

## “MY KINGDOM FOR AN IPHONE” Shakespeare and Mobile Phones

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**Abstract** – The essay examines how Shakespeare and his works have been appropriated and exploited for promotional purposes in the field of mobile phone communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the one hand, I will investigate the strategies used to advertise merchandising related to mobile phones. Capitalising on Shakespeare’s iconic status, crafters have created covers and phone cases featuring pictures of the Bard, which range from the traditional well-known Chandos Portrait to more creative depictions of the dramatist, as he wears earphones or sunglasses. His visage, as Susan Bennett argues, has become “the signifier beyond all others in an international marketing economy” (1996, p. 36). On the other hand, I will discuss the reasons why advertising creative teams have turned most often to *Romeo and Juliet*, a tragedy which dramatises lack of communication on different levels, than to any other Shakespearean play to promote mobile communication providers. I will explore three American ads (Nextel Communications 2003, T-Mobile 2008, and Apple 2016), a French one (Orange 2009) and an Italian one (Vodafone Italy 2013), all reinterpreting the balcony scene from a diverse angle.

**Keywords:** advertising; Shakespeare; mobile phones; intermediality.

### 1. Introduction

In 2012 a study evaluating the monetary worth of the brand of historical figures estimated that if a Shakespeare brand existed, it would be worth \$ 600,000,000, double the combined brand values of Elvis Presley (\$ 108,000,000), Marilyn Monroe (\$ 43,000,000) and George Foreman (\$ 149,000,000).<sup>1</sup> It comes as no surprise that Shakespeare’s marketing power has been recognized and exploited for the purpose of advertising and promotion for centuries. In very recent times, just to make a few examples, the Bard’s words have been appropriated to promote the values of Shift Communications. In 2016 quotations from his works were selected to illustrate some adjectives that well describe the company’s vision, such as ‘positive’, ‘creative’ and ‘honourable’. As the Vice President of

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://campaignbrief.com/version10-starthtml0000000149-176> (25.8.2020).

Shift Communications clarifies in the company blog, “Hopefully these quotes will provide some inspiration for readers of this blog in their day-to-day work”.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, only in the UK, USA and Australia, more than 65 registered trademarks contain the word ‘Shakespeare’. His name evokes tradition, quality, cultural and intellectual sophistication, and this may enhance the appeal of a product. In 2020, an emerging British company named Shakespeare Marketing Services, fittingly located in Shakespeare Road in Bedford, launched its website to attract potential clients by offering “Holistic digital marketing strategies to help your brand reach and create synergies with your target market”.<sup>3</sup> The presence of Shakespeare’s name undoubtedly suggests the unique, non standardised and unconventional quality of a product or a service offered.

There is a long and rich critical history of how Shakespeare has been appropriated as a cultural icon and incorporated in popular culture. The pioneering work of Graham Holderness paved the way for a new approach that contributed to deconstructing the binary opposition between the Shakespeare of the popular culture and the Shakespeare of the academy, so that definitions of “Shakespeare” and “‘Shakespearean’ far beyond the reach of the academy” proliferated (Fazel, Geddes 2017, p. 4): music, film adaptations, TV series but also Bard-related tourism, fan fiction and advertising are only some of the most intriguing fields of investigation.<sup>4</sup> The starting point for any discussion of Shakespeare in advertising is Holderness’s *The Shakespeare Myth* (1988), the first book which provided a comprehensive and critical investigation of this topic, while demonstrating the aesthetic value of Shakespeare-related ads.<sup>5</sup> As he remarked, “Capitalism can now produce Shakespearean materials that display a textual richness and diversity that do justice to the dramatic works from which the material originally derives” (Holderness, Loughrey 2016, p. 120). Following in his footsteps, Douglas M. Lanier<sup>6</sup> explored the mechanisms and the variety of transformative practices employed to exploit Shakespeare’s cultural power and his marketability in the field of advertising, showing that Shakespeare-

<sup>2</sup> Vice President of Shift Communications: <https://www.shiftcomm.com/blog/marketing-inspiration-from-shakespeare>. (25.8.2020).

<sup>3</sup> Shakespeare Marketing Services: <https://www.shakespearemarketingservices.com>. (25.8.2020).

<sup>4</sup> An important contribution to the investigation of the appropriation of Shakespeare in popular media was also given by Richard Burt, who edited an encyclopedia of the Bard in mass media and popular culture (2007), and by the Italian scholar Mariangela Tempera, whose work shed light on this unexplored field in Italian culture.

<sup>5</sup> For Shakespeare and advertising, see also Cavecchi, Soncini (2002) and Shellard, Keenan (2016).

<sup>6</sup> See Holderness (1988, 2011, 2018); Holderness, Loughrey (1991, 2016); Lanier (2002 and 2012).

inspired advertising may have an incisive role as vehicle of critical ideas. Lanier sees advertising as

an important force for reproducing perceptions of Shakespeare from generation to generation and for disseminating them throughout a society, in forms at least as powerful as the tomes and performances of the 'official' guardians of 'proper' Shakespeare. (2012, p. 514)

At the same time, Shakespeare has to be analysed within the broader and burgeoning intermedial research context.<sup>7</sup> The digital turn had a strong impact on the way we relate to Shakespeare and on the way his works are appropriated: "what is collectively represented or defined as Shakespeare is continuously being reimagined and reconstructed in accordance with the affordances of the medium in which he appears and the purposes to which he is put to task" (Fazel, Geddes 2017, p. 2). In what follows I examine how Shakespeare and his works have been used for promotional purposes in the field of mobile phone communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Sujata Iyengar points out, what Shakespeare offers is actually "a liminal, intermedial space between branded, profit-generating, mass-market industry and independent financially threatened idiosyncratic cultural production" (2014, p. 347). On the one hand, I will investigate how Shakespeare occupies that intermedial space by taking into account e-commerce websites which sell Shakespeare-themed merchandising related to mobile phones. Capitalising on Shakespeare's iconic status, crafters have created covers and phone cases featuring pictures of the Bard, which range from the traditional well-known Chandos Portrait to more creative portrayals of the playwright, as he takes a selfie or wears sunglasses. His visage, as Susan Bennett claims, has literally become "the signifier beyond all others in an international marketing economy" (1996, p. 36). Shakespeare inspired phone cases and covers are an example of what Iyengar calls "Shakescraft" objects, "which use Shakespearean texts, stories, and quotes to produce intermediated versions of the brand in ways that travel between the high and low culture divide" (2014, p. 348). These objects are actually designed to appeal to a variegated group of people in terms of age, gender, social, economic and cultural background, and whose fandom often does not emerge from an academic context. Recent studies on Shakespeare and fandom, like Mark Duffett's *Understanding Fandom* (2013) and Johnathan Pope's *Shakespeare's Fans* (2020), decisively contribute to investigating the Bard as a fan object thus shedding light on his cultural power, his marketability, and the numerous forms of engagement of his fans.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Pennacchia (2012); Mancewicz (2014); Fischlin (2014); Fazel, Geddes (2017); O'Neill (2018); Cartelli (2019).

On the other hand, it is worth discussing the reasons why advertising creative teams have turned most often to *Romeo and Juliet*, which dramatises lack of communication on different levels, than to any other Shakespearean play to promote mobile communication providers. I have selected three American ads (Nextel Communications 2003, T-Mobile 2008, and Apple 2016), a French one (Orange 2009) and an Italian one (Vodafone Italy 2013), all reinterpreting the balcony scene from a diverse angle. These commercials deploy different strategies, using Shakespeare's characters as vehicles for their message or spokespersons of their slogans. In all the examples analysed, the marketing specialists downplayed the play's tragic and erotic qualities in a bid to attract potential buyers with a more amusing or romantic rendition of the story. I will focus in particular on Vodafone's Italian campaign, which has received no critical attention so far, even though it offers the most contemporary and insightful rendition. The analysis of these ads can contribute to mapping out the evolution of Shakespeare's cultural power, and to investigating what it means to adapt Shakespeare in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the age of the digital turn and of media fandom.

## 2. Shakespeare and merchandising

The marketing power of Shakespeare has been exploited to sell almost every kind of item and souvenir, from candles and mugs to clothes and jewellery. There are countless websites advertising Shakecraft objects and gifts, from the e-commerce giant Amazon to Etsy and Redbubble, to mention just a few of the most significant examples. E-commerce offers a number of advantages and may turn buying online into a personalised and satisfying experience. Being able to expand the customer base exponentially, it manages to reach customers all over the world, and provide a quick response to market demand. Unlike a physical shop, potentially there is no limit to the number of different types of items available; this may suit the taste of the most demanding shopper and respond to the different "thinking patterns," to use Marc Prensky's words (2001, p. 1), of "digital natives" but also "digital immigrants" who have got used to buying online.

The analysis of Shakespeare inspired phone cases and covers may illuminate some captivating aspects of marketing strategies, what is collectively identified as 'Shakespeare', and his cultural importance and influence. Cases and covers are peculiar objects, functionally more similar to accessories we wear to personalise our style and distinguish ourselves from the masses. Their primary aim is protecting and embellishing mobile phones, one of the most widespread items in modern society, social objects that may even generate some degree of dependence. Moreover, a mobile phone is "an exclusive product strongly attached to one's identity" (Aguado, Martinez

2008, p. 6). Like a branded piece of clothes or an accessory, a phone cover is displayed and exhibited.

The quantity and variety of Shakespeare-related covers are astonishing. An entry search on Google images of the words 'Shakespeare' and 'phone cases' retrieves an incredible number of different phone cases featuring quotations from plays, referencing characters or trading on the Bard's name or his image. Different types of covers imply the use of multiple strategies to attract potential buyers who have a different level of engagement with Shakespeare and his works. The marketing approach seems to be diversified according to age, gender, income and expertise in the field of Shakespeare's theatre: therefore the target is represented not only by fans and aficionados of the Bard, who have an unquenchable appetite "for affiliation through merchandise" (Blackwell 2018, p. 26), but also by those who may desire to participate in the aura of grandeur associated with the playwright and his works.

On the one hand, advertisers and crafters draw on the power of Shakespeare's words. While some lines may be accompanied by specific textual references to the play they are from, most of them are merely attributed to Shakespeare. Words are exploited as motivational slogans such as "There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so" from *Hamlet* (2.2.251-52) and "Let me be that I am, and seek not to alter me" from *Much Ado About Nothing* (1.3.33-34). They may also be modified to make up funny jokes or "creative misquotations", namely the reworking of quoted excerpts in the form of pastiche and parody (Maxwell 2018, p. 220), such as "Booty or not booty" or "To tea or not to tea".<sup>8</sup> The following examples emphasize how Shakespeare is always current and "for all seasons". There are covers featuring Shakespeare as Santa Claus saying "Merry Willmas", portraying Boris Johnson and Donald Trump with the phrase "The Two Gentlemen of Corona",<sup>9</sup> in which Verona is replaced by Corona (virus) to remind of the two leaders' questionable political actions during the Covid 19 pandemic, or celebrating S. Valentine's day through a reworking of *Coriolanus*, "O, me alone! Make you a valentine of me" ("O, me alone, make you a sword of me?" 1.7.76). Finally, quotations may be exploited for propaganda; the phrase pronounced by the heinous moor Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, "Is black so base a hue?" (4.2.71), has been appropriated so that it powerfully resonates as a form of support to the Black Lives Matter

<sup>8</sup> See: <https://www.lookhuman.com/design/91612-booty-or-not-booty/phone-case>. (25.8.2020).

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.redbubble.com/i/iphone-case/Two-Gentlemen-of-Corona-by-DJVYEATES/45848125.PM7U2>. (25.8.2020).

movement,<sup>10</sup> while the following line from *Hamlet* has been slightly reworked to fit in the LGBD vision of gender issues: “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your gender binary”.<sup>11</sup> These quotes seem to wipe out the highbrow/lowbrow divide, at least temporarily, since they are meaningful for those who are not familiar with the original text and, at the same time, are even more enjoyable for those who understand the intertextual game and can experience the pleasure of recognition.

Marketing strategies are not gender blind even when they are used to promote gender neutral products like mobile phone covers. According to marketing researches, most of female buyers seem to respond more favourably to white and pastel colours like pink and peach rather than black and brown. At the same time they may be more attracted by specific quotations that are “repurposed for feminist use” (Blackwell 2018, p. 29). One of the most reproduced quote is “Though she be but little, she is fierce” (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 3.2.324) which, taken out of context, may stand out as a declaration of women’s power, while in the original scene it is a cruel denigration of Hermia’s physical appearance. Rather recurrent are also inspirational sentences targeting female consumers, such as “Go, girl; seek happy nights to happy days” (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1.3.107), or allegedly romantic like “I will wear my heart upon my sleeve / For daws to peck” (*Othello*, 1.1.64-65). Out of its original context, it may sound as a supposedly loving quote but those who are familiar with the play will recognise these famous lines which culminate in the tragically iconic “I am not what I am” pronounced by the villainous Jago.

These quotations do not have any connection with mobile phones or their features but are meant to attract the attention of as many potential buyers as possible. Shakespeare’s works offer a vast array of catchy and apt phrases which have transcended different cultures and historical periods owing to their universal fascination. They succeed in making phone cases (but this may be valid also for other kinds of object) more appealing to potential buyers, who have different degrees of expertise in the field of performative arts and in the mechanisms of adaptation, appropriation and reworking of a Shakespearean text.

Numerous covers, instead, feature portraits of Shakespeare or images related to his works: stylised pictures of the Bard wearing sunglasses or texting a message, posing as Michael Jackson or as a hipster. The main aim is

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.redbubble.com/i/samsung-case/Black-Lives-Matter-Shakespeare-Quote-Is-black-so-Base-a-Hue-by-Shakespeare1616/52605629.B10ML>. (25.8.2020).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.redbubble.com/i/samsung-case/Horatio-s-Gender-Binary-by-lovegood516/25276391.Q464T>. (25.8.2020).

to fashion a more contemporary and up-to-date, even humorous image of the playwright in an attempt to draw the younger generations. Other phone cases present props widely associated with a specific play, such as a skull for *Hamlet* or a dagger for *Macbeth*, art works or paintings portraying iconic moments, such as the balcony scene (Ford Madox Brown, 1870) and Ophelia's death (John Everett Millais, 1851-2). Still frames from well-known film adaptations are also popular, especially Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), featuring Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes as title characters, and John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love* (1998). These items may appeal to people who are more familiar with Shakespeare through the adaptations of his plays in different forms and media more than with the playwright himself. More sophisticated buyers, culturally speaking, may be intrigued by covers depicting in quarto frontispieces of the plays or original pages.<sup>12</sup>

A very high amount of covers portray Shakespeare's face, "one of the most insistently reproduced icons in the world" (Holderness 2011, p. 181). Yet the apparently naive attempt to advertise a product by relying on the visage of a globally famous playwright contributes to fuelling the controversial debate about Shakespeare's identity, on the authorship of the works attributed to him and on his physical appearance. The first three images I will discuss are the most popular and used on phone covers. "The use of Shakespeare in advertising can be traced back to the adoption of an image based on the Chandos Portrait as the publisher Jacob Tonson's trademark in 1710" (Charity 2001, p. 3). The portrait, (dated 1600-10) now at the National Portrait Gallery, takes its name from the first Duke of Chandos, and it is most likely a contemporary representation of Shakespeare. Due to its popularity, the image may attract even buyers with little or no expertise in English theatre but willing to link themselves to an image of a cultural celebrity. One of the most replicated on any object, and phone cases are no exception, is Martin Droeshout's commemorative portrait of Shakespeare for the First Folio (1623), one of the most accurate representations of the playwright. Interestingly, on the website [Shakespeareshoppe.com](http://Shakespeareshoppe.com), the item is advertised as "Shakespeare First Folio Iphone 6 cover":

Shakespeare First Folio iPhone 6 Cover featuring a full print of the front piece of the *First Folio* by William Shakespeare published in 1623, sports a stylish antique design incorporating the original front piece image from the 1623 printing by Issac Iaggard and Ed Blount. Just the thing for any fan of Shakespeare, this iPhone Cover also makes the perfect gift for an actor, writer

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.tostadora.it/web/shakespeare\\_otello\\_1622\\_telefoni/971738](https://www.tostadora.it/web/shakespeare_otello_1622_telefoni/971738). (25.8.2020).

or any other creative type in the Performing Arts who wants something a little different for their day-to-day accessory choices.<sup>13</sup>

In this case, the item description targets a specific type of buyers, such as an actor or a writer or somebody who may be expert in the field, and aware of the pivotal role of the First Folio. As Mark Duffett remarks, fans “are always *more than* consumers. They are more than buyers and their transactions are purchased with a cultural interest that goes beyond merely practicing the process of buying” (2013, p. 21). Yet the marketing strategies do not seem to consider the intrinsic features of the image reproduced, its popularity and its circulation. Despite being promoted as something “a little different”, a cover featuring Droeshout’s portrait is far from being an elitist object.

Also the so-called “Flower Portrait”, probably based on Droeshout’s engraving, is quite widespread. It depicts Shakespeare dressed in an elaborately embroidered costume. It belonged to the Flower Family and was given to Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was identified as a 19<sup>th</sup> century art forgery rather than an Elizabethan oil on canvas. It still enjoys some popularity and adorns many covers and other objects. Like the Chandos Portrait, this may appeal to a more general audience who has little or no interest in the origin of the image and in its authenticity.

The next two images of the Bard bring us to the core of the critical debate about Shakespeare’s identity, while demonstrating, at the same time, that Shakespeare’s name is used as a bait to attract buyers despite the image displayed. One of the most controversial images, which features on a limited number of phone cases, is the Cobbe Portrait. While eminent critic Stanley Wells made the bold claim that this is an authentic representation of Shakespeare, for many Shakespearean scholars and the 16<sup>th</sup> century art historian Tarnya Cooper, it is more likely the portrait of an English poet and essayist, Sir Thomas Overbury, dated around 1610. Yet, despite the controversial identity of the sitter of the portrait, the image is marketed as “Shakespeare”, which may suggest an endorsement of Wells’ view or, rather, a complete unawareness concerning this subject and the cultural burning debate around it.

The Ashbourne Portrait, instead, included in the collection of the Folger Shakespeare Library, was at first falsely identified as Shakespeare. It was only in 1979, following its restoration, that it was said to depict Hugh Hamersley, Lord Mayor of London in 1627.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the image

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.shakespeareshoppe.com/product/shakespeare-first-folio-iphone-6-cover>. (25.8.2020).

<sup>14</sup> See Pressly (1993).

reproduced on covers and phone cases is advertised as Shakespeare.<sup>15</sup> We may presume that the marketing strategy aims to offer something unusual, a non-mass produced, and less conventional image of the Bard.

The presence of several pictures associated with Shakespeare even on phone covers contributes to exploring the controversies over Shakespeare’s identity, to nourish the fiery debate which is perpetuated, more or less consciously, by cover buyers. As Julianna Bark remarked, “If there is one thing that Shakespeare’s portraits can teach us, it is that they reflect our need to construct the author in our own image” (2011, p. 227). The extreme variety of Shakespeare-inspired covers allows each customer to choose the image of the Bard that best represents them and reflects their engagement with him and his works.

### 3. If Romeo and Juliet had had mobile phones

Besides marketing strategies to sell Shakespeare-themed accessories for mobile phones, there are also carefully elaborated campaigns to promote phone carriers and mobile phone models mainly based on Shakespeare and his characters. “Almost all global Shakespearean advertising”, Lanier remarks, “dwells on one of three topoi – Shakespeare himself, Hamlet, and Romeo and Juliet – the last of which offers by far the most fruitful territory for marketers” (2012, p. 514). Around 30% of all Shakespeare-themed ads that are to be found on television or in the web actually allude to *Romeo and Juliet*.

The story of the two young lovers from Verona has been continuously adapted in a wide range of forms and media, from music and films to comics and web series. I will discuss some ads which explicitly refer to *Romeo and Juliet*, considering how Shakespeare’s play impacts on the advertising message. Advertising creative teams who make reference to a play such as *Romeo and Juliet* have a clear marketing strategy and aim at taking advantage of the tragedy’s “almost mythical status” (Minutella 2013, p. 16). These commercials deploy strategies which incorporate Shakespeare on different levels and differ in “how explicitly they state their intertextual purpose” (Sanders 2006, p. 2). The advertising genre has its own rules: the message has to be communicated swiftly, clearly and efficiently. Michael S. Mulvey and Carmen Medina list the elements that contribute to producing “a persuasive communication designed to elicit a particular response from an audience” (2003, p. 224) and that have to be taken into account when analysing the strategies used to market a product: the actors of the ad (often local or global

<sup>15</sup> <https://fineartamerica.com/shop/iphone+cases/folger+shakespeare+library>. (25.8.2020).

celebrities), the setting of the action in time and space, the system of visual and sound cues, and the slogan or tagline.

My first example shows how the marketing specialists have softened the play's tragic tones to engage with potential buyers through a funny reworking of the story which is deprived of any tragic connotation. It is for Nextel Communications,<sup>16</sup> which was the fifth largest wireless company in 2003 when the campaign was launched to promote their “push-to-talk” mobile phones. One of the 9 spots broadcast on TV was about *Romeo and Juliet*. The commercial is a parody of the play, or rather, a “Nextel-styled” rendition of the tragedy based on speed and efficiency. It features characters dressed in Renaissance costumes, who are performing a supposedly traditional version of the play in a theatre. Relying on the audience's familiarity with the story and its characters, the spot offers a 30-second version of the play in an extremely short and modernised dialogue composed by a few words: “Romeo, Juliet, I love you, ditto, die, marry him, never, no, better now, no, kids”. Marjorie Garber sees the dialogue as a “modern-age version of the classical (and Shakespearean) device of *stichomythia*” (2008, p. 60). Moreover, the spot seems to be influenced by cinematic adaptations of the tragedy and reifies “what the play has become post-Baz Luhrmann” (Hodgdon 2009, p. 109). The commercial closes with Nextel's tagline: “Nextel. Done”. The campaign aimed to communicate the idea of speed and efficiency in a bid to “capture Nextel's startup, accelerated attitude” (Teague 2007, p. 1551). According to sales figures, profits increased by 23.5% during the campaign (2003-2004). This humorous spot, which features two extremely popular Shakespearean characters, seems to target mass viewers. But does it really convince them to use Nextel products?

The commercial aims to persuade the audience that the company may allow “communication without interference” even between *Romeo and Juliet* but this does not have a significant impact on the fate of the two lovers from Verona, since they both die at the end of the commercial, as happens in the play. The title of an oft-cited article by Barry Wellman and Lee Rainie is suggestive: “If *Romeo and Juliet* had mobile phones”. Their conclusion states that “the course of their true love would have been more connected – and perhaps would have run more smoothly. If only *Romeo and Juliet* had had mobile phones, they might have lived happily ever after” (2013, p. 170). It is no coincidence that in the commercials about mobile phones and providers aired after Nextel's campaign the play is given a happy ending; this may thus suggest that telecommunication companies have managed to put an end to the old strife between Capulets and Montagues and, consequently, their products are worth buying.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-cZtWefN8s>. (25.8.2020).

The French provider Orange (2004)<sup>17</sup> offers a completely different depiction of the lovers in a modern setting. The spot opens with a close up on a red rose, suggestive of the Shakespearean protagonists. A young man and a young woman live in different buildings but manage to meet in mid air. The story embodies the tagline of the campaign "*Orange intense: communiquons sans limites*". As Holderness convincingly argues, "Here Shakespeare is quoted as a familiar source for images of beauty, love, transgression of barriers and a transcendent emotional liberty" (2018, p. 265). An effective strategy that was used to enhance the communication of the message was the inclusion of a renowned tune to catch the viewers' attention, "set the appropriate mood and act as a memory jogger" (Sutherland 2008, p. 121).

The spot greatly relies on the power of music: there are no dialogues and the only sound audible is the unmistakable "Love theme" from Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*, which contributes to identifying the two protagonists of the spot as contemporary versions of Romeo and Juliet. The target buyers of this product seem to be older people or viewers who have more familiarity with the adaptations of Shakespeare's tragedy rather than with the actual text. In this case the audience may be inebriated by the enchanting music or their memory may go back to the film so that they do not focus on the information provided and the message, and do not question the intrinsic value of what they are buying. Instead, they are driven by the emotions associated with their cinematic experience as film-goers and, through a possible identification with the characters, they may be inclined to see Orange as the key to solving Romeo and Juliet's problems and, hopefully, their own.

In 2008 a spot for T-Mobile<sup>18</sup> crafts a contemporary and entertaining rendition of the play in 30 seconds. In her room, with her mobile phone in her hand, Juliet wonders: "Wherefore are thou Romeo?" Juliet is wearing Renaissance clothes while Romeo, in a present-day outfit, is riding a motorbike. The situation is no longer a family feud but it is a problem related to phone plans. When Juliet finally receives a text message from Romeo, her father intervenes and exclaims: "thou betrayest thy family's cell plan". These lines retain early modern English words but mix it up with contemporary concepts. The solution is to be found swopping a limited phone plan to an unlimited one, as the father explains: "I never really hated Romeo's family; he was just too expensive to call". The alleged message seems to be that the new T-Mobile phone plan can even solve the problem of the inveterate hatred between Capulets and Montagues. The spot recalls the mixture between early modern and contemporary that characterises Nextel commercial. Here Shakespeare's language has been partially preserved in the context of a

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fgh6tOSm9hk>. (25.8.2020).

<sup>18</sup> <https://adland.tv/adnews/t-mobile-romeo-and-juliet-2008-30-usa>. (25.8.2020).

modern day setting. Unlike Nextel, though, the message emerges clearly. Humorous ads like this and the following may be risky. Amusing and witty commercials usually find more appreciation than straight ones and, consequently, may be more effective since they arouse the interest and the attention of the audience. Nevertheless, “there is less counter-arguing with humorous ads because viewers process them as entertainment rather than engage in a true/false evaluation of the product” (Sutherland 2008, p. 202). Humour and irony may also distract potential buyers from fully understanding the message. In this case the ad seems to be effective because it stresses the quality and the characteristics of the product, and the viewers can clearly understand the offer since it is part and parcel of the story of Romeo and Juliet.<sup>19</sup>

A similar approach was taken by Vodafone Italy for its commercial campaign in 2013.<sup>20</sup> Quite surprisingly this ad has not received any critical attention. The protagonist of the whole campaign is an impertinent seal dubbed by a well-known comic Italian actress, Luciana Littizzetto, while Romeo, who adheres to the canonical idea of lover, is played by Kyle James, an attractive American actor and model. The spot is set in Juliet’s garden at night, in a location reminiscent of the traditional setting for the play, such as Zeffirelli’s screen adaptation. Romeo throws a stone at the balcony in an effort to arouse Juliet’s attention but he actually hits her. The dialogue between the two characters is surreal:

Juliet: Ahia, scimunito! Finalmente! Me ne stavo andando in paranoia.

Romeo: Mio amore, sai che non possiamo parlarci; apparteniamo a due famiglie diverse.

Juliet: Ma hai la polenta nelle orecchie? Non hai sentito che oggi puoi parlare con chi vuoi?

(Juliet: Ouch! Fool! At Last! I was starting to get really paranoid!

Romeo: My love, you know we can’t talk to each other. We belong to two different families.

Juliet: Have you got polenta (cornmeal mush) in your ears? Haven’t you heard that now you can talk to whoever you want? (The translation is mine)

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, Ogilvy & Mather produced a very similar commercial to promote a Romanian mobile phone network operator, Cosmote.<sup>19</sup> Even though the commercial is named after the two Shakespearean protagonists, “Romeo și Julieta”, there are not specific textual references and the similarity is based on the presence of two young lovers and a father who opposes their relationship. Yet, as Gabriela Iuliana Colipcă-Ciobanu argues, “the Shakespearean hypotext is at least in the back of the advertisers’ mind” (2016, p. 35) but it is not explored. The commercial is available at <https://www.iqads.ro/creatie/4559/cosmote-romeo-julieta>. (25.8.2020).

<sup>20</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BrRyOvc15U>. (25.8.2020).

In the final part we see the actors after the shooting of the commercial. The seal, no longer playing Juliet, is talking on a mobile phone and says: "Ettore, mi passi a prendere o esco con questa piaga?" ("Ettore, will you come and pick me up or I have to go out with this plague?") The translation is mine). In the meantime her set partner sends her some kisses as if he were really in love with her.

Besides the balcony and the song "True Love" sang by Pink and Lily Allen, a hit in 2013, what identifies the characters as Romeo and Juliet is Romeo's voice. Actually the actor was dubbed by Francesco Pezzulli, the Italian voice of Leonardo DiCaprio in celebrated films such as *Titanic* and *Romeo + Juliet*. The spot is obviously humorous since Juliet is a seal who complains about Romeo being late, and addresses him using colloquial and rude words. The campaign tagline is "you choose" and offers unlimited calls to a chosen number. The ad certainly seems to foster the importance of female agency, since it suggests that Juliet can choose whether she wants to start a relationship with Romeo or not, as she can also decide about her phone plan. The spot is about making decisions. No-one here is "fortune's fool" but everyone is responsible for their own choices, women in particular. Here the story of Romeo and Juliet is appropriated more radically since it suggests the possibility of a happy ending only for Juliet, excluding both her death and a long lasting relationship with Romeo. The future seems to lie wide open in front of the young female protagonist.

The most recent Romeo and Juliet related ad for mobile phones is by Apple.<sup>21</sup> The commercial promotes the Iphone7 camera which is shown while recording a school performance of two children acting out Romeo and Juliet in a fairy-tale-like atmosphere. The campaign tagline is "your movies look like movies. Practically magic". In the ad the school performance looks like a real film, thanks to the outstanding camera work. Nothing in the execution points to the brand itself. It could be used as a commercial for many other brands of mobile phones. Where a brand is not inherently integrated, as in this case, commercials "have to make doubly sure the correct brand gets successfully registered in people's minds" (Sutherland 2008, p. 220). Otherwise the ad may be effective for mobile phones in general but not for the specific one being advertised. Moreover, more than any other spot, this one shows that Shakespeare actually works as a myth. There is no connection between the play and the product advertised; the advertisers could have used any other play by Shakespeare, an opera, a musical or another form of performance. We may question what the journalist Angela Natividad argues about the spot: "And while it's neither noble nor true to life, it sure is pretty – a Shakespearean rendition of how we'd actually like these moments to look

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxCKSSXu3aU>. (25.8.2020).

and feel”.<sup>22</sup> The adjective Shakespearean here hints at high quality, sophistication, prestige, the powerful impact of emotions, modernity, qualities that are somehow supposed to be transferred to the product and thereby to increase its sales. On the other hand, the ad supposedly represents a realistic situation in which children perform a school play. This reveals Shakespeare’s pervading presence: the Bard is part of our daily life and our schooling. The father recording the school performance is proud of his daughter but also of the idea that she is playing a Shakespearean character.

The analysis of these ads can hopefully contribute to delineating the evolution of Shakespeare’s cultural power and also to investigating how much we actually understand of the playwright and his work. Ads are like mirrors, which reflect how our understanding and approach towards this tragedy (but also towards Shakespeare more in general) varies through time. We move from a cinematic and concise version of the play in a commercial which relies on the viewers’ familiarity with the story to one that brings Shakespeare back to the stage, his natural place, but also suggests the incredible success and influence of his plays adapted for the screen.

#### 4. Conclusions

Among the countless Shakespearean quotations reproduced on phone covers, one of the most recurrent is from *Hamlet*: “To quote Hamlet Act III, Scene III line 87 ‘no’”.<sup>23</sup> This funny example is extremely fitting since it illuminates some aspects related to Shakespeare’s cultural power. What makes it meaningful is not its content but the effect it may have on the people who show it on their mobile phone and on those who see it. Only the most expert would be able to identify the character who says ‘no’ as the Prince of Denmark, and remember why he says so. Therefore, only few can experience the pleasure of recognition, realizing that the quote refers to the scene when Hamlet finds Claudius in prayer, apparently seeking forgiveness, and decides not to murder him but wait and kill him “At game a-swearing, or about some act/ That has no relish of salvation in’t” (3.3.91-92).

On the other hand, this quote also shows the extremes of the use of Shakespeare’s for marketing ends. Shakespeare stands as a cultural status symbol: his words lend prestige and authority to those who quote them, whatever they are. The quote does not have to be necessarily meaningful but

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/ad-day-kids-act-out-romeo-juliet-apples-charming-new-iphone-7-spot-174969>. (25.8.2020).

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.redbubble.com/i/iphone-case/To-quote-Hamlet-Act-III-Scene-III-Line-87-No-by-inspires/24696049.PM7U2>. (25.8.2020).

it has to be from Shakespeare because it is the Bard's cultural authority which makes it significant. In this case not only is Shakespeare's authorship which dignifies the words but also the idea that the quote is pronounced by his most famous character.

The digital turn has fostered the popularization of the Bard, who has been appropriated in a variety of media and forms, becoming "a mobile, even disruptive, global cultural brand, the site of cultural as well as technological intermediation, and an unavoidable site where many of these intermedial energies are gathered" (Fischlin 2014, p. 7). Moreover, it has also exponentially increased the number and the type of Shakespeare users, who have different expertise in, interest in and level of engagement with the Bard. This emerges clearly from the analysis of phone cases, which reveals the multifarious variety of buyers of Shakespeare-themed covers. The Bard himself has been turned into a product, "one of the most marketable products" (Collins 2014, p. 134). His marketability led to a potentially limitless proliferation of covers with his image and his words, faithfully reproduced or refashioned to suit the taste of the variegated clientele.

On the other hand, while phone covers manage to satisfy both customers with no specific knowledge and more expert ones, TV ads seem to address a more mainstream audience. As a matter of fact, despite the "extraordinary linguistic semantic pliability" (Lanier 2002, p. 262) of Shakespeare's language, none of these spots retain his words in a meaningful way, and they all seem to be relying on other adaptations of the story and not on the text. In the hands of skilled advertising creative teams the tragedy of miscommunication becomes the symbol of the triumph of mobile phone providers, which manage to save the two lovers by allowing communication. Therefore, even though it is true that advertising heavily relies on the Bard's name and his cultural power, and "typically is not a source of new ideas about Shakespeare" (Lanier 2012, p. 499), the investigation of advertising strategies used in the field of mobile phones in the 21<sup>st</sup> century may offer an interesting angle to look at Shakespeare's centrality in the intellectual, aesthetic and political discourse of our cultural moment.

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