hath power  
 T'assume a pleasing shape. Yea, and perhaps  
 Out of my *weakness* and my *melancholy*,  
 As he is very potent with such spirits,  
 Abuses me to damn me! (2.2.533-38; emphasis added)

This soliloquy is important, as it is one of the two times the word "melancholy" appears in the play; the other appears in act 3, scene 1, where Claudius also diagnoses Hamlet's melancholy: "There's something in his soul / O'er which his melancholy sits on brood" (3.1.164-65). Furthermore, this moment demonstrates Shakespeare's knowledge that seeing such ghosts was a symptom of melancholy. While Hamlet initially believes that the apparition is "an honest Ghost" (1.5.137), this admission that the Ghost may be preying on his self-prescribed "weakness" demonstrates that he is aware of the connection between melancholy and such delusions.<sup>25</sup> As Douglas Trevor rightly notes, "Hamlet's fear [expressed in this soliloquy] that his melancholic temperament exposes him to immaterial, potentially demonic forces . . . is a fear that is supported by the medical doctrine of the day" (Trevor 2004, 78).<sup>26</sup> Struggling with his feelings on the matter, Hamlet demands stronger

proof that what the Ghost says is true and so stages the play *The Mousetrap*, where the Ghost's supposed honesty is confirmed by Claudius's reaction to the play. Yet, as Stephen Greenblatt rightly notes, "the question of the Ghost's origin [remains] unanswered" (Greenblatt 2001, 239). This lack of closure with regards to the origin of the Ghost in *Hamlet* gives rise to various attempts by directors, writers, and artists to explain what exactly the Ghost in fact is, both metaphorically and also literally — if such a clear-cut and concrete explanation is, indeed, at all possible.

### Haunting the Graphic Novel: Visualizing Melancholy in *Kill Shakespeare* and Nicki Greenberg's *Hamlet*

As we have argued earlier, the appearance of the Ghost is a major feature in both *Kill Shakespeare* and Nicki Greenberg's *Hamlet*. *Kill Shakespeare* begins with Hamlet's exile from Denmark. In the span of the first few pages of the graphic novel, "time is [definitely] out of joint" (1.5.186), jumping from now, to the past, and then to three days in the future.<sup>27</sup> The reader is provided not only with the back-story from Shakespeare's play, but is also given an insight into Hamlet's inner thoughts through an extreme close-up of the Dane's eyes; reflected in them is his father's tombstone. Hamlet literally sees his "father" in his "mind's eye" (1.2.184). This image of King Hamlet's headstone becomes a symbolic stand-in for the Ghost throughout *Kill Shakespeare*. Before Hamlet leaves Denmark, he takes one last look around his city and is confronted by a strange smoke-like mist that attempts to convince him to kill his uncle Claudius. Just as Shakespeare's Hamlet ignores Horatio's pleas and follows the Ghost (1.4), the Hamlet in *Kill Shakespeare* chases the mist, calling out to it and questioning whether it is his father. Hamlet instead discovers that it is a sinister female figure, later revealed to be one of the three witches from *Macbeth*. *Kill Shakespeare* takes Hamlet's questioning of the Ghost's motives and origins and literally visualizes them. Here, Hamlet is obviously being manipulated by someone for quite nefarious reasons, but later in this opening sequence and in Volume 1, the line is blurred, and the reader and Hamlet are left wondering whether the Ghost is something sinister (and will damn him as the witches do *Macbeth*), some "coinage" (3.4.135) of Hamlet's brain, or indeed a manifestation of his father. This opening sequence includes the first instance of head artist Andy Belanger's use of a montage, a stylistic technique that has become a signature for the artist. What we refer to by the term montage in this instance is how "images are inset against a background that signifies emotions" (Silva 2012). Sailing towards England, as Hamlet stares out to sea, King Hamlet's headstone appears to be rising up out of the water. This sequence of panels is intended less as a literal illustration of action than a metaphorical manifestation of Hamlet's intense sadness about his father's death, which

preoccupies his thoughts, guilt for not avenging his father's murder, and the melancholy that, as a result, overwhelms him.<sup>28</sup>

The Ghost appears again in a later sequence in Volume 1. Hamlet chooses to leave "The Prodigals" he has been travelling with and ventures out on his own to find Shakespeare. Battling his way through a forest, he stops to rest by a river bank when the Ghost suddenly surfaces from the depths of the water to haunt him once again. Its appearance morphs from a demonic looking version of King Hamlet's headstone, to a monstrosity of melting and rotting flesh, first shaped like Polonius and then like Hamlet himself. This nightmare sequence literally illustrates Hamlet's guilt over his inaction regarding his father's murder (a guilt absent from Shakespeare's play-text), but also over his earlier murder of Polonius; Hamlet's harried expression is palpable. The font used in the speech bubbles matches the font used in the earlier sequence, where the Ghost is revealed to be the witch from *Macbeth*, indicating all is not well in this new visitation. Yet when Hamlet falls into the river in fright and appears to wake up from his "nightmare," the reader is left wondering whether this visitation is just all in Hamlet's head and simply a symptom of his melancholy. Unlike in Shakespeare's play, where other characters (Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo) also see the Ghost (in act 1 at least), in *Kill Shakespeare* Hamlet is consistently the only character who sees the apparition. This significant edit emphasises the ambiguity of the Ghost's identity and intentions — there is no one else to appoint as a corroborating witness to these visitations — as well as an increased sense of Hamlet's isolation and emotional instability; as he is the only one to have seen the Ghost, can his troubled mind be trusted? This in turn opens up discussion about the effect of Hamlet's melancholy (with its basis in humoral theory), the idea of supernatural manipulation and damnation, and the Ghost as a figure from revenge tragedy that influences and guides the main protagonist, Hamlet, either to heaven, or more likely, to hell.

Nicki Greenberg's conception of the Ghost in her graphic novel *Hamlet* has its basis in one of the most fascinating features of comics and graphic novels — namely, that the page composition can act as both a narrative device and a conceptual device. Breaking out of this frame draws attention to this feature. The Ghost in Greenberg's *Hamlet* exists both outside and around the panels. Literally framing the narrative, he is the "machine" propelling the story, as well as an uncontained ghostly observer haunting the narrative from the shadows. In the moments when the Ghost appears on Greenberg's "stage," it is integrated with the frames of the panels on each page, known in comics' terminology as the gutter (see Greenberg 2010a, 7-8, 13-15, 72-87, 94-95, and 252-57). This technique of using the gutter as the location of the Ghost raises thematic questions of what is real and what is artifice.<sup>29</sup> Is this Ghost really King Hamlet, or is it an emanation of Hamlet's

melancholic imagination? The Ghost's grand, lion-like appearance (a sly reference to the *Lion King* (1994), another reworking of *Hamlet*), is telling: it suggests both Hamlet's connection to him — Hamlet looks more like his father and nothing like his mother, whose appearance instead matches that of Claudius — and also of Hamlet's exaggerated view of him; the Ghost's page-stealing, grandiose appearance (Greenberg 2000a, 73 and 86) reminds the reader of Hamlet's comparison of King Hamlet and Claudius, "Hyperion to a satyr" (1.4.140), or in this case, a lion to a weasel. When the Ghost appears out of the darkness to haunt Hamlet, he physically intrudes on the narrative, and along with other symbolic imagery, such as the interlocking clockwork gears, that crowd the page space throughout the text (suggesting that like in *Kill Shakespeare*, "time is out of joint" 1.5.186), contributes to a sense of menacing claustrophobia in Greenberg's Elsinore. This is particularly evident when the Ghost transforms into a demonic octopus-like creature, and its words and tentacles strangle and impregnate Hamlet's personage and his mind (Greenberg 2010a, 76).

As in *Kill Shakespeare*, in Greenberg's *Hamlet* the reader is presented with the idea that the manifestation that appears before Hamlet is a symptom of his melancholy. This is best illustrated in Hamlet's confrontation with his mother Gertrude (Greenberg 2010a, 252-57). As Hamlet bombastically compares his father to Claudius, each figure appears in pink outline; Greenberg literally visualizes Hamlet's thoughts and description of his father. Later, when the Ghost appears to Hamlet (and, it's important to note, not to Gertrude), these visualized thoughts change color to light grey, falling in line with how Greenberg has earlier illustrated the Ghost. As if in the summoning of a demonic creature in a horror film, Hamlet has made the Ghost appear through the mere mention of him. This blurring of distinction between Hamlet's thoughts and what he literally sees before him leaves the reader wondering if Gertrude's diagnosis of Hamlet is correct: "Alas, he's mad" (Greenberg 2010a, 255).

Through their collaborative engagement with Shakespeare's text, both Nicki Greenberg and the creators of *Kill Shakespeare* essentially repackage a canonical early modern performance text for a media-savvy, popular culture aware, twenty-first century audience. They subsequently demonstrate that students can be engaged and challenged in their learning by using popular culture in the classroom and that "visual interpretation may provide students the ability to understand and communicate ideas they cannot yet comprehend from text alone" (Wolfe and Kleijwegt 2012, 30). Both *Kill Shakespeare* and Greenberg's *Hamlet* visualize an indicator of Hamlet's melancholy in Shakespeare's play: the appearance of the Ghost. These characteristics of melancholy, as they are related to humoral theory and the character of Hamlet, are both illustrated with clarity and drama. By reading a scene carefully and then reflecting upon how it is translated into the visual medium by these graphic novels, readers develop an increased awareness of *Hamlet* and the early

modern conceptions and representations of emotions and mental health upon which Shakespeare drew when writing the play. Both texts illustrate the appearance and ambiguity of the Ghost in a relatable way, presenting readers with options as to the Ghost's identity and intentions but never deciding on one. Like Hamlet, the reader is left to decide if the Ghost is a truthful ghost, or the devil come to damn them. The greater emphasis on the doubtful nature of the Ghost in these modern interpretations, and on that doubt as the main issue, shows the relative decline of the revenge plot as an important concern for a young popular culture aware audience.

These multimodal texts offer an excellent way of staging a new performance of *Hamlet* on the page — the text comes alive! Encouraging an active approach (and fascinating conversation) with Shakespeare's dynamic and emotionally shifting performance text *Hamlet*, graphic novels mirror the exciting and visual experience of seeing a performance of *Hamlet* on stage and/or on screen. It comes as no surprise, then, to discover that the *Kill Shakespeare* series has expanded into the realm of live performance. Several special live stage readings — the *Kill Shakespeare: Live Stage Reading* theatrical shows, based on the first twelve issues of the series — have been staged so far, with more planned in the future. These shows combine comic art, radio-play-style drama, music, and audience interaction. The revelation that Nicki Greenberg's research for her adaptation of *Hamlet* included two books on performance<sup>30</sup> serves to foster the hope that in the future, her ingenious adaptation of *Hamlet* will inspire an equally lavish live performance.

### Notes

1. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at both the Australian Research Council / Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Studies (UWA) Masterclass: "Medievalism and Youth Culture," held at the University of Western Australia, December 2011; and the Australian and New Zealand Shakespeare Association (ANZSA) Biannual Conference: "Shakespeare and Emotions," held at the University of Western Australia, 2012. We would like to thank the participants at both these events for their helpful feedback in the early stages of this paper: in particular, Andrew Lynch, Philippa Kelly, Ciara Rawnsley, Gayle Allan, and Clare Bradford.
2. Sheila Cavanagh calls for a clarification and justification of why we teach Shakespeare, and a consideration of what students gain from exposure to his work. Cavanagh worryingly connects texts that attempt to make Shakespeare "fun" with a loss of an "idea that the plays have some intrinsic value for readers and audiences" (Cavanagh 2006). This article argues that graphic novel versions of Shakespeare's work are more than simply an attempt to make something that "has to be taught" palatable, fun, and easy to teach. They examine and present complex and intrinsic human emotions (and the conception of these in early modern dramatic texts and

humoural theory) to students in a clear and relatable way, and can be used as tools in the cognitive development of students, particularly in the development of visual literacy, which is fundamental to classroom learning in the twenty-first century.

3. Lanier's term "Shakespop" refers to Shakespeare's affiliation with and appropriation in twentieth-century popular culture, where there is a tension between reverence and resistance, and where notions about Shakespeare's cultural significance can be "created, extended, debated, revised, and renewed, not only parodied and critiqued" (Lanier 2002, 20).
4. In Dallacqua's study (2012), after reading two pre-selected graphic novels, four fifth-grade students took part in book discussions and one-on-one interviews. These discussions took place in the classroom, but after regular school hours.
5. See both Golden (2001, 53) and Teasley and Wilder (1997, 69) and the connection between storyboards and comic books that they mention in their writing (both are cited in Dallacqua 2012, 67). We would also be remiss not to mention an emerging form of comics and graphic novels: interactive comic books and graphic novels, which combine text, illustration, music, animation, and interactivity, and thus take this idea of performance to the next level. Classic Comics, a U.K. publisher creating graphic novel adaptations of classical literature (including Shakespeare plays), have released "Interactive Motion Comics" of two of Shakespeare's works, *Macbeth* (Shakespeare 2010a) and *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare 2010b), with the books "coming to life" through animation and audio.
6. Dallacqua cites Scott McCloud's (1993) important additions to this list of vocabulary, namely that "color within a graphic novel can help shape a mood of story and that shading can add depth to a work" (McCloud 1993, 190-92, cited in Dallacqua 2012, 66).
7. Rather than classifying *Kill Shakespeare* as a comic book limited series (where the number of issues is determined before production, compared to a one-off release, or an ongoing comic series, such as *The Uncanny X-Men*), we classify it as a graphic novel. We acknowledge that *Kill Shakespeare* has been released in serial form; however, it was bound together in two trade paperbacks (with a third, *A Tide of Blood*, released in late 2013; see note 8 for more details), and was released in one "definitive edition," *Kill Shakespeare: The Complete Edition* (with annotations and accompanying scholarly essays), in 2014. This demonstrates to us first, that the writers Del Col and McCreary view *Kill Shakespeare* as one whole complete work, which is reminiscent of how authors such as Charles Dickens released their novels in serialized form (in Dickens's case, chapters were published weekly/monthly in Victorian periodicals such as *Master Humphrey's Clock* and *Household Words*), before being reprinted and re-released later as a whole and complete work in novel form.

8. A five-issue second series of *Kill Shakespeare*, titled *Kill Shakespeare: A Tide of Blood*, was released in individual issues by IDW beginning in late February 2013. It was released in trade paperback form in late 2013. This second series is a continuation from the first two volumes and follows Hamlet, Juliet, and others as they face their biggest threat — Prospero, a rogue wizard who plans to destroy all of creation.
9. For more on how *Kill Shakespeare* embodies the figure of William Shakespeare, and Shakespeare's relationships with his "creations," see Holland (2012) and Ephraim (2013).
10. *Kill Shakespeare* owes much to the comic book series *Fables*, created by writer Bill Willingham and published by DC Comics's Vertigo imprint (2002 — present). The series *Fables* follows the story of various characters from fairy tales and folklore as they intermingle in a fictional New York City community known as "Fabletown."
11. This term can be found on the cover of Greenberg's *Hamlet*. Nicki Greenberg also uses images of actual curtain-like material in the background of the beginning of the play — Shaun Tan, during the Wheeler Centre interview with Nicki Greenberg, refers to this imagery as a "suggestion of a curtain" (Greenberg and Tan 2010) — as well as each scene (see for example, Greenberg 2010a, 1-3). This frames the action on the page and contributes to the theatrical "look" of the book, as if the reader is watching a production of *Hamlet* being performed on a proscenium stage. In his recent article on meta-text in *Kill Shakespeare*, Jason Tondro highlights Andy Belanger's similar use of "theatrical red curtains" (Tondro 2013, para. 13) to establish the theatrical nature of the play-within-a-graphic novel sequence, the staging of *The Murder of Gonzago*.
12. A term coined by Shaun Tan during the Wheeler Centre interview with Nicki Greenberg (Greenberg and Tan 2010).
13. For contemporary analysis of the influence of humoral theory on Shakespeare's works, particularly with regards to the examination of melancholy in *Hamlet*, see Floyd-Wilson (2003), Hunt (2007), Neely (2004), Paster (2004a and 2004b), and Trevor (2004).
14. A word search at the website *Shakespeare's Words* (Crystal and Crystal 2008) for the term "melancholy" in all of Shakespeare's plays, poems, and sonnets reveals seventy-six results, including two instances in *Hamlet* (2.2 and 3.1).
15. Floyd-Wilson gives the following list of the various causes of melancholy (as they apply to the character of Hamlet): "travel, education, scholarly pursuits, philosophical interests, political inclinations, and possibly even the devil" (Floyd-Wilson 2003, 78). This essay is not an examination of the causes of melancholy, but rather of how melancholy is manifested in the character of Hamlet, primarily through his ability to see apparitions. See also Paster (2004b)

on the differences between contemporary and early modern understandings of melancholy, particularly 5-6. An example of an early modern view of melancholy that differs from contemporary understandings such as Babb's is that of dramatist John Ford (a contemporary of William Shakespeare), who emphasized the psychological experience of melancholy. In Ford's work *The Lover's Melancholy* (licensed 1628, printed 1629), the character Corax, a physician, asserts that "Melancholy / Is not, as you conceiue. Indisposition / Of body, but the mindes disease" (Ford 1629, 39-40; emphasis added). Although melancholy is certainly a disease of the mind, it was thought to have its roots in a physiological condition (as Babb rightly argues; see Babb 1951). Erin Sullivan cites Ford as an example that this emphasis of the psychological experience of melancholy was a popular view at the time (2008, 885). Sullivan goes on to argue that this is seen in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where "Hamlet explores his situation in philosophical rather than medical terms" (Sullivan 2008, 885). While we acknowledge that Hamlet explores his melancholy in philosophical terms, we will argue in this article that when composing *Hamlet*, Shakespeare was probably inspired by medical treatises by physicians such as Timothie Bright and André Du Laurens. Throughout the play, Shakespeare embeds the language and ideas, particularly the descriptions of the symptoms of melancholy (such as visions and apparitions), found in these treatises.

16. The fact that André Du Laurens's work was translated a mere two years after being initially published in Paris indicates the interest in and the importance of his work on melancholy. Both Bright's and Du Laurens's works were written well before *Hamlet* was published in the first quarto (1603) and, arguably, before *Hamlet* was initially written by Shakespeare in the late 1590s or early 1600s. For more on the dating of the composition (and publication) of *Hamlet*, see the discussion in Shakespeare 2006, 74-94.
17. For more on Bright's influence on Burton, see Dover Wilson 1935, 227, 309 ff.
18. While we would not go so far as to agree completely with Lawrence Babb's assertion that the melancholic traits that appear in Hamlet were "traditional and commonplace" and thus it was "not necessary to assume that Shakespeare had read a book about melancholy" (Babb 1951, 107), we could concede that Shakespeare would not have necessarily read widely on the subject of melancholy, as there was an immense amount of literature on the subject at the time of his composition of *Hamlet*.
19. André Du Laurens was a physician to King Henry IV of France, and Timothie Bright was a physician at St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London at the time he wrote his treatise on melancholy.
20. For more on Bright's influence on Shakespeare's work see Dover Wilson (1935), 309-20.



21. David Tennant, quoted in *Shakespeare Uncovered* (2012). Tennant himself portrayed Hamlet for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2008; this performance was later filmed for television by the BBC in 2009.
22. The quote comes from the "Author's Abstract of Melancholy," a poetic summary of the main characteristics of melancholy outlined in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, which is included in the preface of the 1632 edition of Burton's *Anatomy* (Burton 1632).
23. For contemporary attitudes to ghosts, as well as critical attitudes to the Ghost in *Hamlet*, see Alexander (1971), 30-33, Babb (1951), 49-53 and 65-66, Campbell (1952), 84-92, Garber (1987) 124-76, Greenblatt (2001), Kallendorf (1998), and Prosser (1971), 102-106. For an examination of the supernatural versus the materiality of the Ghost in the staging of *Hamlet*, see Foakes 2005.
24. All quotations from *Hamlet* are taken from the Arden edition, edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (Shakespeare 2006).
25. Hilarie Kallendorf (1998, 54) cites this passage as an example of the intertextual connection between Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and both King James I's *Daemonologie* (1597) and Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584). Kallendorf further notes that both Scot and James suggest in their works that "a person was especially prone to see apparitions of devils in the shapes of dead friends when he was already melancholy" (76). Thus, Scot's and James's treatises offer further examples of an ongoing early modern conception (and diagnosis) of melancholy that is (in part) characterized by a victim seeing apparitions of demons, devils, ghosts, and other such "unworldly" entities.
26. Trevor later argues that the "witnessing of spirits was . . . another phenomenon attributed to melancholic vapors" (Trevor 2004, 83).
27. *Kill Shakespeare* does not include page numbers, and so we have instead described in detail the scenes and panels from the text which we refer to in our analysis.
28. The name of the ship on which Hamlet sails to England, which is revealed to be "The Antonio," is also rather telling: the name Antonio in Shakespeare's works is loaded with meaning. It possibly refers to the melancholic merchant in *The Merchant of Venice*, who knows not why he is so sad. More likely, the name refers to Prospero's brother in *The Tempest*, who usurped his position as Duke of Milan; thus, Hamlet is traveling on a vessel that serves as a reminder of his unresolved business back in Denmark, the killing of his father's usurper, Claudius. This connection between the ship and Hamlet's revenge for his father's murder is literally visualized in the pages of *Kill Shakespeare*, with the word "father" superimposed on top of an image of "The Antonio" travelling on rough seas. See Figure 6.

29. The gutter later becomes personified and takes a role in the action; see, for example, Greenberg (2010a), 63, where the gutter shoots out menacing, Venus-fly-trap looking shadows, which snap at Ophelia and tear her apart (literally and figuratively), a symbolic representation of the equally biting words with which her father Polonius admonishes her.
30. Greenberg reveals that two books she found "most helpful" in her research process were Marvin Rosenberg's *The Masks of Hamlet* (1992), "which examines how different *actors, directors,* and scholars have approached every line of the play," as well as Mary Zenet Maher's *Modern Hamlets and Their Soliloquies* (1992), which Greenberg describes as "a fascinating collection of interviews with *actors who have played Hamlet*" Greenberg (2010b), emphasis added.

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