

# Czech-ing Shakespeare: Tracing Shakespeare's Influence (not only) in Czech Advertisements

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## ABSTRACT

*Shakespeare's plays are indisputably among the most translated, staged, and adapted works for both theatre and screen. The texts undergo updating, recontextualization, and transcultural adaptation to engage audiences across different age groups, thereby facilitating their reception. This article explores Shakespeare's position in modern popular culture. Initially, Shakespeare's status in popular culture is discussed, drawing on the concepts of Graham Holderness (1988), Douglas Lanier (2002, 2006), and Marjorie Garber (2008). The article then examines selected popular Shakespearean representations, such as Richard Burt's concept of "Schlockspeare" (2002), which focuses on the use of catchphrases, references, along with both textual and visual allusions to Shakespeare in advertising (e.g. mortgage loans from Commercial Bank, a Shakespeare-inspired yogurt, etc.). The objective is to demonstrate that popular culture serves to disseminate Shakespeare's work without diminishing its inherent value, echoing Graham Holderness's assertion that "Shakespeare is, here, now, always, what is currently being made of him."<sup>1</sup>*

## KEYWORDS

William Shakespeare, popular culture, Shakespeare-themed advertisement, advertising themes, cultural capital

## Introduction

In her book *Shakespeare and Modern Culture*, Marjorie Garber asserts, "Shakespeare makes modern culture and modern culture makes Shakespeare."<sup>2</sup> Douglas Lanier observes how Shakespeare permeates popular culture extensively, manifesting in music, children's books, advertisements, comic books, toys, computer games, and many other spheres. However, this phenomenon encompasses a broader spectrum of products, including political cartoons, detective fiction, theme parks, cigar brands, science fiction, board games, stationery (pens and pencils), gift wrapping paper, greeting cards, shopping bags, T-shirts, beer labels, rubber duck bath toys, Internet websites, and business management guides.<sup>3</sup> The list is continuously expanding with new additions, seemingly never reaching a saturation point.

This article draws upon Marcel Danesi's concept of pop culture, following which Shakespeare's position within popular culture is explored by introducing historical stages of Shakespeare-themed advertisements with a focus on British and American examples as well as selected Czech advertisements.

1 Graham Holderness, *The Shakespeare Myth* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), xvi.

2 Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare and Modern Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008), xiii.

3 Douglas Lanier, *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [2002] 2006), 3.

## Shakespeare in popular culture

Explorations of Shakespeare's role as a cultural icon as well as his integration into popular culture have a rich and extensive critical history. Graham Holderness's pioneering work *The Shakespeare Myth* (1988) established a new methodology that helped break down the binary opposition between popular and academic perceptions of Shakespeare. This led to a proliferation of definitions of "Shakespeare" and "Shakespearean" that extends beyond academic boundaries. Fields such as cinematography/filmography, PC games, Shakespeare-related tourism, and advertising are just a few examples of such areas of research. Holderness's book has served as a cornerstone for explorations of Shakespeare in advertising, offering the first thorough and critical analysis of this subject and demonstrating the artistic value of Shakespeare-themed advertisements. Holderness asserts that as the Shakespeare myth solidifies, it invites greater scrutiny and reinterpretation. If Shakespeare's works are projected to be universally relevant across various eras and social contexts, there is significant pressure for them to resonate with contemporary society, particularly among those who express the greatest interest. This pressure fosters a demand for inventive adaptations that reify relevance and engagement. A similar viewpoint is echoed in Michael D. Bristol's *Big-time Shakespeare* (1996), a work in which Shakespeare is likened to cultural icons such as the Beatles and Elvis Presley which symbolize cultural success, high visibility, and contemporary celebrity status.<sup>4</sup>

Shakespeare is obviously part of popular culture, a concept which according to Marcel Danesi, frequently rejects, ignores, or adapts traditions to fit its own context. The allure of pop culture stems from its origin in emerging trends and societal needs, which are continually evolving in response to public opinions and preferences.<sup>5</sup> This definition, in fact, resonates with the conception of Shakespearean reworkings, each adapting Shakespeare's works in their own way, usually in response to new trends and needs which themselves are in a constant state of revision. As Douglas Lanier observes, however, the intricate process of reshaping Shakespeare is seldom straightforward and often lacks inevitability.<sup>6</sup> Each transformation is influenced by distinct cultural concerns in reaction not only to developments in theatre and publishing, but also the increasing influence and ambiguous cultural standing of the middle class, shifts in nationalism and colonialism, the professionalization of literary study, and the rise of new mass media. These forces create specific climates that mold the ways Shakespeare has been reinvented and reshaped throughout history. The history of adapting Shakespeare is thus intricately connected to the history of cultural classification, the study of which demonstrates how contemporary societies and cultures create hierarchies by distinguishing between high and low culture as well as what is considered mainstream and marginal.

Lanier further examines the various methods and transformative practices used to leverage Shakespeare's cultural influence and marketability in advertising. He observes that advertisements inspired by Shakespeare can play a significant role in conveying critical ideas. Lanier views advertising as a key force in perpetuating perceptions of Shakespeare across generations and spreading them

4 Michael D. Bristol, *Big-Time Shakespeare* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 3.

5 Marcel Danesi, *Popular Culture. Introductory Perspectives* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 4.

6 Lanier, *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture*, 21.

throughout society in ways that are at least as impactful as the traditional books and performances valorized by the custodians of “authentic” Shakespeare.<sup>7</sup> Shakespeare’s cultural afterlife is evidently a continuous process, or rather, as referred to by Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, “an ongoing explosion of recreation”<sup>8</sup> influenced by numerous interacting and permeating factors and revitalized by both the past and present. Following in these footsteps, Jennifer Hulbert, Kevin Westmore, and Robert York perceive Shakespeare as a framework through which contemporary elements such as social and cultural conflicts and business practices are perceived in processes which often undermine to various degrees the classic status of Shakespeare. The Bard consequently becomes commodified and multiplied into “Shakespeares.”<sup>9</sup> This perspective of Shakespeare’s dominance in contemporary culture, with youth culture no exception, echoes Marjorie Garber’s bold assertion that “Shakespeare makes modern culture, and modern culture makes Shakespeare.”<sup>10</sup>

In this respect, Richard Burt’s theory on Shakespeare’s influence post-mass media becomes relevant.<sup>11</sup> According to Burt, the emergence of electronic and digital mass media, alongside the shifts in the political landscape following the conclusion of the Cold War, has initiated a transformation in how we engage with Shakespeare and interpret his works, both in scholarly critique and educational settings. Examining Shakespeare’s cultural influence, appropriation and adaptation across various media such as print, film, and digital communication technologies can aid in understanding the concept of loss. New technologies inherently prioritize speed, which inevitably fosters a sense of lateness and eventual obsolescence. In this context, Burt examines mass media in relation to the concept of “Schlockspere,” which in his view regards mass media as embodying characteristics such as “trash, kitsch, obsolete, trivial, obscure, unknown, forgotten, unarchived, and beyond the usual academic purview.”<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to note that Schlock and Schlockspere are not purely derogatory terms in Burt’s usage. Instead, he employs them to underscore a fundamental concept of epistemic exclusion which implies dismissal based on various criteria such as quality, interest, seriousness, and topicality. In agreement with Burt’s perspective, it is possible to distinguish between adaptations and references to Shakespeare that are interactive and interpretive in comparison to those that venture beyond mere interaction and interpretation. While the former can often be analyzed in relation to past or present political contexts, the latter types of appropriation routinely lack any discernible doctrinal meaning; such discourses may repudiate or parody conventional politics or even be devoid of any political significance at all.

7 Douglas Lanier, “Marketing,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 514.

8 Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, *Adaptations of Shakespeare. A Critical Anthology of Plays from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (London and New York, 2010), 1.

9 Jennifer Hulbert, Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., and Robert York, *Shakespeare and Youth Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1.

10 Garber, *Shakespeare and Modern Culture*, xiii.

11 Richard Burt, *Shakespeare after Mass Media* (London, New York: Palgrave, 2002), 1.

12 Burt, *Shakespeare after Mass Media*, 8.

## Selling with Shakespeare: The Evolution of Advertising Themes

Shakespeare's name, quotes from his plays and other allusions to his works have been commonly used in advertising and marketing for many years. Advertisers draw upon Shakespeare as "cultural capital,"<sup>13</sup> a term coined by Pierre Bourdieu to describe the social prestige and respect acquired by individuals who possess the knowledge and skills to appreciate and understand artistic works like literature. In our case, specific Shakespearean cultural allusions that have emerged over time are utilized. Based on concepts of Douglas Holt, Shakespeare embodies symbolic associations and characteristics typical of cultural icons.<sup>14</sup> These representations traditionally serve as exemplary symbols that readers/viewers readily accept as shortcuts to represent significant ideas. These cultural associations, along with the prestige associated with Shakespeare's works, may also help explain why Shakespeare holds a central position not only in the educational systems of various nations, but also in other sectors. Referred to as the "Shakespeare industry" by Siobhan Kenaan and Dominic Shellard, it is evident that this sector has expanded significantly over the centuries, serving as a constant reminder of Shakespeare's economic and cultural influence.<sup>15</sup>

Although Shakespeare-themed advertisements constitute a relatively small portion of advertising in general, the cultural impact of these artifacts often surpasses the limited prevalence and range within the works themselves due to the persuasive nature and frequent repetition of advertising messages. According to Douglas Lanier, Shakespeare's use in (particularly British) advertising can be classified into three phases: the late Victorian era, characterized by a peak in Shakespeare-focused marketing; the modern period spanning from the Great War through the 1950s and 1960s, during which Shakespeare played a relatively minor role in marketing efforts; and the contemporary period from the 1960s to the present day which has witnessed a subtle revival (or gradual comeback) in Shakespeare-themed advertising.<sup>16</sup> Each of these epochs employs Shakespeare in distinct ways, influenced not only by changes in media, advertising strategies and mass production methods, but also by shifts in ideological interpretations of Shakespeare and his relationship with the public.

Shakespeare's involvement in advertising during the 18th and 19th centuries was notably limited, primarily due to his esteemed iconic status, which did not correspond to the prevailing skepticism towards advertising, which was often regarded as mere exaggeration or "puffery."<sup>17</sup> Moreover, constraints such as space limitations and taxes on printed products further restricted the scope for advertisements during this period. Changes occurring in the late Victorian era, however, paved the way for an increase in Shakespeare-themed advertising. Firstly, this period witnessed a surge in mass-produced and widely distributed goods, necessitating symbolic associations and assurances of quality to encourage consumer adoption. Shakespeare's revered cultural status

13 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), 12–14.

14 Douglas Holt, *How Brands Become Icons* (Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, 2004), 1–2, 230–231.

15 Siobhan Kenaan and Dominic Shellard, eds., *Shakespeare's Cultural Capital. His Economic Impact from the Sixteenth to the Twenty-first Century* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 5.

16 Lanier, "Marketing," 500.

17 Lanier, "Marketing," 500.

precisely facilitated this association. Additionally, advancements in imaging technology enabled new advertising methods. Furthermore, Shakespeare's established role as a cultural touchstone, one widely respected and prevalent in theatre and literature, further bolstered his appeal in advertising efforts. Advertisers in the late nineteenth century, like their modern counterparts, faced two fundamental questions: how to encourage customers to integrate mass-produced items into their daily routines, and how to persuade a public typically skeptical of the quality of these products. Shakespeare satisfied both of these needs.

The first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were characterized by a cultural rift between the elite and the mass audience. Shakespeare, long seen as an emblem of highbrow culture, seemed to lose his status as a viable figure in advertising.<sup>18</sup> This division was reinforced by the rise of cinema as a dominant medium and the formal recognition of Shakespeare as a literary figure within academic institutions. According to Lanier, advertisers did not see Shakespeare primarily as a source of validation, but rather as a collection of associations they could leverage to highlight features of their products. Nevertheless, many of Shakespeare's major themes were no longer connected with the values advertisers of mass-manufactured goods favored, such as modernity, urban living, convenience, accessibility, enjoyment and democratization. When it came to luxury goods, however, Shakespeare became a symbol of exclusivity, adding a high-end appeal. Shakespearean quotations were employed in advertising various products, including diamonds (referencing *1 Henry IV*), chocolates (*Romeo and Juliet*), whiskey and automobiles, leveraging Shakespeare's artistry and expertise. Advertisers employed multiple strategies in Shakespeare-themed campaigns. Initially, a particular product was tailored to appeal to the middle class while subtly emphasizing aristocratic associations or the status of certain characters within Shakespeare's works. Advertisers also often injected humour or irreverence by altering or blatantly misquoting famous lines from the plays. Shakespearean references were sometimes indirect, commonly utilizing iconic settings like the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. Renowned actors such as Orson Welles and Maurice Evans often acted as intermediaries, lending a Shakespearean flair to advertised products. Additionally, esteemed institutions like the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre and the Folger Library were used to add prestige to items like liquor, insurance and cars.

Shakespeare was also used for corporate-image enhancement, an approach Lanier illustrates by offering a detailed analysis of particular advertisements.<sup>19</sup> Among Lanier's earliest examples is a 1945 advert for Olin Industries, a significant supplier of munitions to the Allies during World War II. In posters and print ads, the ruins of London are portrayed featuring a flower in the foreground and a toppled bust of Shakespeare with a bullet hole in its temple in the background. The ad copy opens with Hotspur's line from *1 Henry IV*: "Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety" (Act 2, Scene 3, 11); the connotation is that a blossom has emerged amidst the rubble of London, with the text suggesting that the flower has been nourished by the nitrates in bombs dropped on the city, a clear metaphor for how Olin's wartime efforts have contributed to the blossoming of peace.<sup>20</sup> The use of Shakespeare in this advertisement serves a dual purpose:

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18 Lanier, "Marketing," 506.

19 Lanier, "Marketing," 509.

20 Lanier, "Marketing," 509.

it not only relates Olin to the values associated with Shakespeare and culture itself, effectively positioning the company as a guardian of both Shakespeare and the broader cultural heritage, but it also successfully deflects attention from Olin's profiting from the war effort. Subsequently, corporate backing of Shakespearean performances began to serve as a means of projecting an image of generous and supportive artistic patronage. In 1964, British Petroleum publicly endorsed Canada's Stratford Festival, an annual event held in Stratford, Ontario from April to October. Following suit, major corporations such as ExxonMobil, MetLife Insurance, and Morgan Guaranty Trust, a prominent investment banking institution, initiated a campaign to showcase their joint sponsorship of the BBC – *Time Life Shakespeare* series aired on American public television.<sup>21</sup> Notably, these advertisements portrayed the mass medium of television as on par with Shakespeare, indicating that these companies aimed not only to enhance their reputation by linking with a symbol of high culture but also to facilitate the adaptation of traditional cultural assets into a medium conducive to their objectives. Their support for the transformation of Shakespearean works into televised and, later, video format suggests a convergence of interests among multinational corporations, visual media, and Shakespearean cultural heritage.

Modern advertising and marketing campaigns centered around Shakespeare exhibit notable parallels and continuities with earlier practices. During the 1960s and 1970s, with the introduction of technologies like copiers and word processors, Shakespeare was often utilised to showcase advancements in writing and print technologies to integrate new products into the workplace by associating them with the handwritten tradition. As Lanier points out, Shakespeare persisted as a symbol of elite cultural tradition, frequently invoked with a touch of irony.<sup>22</sup> References to Shakespeare became subtler, prioritizing visual elements over textual ones and frequently drawing upon iconic and instantly recognizable scenes, such as the afore-mentioned balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, which was also later featured in a Czech yogurt commercial (see below). During this period, Shakespeare-themed advertisements proliferated on television screens. Lanier explains the appeal of Shakespearean motifs in advertising through a specific BIC pen advertisement launched in 1972.<sup>23</sup> In this commercial, voiced by American comedian Mel Brooks, a depiction of Shakespeare struggling to connect with his Elizabethan audience contrasts sharply with his modern “reincarnation” using a new porous-point BIC pen, impressing a contemporary crowd with an updated rendition of his famous “To be or not to be” line transformed into “Take it or leave it.”<sup>24</sup> The advertisement's voiceover positions other ballpoint pens as relics of Shakespeare's outdated language, while the BIC pen is presented as chic and stylish. Comparing Shakespeare to a modern reincarnation in the advertisement can be seen as a creative and compelling concept. While Shakespeare's inclusion in advertising can be seen as an attempt to elevate the product's status and appeal to a sophisticated audience, it could also be viewed as controversial or even disrespectful by some highbrow audiences. Nevertheless, generally speaking, in television advertisements,

21 Russell Jackson, “Salus Populi: Shakespeare Roman Plebeians on Screen,” in *Shakespeare on Screen*, eds. Sarah Hatchuel and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 172.

22 Lanier, “Marketing,” 510.

23 “Classic BIC Banana Shakespeare Commercial (FHD, 60FPS).” Accessed February 2, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skwwZnDQd1E>.

24 Lanier, “Marketing,” 510.

Shakespeare has been frequently depicted as a representation of elitist high culture in conflict with the liberating and rebellious spirit associated with popular culture.

Later, a new trend emerged building on romanticized and re-heroized film adaptations. The phenomenon is traceable in an advertisement for Levi's jeans featuring a young man dressed in a pair of Levi's 501s with anti-fit cut in the seat (2005).<sup>25</sup> The film-like atmosphere of the advertisement is intensified by an introduction featuring a red drawn theatre curtain with a sign *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, Act 3, Scene 1. Set on a rough hostile corner in Los Angeles, the ad opens with a model-like Bottom (Joshua Alba) who is walking past street gang members wearing unfashionable high waisted jeans. The young men are evidently impressed by his stylish jeans that they wonder: "Bottom thou art changed, what do I see on thee," and touch his loose-fitting Levi's 501. Meanwhile, a young Titania (Amanda Sudano) wakes up in a nearby café and is drawn onto the street to Bottom. Charmed by him (or most probably his jeans), she muses: "What angel wakes me from my flowery bed? I pray [the] gentle mortals sing again; mine ears much enamored of thy note; so is mine eye thrall'd to thy shape" (original Act 3, Scene 1, 122, 180–182). In contrast to the enchanted Queen of the fairies, who wakes up to Bottom with an ass's head, the young woman seems to declare her love for the handsome young man mainly due to his outfit, with his jeans being the focal point, ending up with the ultimate pronouncement "I love thee."<sup>26</sup>

In Lanier's view, Shakespeare is not used as a "high-cultural foil," but rather as a romanticized tool for revitalizing the Levi's brand.<sup>27</sup> Shakespeare has thus recently been utilised as a positive connotative source, which in turn strengthens the Bard's value as cultural capital. This reinvigoration is tied to the globalization of Shakespeare-themed advertising. In contrast to previous phases of such advertising, mainly connected to British culture and context, the new era highlights Shakespeare's global appeal in marketing. This international influence is evident in an advertisement for Levi's featuring a multiethnic cast, variously featuring subtitles or dubbing depending on the English-language tradition of the particular country.

According to Cristina Paravano (2021), Shakespeare's language and Shakespeare per se represent a potent tool in advertising. While some phrases are directly linked to the original plays, others are simply attributed to Shakespeare. In Paravano's view, these words serve as motivational slogans or can be twisted for humour or "creative misquotations" in which quoted excerpts are reworked in a playful manner.<sup>28</sup> Such language usage illustrates Shakespeare's enduring relevance and adaptability across different contexts. Shakespeare can even be portrayed as Santa Claus on T-shirts wishing a "Merry Willmas."<sup>29</sup> Such appropriations bridge the gap between highbrow and lowbrow culture, appealing to both those unfamiliar with the original text and those who appreciate the intertextual references, creating a sense of communal enjoyment and recognition. The most popular Shakespeare references in advertising are evidently the persona of Shakespeare himself,

25 Levi's (UK). "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Accessed March 23, 2024. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=392OpS7jG-s>>.

26 Levi's (UK). "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Accessed March 23, 2024. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=392OpS7jG-s>>.

27 Lanier, "Marketing," 512.

28 Cristina Paravano, "My Kingdom for an iPhone." Shakespeare and Mobile Phones," *Lingue e Linguaggi*, no. 45 (2021): 151–167, accessed April 2, 2024. DOI: 10.1285/i22390359v45p151. <<http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/lingueinguaggi/article/view/24510>>.

29 "William Shakespeare Merry Willmas Funny Christmas T-Shirt." Accessed May 19, 2024. <<https://www.amazon.com/William-Shakespeare-Merry-Willmas-Christmas/dp/B07XPHKJQM>>.

*Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, all of whom offer a vast space for creativity. This trend is apparent around the world in regions familiar with Shakespeare, for example in the Czech advertising scene. As alluded to several times above, the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* is particularly popular, as it has been used to advertise a range of products from cars (Volkswagen) to chewing gum, tea, and insecticide in various regions. Without a doubt, Shakespeare transcends borders not only in traditional theatre productions and films but also in more alternative and extravagant forms of advertising.

## Czech Shakespeare-themed advertisements

*Hamlet* was featured in a Czech Shakespeare-themed advertisement for a loan from Komerční banka (Commercial Bank).<sup>30</sup> Set in a darkened theatre before a full audience, an actor portraying the young Danish prince dressed in black and holding Yorick's skull begins the famous soliloquy: "To be or not to be." As he gazes at the skull in his outstretched hand, he hesitates and forgets the next words. The camera then zooms out to reveal a cue box, from which a woman's voice prompts: "Flat, or house." She repeats, with increased urgency, "Flat, or house, that is what this is about." The audience reacts with surprise, whispering and exchanging puzzled glances. Hamlet, however, repeats the words boldly. Then, another cue follows: "I will advise you, too, where to get the best home loan." Attention shifts to the theatre prompter, an elegant middle-aged woman who removes her glasses and smiles knowingly, revealing she is "the best mortgage broker from Komerčka [sic]." Hamlet looks confused, and the scene ends with the prompter confidently nodding and clapping her hands, breaking the silence.

The advertisement plays on the famous line from Hamlet's soliloquy, "To be or not to be," using the Czech partial homonyms "být" (to be) and "byt" (flat) to create a humorous and easily memorable twist. This wordplay not only attracts the audience's attention but also ties directly into the product being advertised – a loan for a flat or house. The prompter takes on the role of a wise, omniscient helper, assisting Hamlet, who surprisingly fumbles for the right words, and by extension, the audience, who are initially confused by Hamlet's memory loss. Her calm and confident behavior implies reliability and expertise, qualities desirable in the banking sector. Her quick reaction underscores the putative capability and reliability of Komerční banka to deal with various unexpected problems, to advise its clients and customers accordingly, and to support them at critical moments. The theatre setting is also significant, offering a touch of both familiarity and festivity, supported by the historical, National Theatre-like interior and the elegant clothes of the visitors. Using a well-known scene from a classic play makes the advertisement instantly recognizable and engaging. This approach leverages the cultural capital of Shakespeare and simultaneously lends a sense of gravitas to Komerční banka's message. Moreover, by addressing the audience directly, the scene, or rather the prompter, breaks the fourth wall. As Elizabeth Bell observes, "[B]y breaking

30 Komerční banka. "Byt či dům v Hamletovi (hypotéka)." Accessed February 1, 2024. <<https://www.tvspoty.cz/komercni-banka-hamlet/>>.



the fourth wall [...], actors and audience alike are asked to analyze the construction of reality,”<sup>31</sup> a mnemonic strategy which seems to be exactly the case here.

Following the Komerční banka advertisement, another example of a Shakespearean theme in Czech advertising is a commercial for Müller Grácie yogurt.<sup>32</sup> This ad skillfully utilizes the iconic balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* to highlight the product's appeal. Like the previous commercial, this one is also set in a theatre, but the action focuses solely on the stage. The spot begins with the introduction of the dairy product's logo, accompanied by a soundtrack. A white, raised balcony covered in green vegetation (probably ivy or grapevine) appears, on which the beautiful, blue-clad Juliet (Barbora Seidlová) stands, a pot of Müller Grácie yogurt in hand, and recites a distinctive variation on Juliet's monologue: “Why Müller Grácie? What's in a name? That which we call Grácie [grace], by any other word, would be no less delicious than with that name” (originally in Act II, Scene 2). At Juliet's words, Romeo (Robert Nebřenský), dressed in light-blue knee-length breeches, white stockings, and a pelerine, appears under the balcony with a pink blooming flower and listens, smiling. When she finishes, he adds almost laconically: “Said it with grace... But suffice to say you just like it.” Focusing on a close up of yogurt enriched with cherries, a voiceover says, “The new Müller Grácie: fruit and yogurt in the role of a lifetime.” Surprisingly, the advertisement does not end at this point but returns to the stage, where Romeo uses a hand-operated lifting platform to “float” up to Juliet and takes the yogurt from her with a broad smile. His final ambiguous words are addressed to both Juliet and the audience: “If on a date, then with grace.”<sup>33</sup>

Like the previous advertisement, this one is based on one of the most famous lines from Shakespeare's play. The text features an essential part of Juliet's monologue, “What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet” (Act 2, Scene 2, 43–44), transforming it into an ode to yogurt. The commercial initially suggests that any yogurt, regardless of its name, would always taste just good and delicious. The text effectively conveys the message that the product's name is secondary to its quality, which makes sense, of course. However, the play-on-words in the message of the advertisement is trickier than it might seem. To borrow a metaphor from flora or fauna, yogurt is defined by its “genus” name, i.e. Müller, while the “species” name, i.e. Grácie, can be changed or omitted. This emphasizes the separability of the yogurt's name and its quality, similar to the case of Romeo, whose name, according to Juliet, is not important. Or rather, as observed by William Nest, for Juliet, “Romeo's true identity transcends what in him can be named.”<sup>34</sup> Despite her assurance, she exhorts Romeo to renounce or “[d]eny thy father and refuse thy name; / Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love, / And I'll no longer be a Capulet” (Act 2, Scene 2, 34–36). The original lines, like the advertisement itself, thus imply a paradoxically simultaneous separability and inseparability of name and identity, as David Schalkwyk observes.

31 Elizabeth Bell, *Theories of Performance* (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore: Sage Publications, Inc., 2008), 20.

32 Müller Grácie. “Romeo a Julie mají rande.” Accessed February 1, 2024. <<https://www.tvspoty.cz/muller-gracie-romeo-a-julie/>>.

33 Müller Grácie. “Romeo a Julie mají rande.” (online).

34 William N. Nest, “Romeo's Bad Language,” in *Rematerializing Shakespeare. Authority and Representation on the Early Modern Stage*, ed. Bryan Reynolds and William N. Nest (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 120.

Thus, while the name is claimed to be unimportant, it still holds a significant connection to identity and quality.<sup>35</sup>

The setting is again a theatre stage with backdrops, where the main characters perform in period costumes. The overall historical character of the scene is disrupted by the presence of the advertised yogurt and, at the end, a modern manual lifting platform, which adds a parodic, humorous touch to the theatrical framing. The playful nature of the advertisement is further emphasized by the rather mature age of the actor playing Romeo, who appears more as Juliet's mentor, which is obvious from his comments, than her admirer. Despite the parodical aspect, Shakespeare's work serves as cultural capital, reinforcing the quality of the product.

In both cases, the television advertisements are set on a stage and use Shakespeare's most famous works and verses to lend the products an air of solidity and cultural prestige. This approach targets a wide range of audiences and potential consumers. However, in the case of Müller Grácie, the target group is most likely women. It is symptomatic that in the Czech context, these Shakespeare-themed advertisements exclusively use a theatrical setting, which resonates more with Czech audiences and consumers due to the familiarity and cultural relevance they connote. The strategy may be rooted in the rich tradition of theatre in Czechia, where theatrical performances have long been a cornerstone of cultural life. The use of a stage setting in commercials effectively taps into this cultural heritage, making the message more relatable and impactful.

In 2017, an international advertisement for Old Spice shower gel was launched on Czech television using a parody of a line from Hamlet "To wash or not to wash, that is the question" as its opening slogan.<sup>36</sup> In the advertisement, a traveler (Axel Kiener) finds himself in an arid desert covered with white sand. Thanks to a simple handmade shower constructed from a water flask tied with a belt to a dry tree, he enjoys the beneficial effects of water while attributing the "cleansing of his body" to the shower gel: "Thanks to the Old Spice Dirt Destroyer, my journey of cleansing has finally been fulfilled. Was it a mistake to use up the rest of the water in this arid desert? Time will tell..." The advertisement concludes with a view of three specific Old Spice products next to the traveler's skeleton, as the voiceover recaps, "Old Spice Shower Gels. Say goodbye to the curse of sweat. Say hello to manly scent!"<sup>37</sup> In contrast to Czech advertisements, which are set in theatrical settings, the international Old Spice spot employs a cinematically elaborated journey and quest motif. Despite having little hope of finding an oasis or artesian well, the traveler unhesitatingly chooses bathing and cleansing over quenching his thirst or stockpiling water. The opening question is answered not only by the traveler himself but also by the more or less humorous image of the skeleton next to the shower gels. Here, the allusion to Shakespeare serves merely as a rhetorical question, the answer to which is well known in advance.

Shakespeare-themed advertisements appear not only on TV but also in print. Unsurprisingly, they often modify Hamlet's line "To be or not to be" into diverse variants, such as "to wash or not to wash (the dishes in the dishwasher)." These advertisements play on the rhyme and the pronunciation of the English infinitive verb "to be," which rhymes with the one-syllable Czech

35 David Schalkwyk, *Shakespeare, Love and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 187.

36 Old Spice. "Mýt či nemýt, to je otázka / Endless Quest." (2017). Accessed May 19, 2024. <<https://www.tvspoty.cz/old-spice-myt-ci-nemyt-to-je-otazka-endless-quest/>>.

37 Old Spice. "Mýt či nemýt, to je otázka / Endless Quest (online)."

verb “mýt” (to wash): “To wash or not to wash dishes in the dishwasher? That is the question that divides households into two camps.”<sup>38</sup> In this context, the variations on the Hamletian line function as a sort of cliché, simplifying a complex existential question into a trivial domestic decision and underscoring the difference in opinions with a touch of humour. Like ads in other cultural contexts, Czech commercials frequently portray activities that are mutually exclusive, drawing on a famous literary reference to effectively engage the audience by utilizing the cultural weight of the original line while simultaneously playing with its meaning.

### **Conclusion: Rethinking Shakespeare-themed advertising and popular culture**

Our examples of television and print advertising bring us back to a discussion of popular culture, especially the presence and role of Shakespeare within it. Shakespeare and Shakespeare-themed advertisements are integral to popular culture, especially advertising. In this context, the emphasis is placed more on reshaping Shakespeare to meet immediate commercial needs rather than on systematically acknowledging or affirming his esteemed cultural status. The incorporation of Shakespearean phrases or ideas into the language and style of advertisements often occurs without a deliberate effort to uphold claims about the Bard’s enduring relevance or universality. Additionally, instances in which the legitimacy or high-brow nature of Shakespeare’s work is resisted or challenged seldom involve a thorough critique of his canonical status or the hierarchical structure of culture. The use of Shakespearean themes and characters in advertisements is characterized by a combination of respectful acknowledgment and playful reinterpretation, as exemplified particularly in the Czech commercials discussed above.

Shakespeare-themed advertisements can be found not only in British and American press advertising and TV commercials, but also virtually all over the world. These advertisements may appear in their original form, adapted to suit a national context, adopted and subsequently dubbed, or even (un)intentionally quoted or misquoted. The Czech environment is no exception, although Shakespeare-themed advertisements seem to be less prevalent in Czechia compared to other countries. Czech-themed advertisements are more commonly encountered on television than in print. In contrast to advertisements in other countries, Czech commercials often take the format of short, televised theatrical performances. This trend corresponds with the traditional Czech perception of Shakespeare’s work as cultural capital and Shakespeare himself as a revered cultural icon to be preserved or utilised, albeit with occasional modifications, within a traditional theatrical (and festive) setting. The hybridity of cultural capital and commercialism contributes to the effectiveness and memorability of these commercials.

Similar to the Anglo-American context, Czech advertising also draws upon the most famous tragedies, such as Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy and the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. Creators evidently aim to associate products with qualities such as artistic merit and high status. Rather than engaging in revision or subversion, these artifacts often employ light parody to underscore the uniqueness and quality of the product through playful Shakespearean

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38 “Pod drobnohledem: Kolik vody a energie ušetří myčka?” Accessed March 1, 2024. <<https://www.e15.cz/finexpert/setrime/pod-drobnohledem-kolik-vody-a-energie-usetri-mycka-1330720>>.

allusions. This approach resonates with a certain horizon of expectation, as described by Hans Robert Jauss, one in which in the Czech environment is primarily characterized by the juxtaposition of Shakespeare with cultural capital or cultural heritage.

Shakespeare and his works embody cultural distinction: his words confer a sense (or parody) of prestige and authority upon those who invoke them, regardless of their context. The essence of a Shakespearean quote lies not solely in its literal meaning, but in its association with Shakespeare and his body of work, which imbues the language with a perception of cultural gravitas. It is not only Shakespeare's authorship that lends these words dignity, but also the resonance of hearing them spoken by his iconic characters. Through their enduring influence, Shakespeare and his works offer a wide range of possibilities to reshape the spectrum of interpretations that individuals consider characteristic of his oeuvre.

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