

# Representations of Shakespeare's Humanity and Iconicity: Incidental Appropriations in Four British Television Broadcasts

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## Abstract

Since his lifetime, Shakespeare has been constructed as both an icon and a human, above and beyond most individuals, yet simultaneously one of us. Representations of Shakespeare on television are able to thrive on these seemingly contradictory attributes. Yet Shakespeare is not only credited with humanity and iconicity; he is also figured as bestowing these qualities on others. This article draws the evidence for continuing portrayals of Shakespeare's combined humanity and iconicity in the twenty-first century from four television programs: "The Shakespeare Code" episode of *Dr. Who*, "The Supersizers Go Elizabethan," "The Quality of Mercy" episode of *Lewis*, and the series *Jamie's Dream School*. More broadly, this article extends the work on television appropriations of Shakespeare by authors such as Peter Holland and Douglas Lanier and argues for the adoption of the new term "incidental appropriation" with which to discuss Shakespeare on television beyond adaptations of his plays or documentaries about his life.

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The blurb on the back cover of the DVD of *Dr. Who*, Series 3 is suitably captivating for Whovians and Shakespeareans alike: "The Dr. takes Martha to Elizabethan England, where William Shakespeare is under the control of deadly witch-like creatures," it proclaims. In one sentence, this quotation demonstrates the phenomenon that is the subject of this article: the way in which Shakespeare is appropriated in television programming, often unproblematically, as both a regular human and an outstanding icon: above and beyond most individuals, yet simultaneously one of us. Shakespeare's human-ness is alluded to in the blurb's implicit suggestion that the helpless, merely mortal playwright requires the application of Dr. Who's super-human capacities to be freed from his enslavement to this episode's alien adversaries, the Carrionites. Shakespeare's iconicity is

simultaneously indicated by his juxtaposition with other heroic British figures, such as Dr. Who and Queen Elizabeth I. Moreover, his iconicity is demonstrated by the fact that his name apparently needs no gloss to be recognizable instantly to the DVD's potential audience. The blurb evidently eschews any construction such as "William Shakespeare, poet and playwright."

This article demonstrates that similar conceptions of Shakespeare's value, as a human and an icon, can be found in other examples from twenty-first century British television, across the gamut of subjects and genres, including science fiction, documentaries (inflected with elements of reality television) such as "The Supersizers Go Elizabethan" and *Jamie's Dream School*, and murder mysteries such as *Lewis*. Indeed, I will show that representations of Shakespeare on television are able to thrive on these seemingly contradictory attributes. Furthermore, analysis of these programs demonstrates that they not only credit Shakespeare with humanity and iconicity; they also figure him as bestowing these qualities on others. More broadly, the article argues for the adoption of the term "incidental appropriation" to discuss Shakespeare on television beyond adaptations of his plays or documentaries about his life, which continue to dominate considerations of Shakespeare on television.<sup>1</sup> Exceptions to the preponderance of literature on televised play adaptations and biographical material include Cary M. Mazer's article, "Sense/Memory/Sense-memory: Reading Narratives of Shakespearean Rehearsals (2009)," on the televised practice of Shakespearean actors and directors; Laurie Osborne's "Serial Shakespeare" (2012), on the role of Shakespeare in the Canadian mini-series *Slings & Arrows*; and Mariangela Tempera's essay, "'Only about Kings': Reference to the Second Tetralogy on Film and Television" (2008).

The four programs analyzed here represent a snapshot of Shakespeare on television across a range of broadcasters (BBC, ITV, and C4). Shakespearean quotations, plotlines, and theater practices are all readily appropriated in these broadcasts. In terms of approaching Shakespeare's works, two of the programs (*Jamie's Dream School* and *Lewis*) draw on canonical plays, including *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Merchant of Venice*, and two on more apocryphal works, including the lost play *Love's Labor's Won* and a poem slandering a Warwickshire nobleman ("The Shakespeare Code" and *The Supersizers*). These popular culture Shakespeares were not chosen strategically for their acclaim, quality, or the range of genres covered (although, serendipitously, they offer much of the above). These Shakespeares represent my encounters with him outside my own formal education, teaching, and research. They are the Shakespeares that I have come across when switching on the television, browsing links posted by friends on social networking sites, and reading entertainment news. If anything, these are the Shakespeares that I have met while trying to escape studying "Shakespeare." This unstructured, almost auto-ethnographic approach also explains why

this article contains only examples from British television: until recently, I have only received four of the UK's five free-to-air channels (no digital or cable channels). Had I set out to conduct a survey of Shakespeare on television internationally, in the twenty-first century, I am aware that I could have chosen from series as diverse as *Slings and Arrows* (Canada), *Deadwood*, and *Sex and the City* (U.S.).

### Incidental Appropriation: Toward a Terminology to Describe More Shakespeares on Screen

Shakespeare features as a person, a myth, or a quotation in myriad, often hugely popular, programs: drama, documentary, mockumentary, quiz shows, and satire. His presence on the small screen may not steal the show, but as a figure or a fistful of phrases he is part of the texture of daily life in Britain and beyond. Considering his incidental appropriation highlights the wealth of "previously unrecorded programming appeared on ITV [Independent Television]" and other channels, revealing the way in which the supposedly conjoined relationship of Shakespeare and the BBC has been mythologized through the over-representation in research of broadcast plays (Holderness, 1988, 174).

Incidental appropriation of Shakespeare is experienced, for instance, when, nestled on your couch, you turn on the television to watch your favorite detective or superhero, or to catch a documentary about food or troubled pupils, only to find that the producers have decided to feature students rehearsing Shakespeare; to set thwarted Armageddon in Elizabethan Southwark; to filter their account of early modern diet through Shakespeare's plays and biography; or to depict teenagers disrupting a teacher's efforts with *Romeo and Juliet*. Julie Sanders has previously used the term "fragmentary allusion," in opposition to "sustained reworking and revision," to describe the phenomenon (2006, 97). The term "fragmentary allusion," however, risks evoking the direct quotation of plays and poems, rather than a wide range of appropriations. Furthermore, the appropriation of Shakespeare in some of these programs is enduring and coherent, rather than fleeting and disunited, while also being largely irrelevant to the overall narrative: a sub-plot to, framing device for or illustration of some other story. *Dr. Who*, for example, foregrounds the Doctor and his assistant's ability to save the world; *Lewis*, the crime-solving achievements of a detective inspector and his sergeant; *The Supersizers*, its presenters' experiences of early modern cuisine; *Jamie's Dream School*, its host's vision for overcoming youth disengagement with education. Shakespeare gets merely a cameo (or something rather more substantial in "The Shakespeare Code" ) with which to illustrate these meta-narratives. They are *incidental* appropriations in the sense that Shakespeare happens in these programs "Occurring . . . in fortuitous or subordinate

conjunction with something else of which it forms no essential part" (*OED*, 1.a). Unlike adaptations of the plays or biopics of Shakespeare's life, these programs do not seek to rework his plays or his life story in any holistic way. There are only brief moments in which the scriptwriting writes back to Shakespeare to better represent oppressed or marginalized groups — for instance, when Shakespeare flirts with Dr. Who or when his offensive labeling of African women is challenged by Martha in "The Shakespeare Code." Additionally, incidental appropriations of Shakespeare frequently occur as part of a competing series of allusions — Shakespeare shares space with Handel, Elizabeth I, and the Sex Pistols, among other icons denoting Britishness in *The Supersizers* — adding to the sense in which he is at the margins of these productions.

Existing explanations about the function of quotation are useful for suggesting some of the rationale behind incidentally appropriated Shakespeare. It may well be that Shakespeare for these television makers is "a vehicle for accruing capital, power and cultural prestige" or that their incorporations of him into these episodes are "individual acts of 're-vision' that arise from love or rage, or simply a desire to play with Shakespeare" (Desmet and Sawyer 1999, 2). It is well acknowledged that quotation and appropriation of Shakespeare may celebrate, entrench, queer, or challenge existing ideas about his life, works, and reception. Annalisa Castaldo has categorized some of these ideas in terms of three common agendas for authors using Shakespeare: first, to test the "cultural literacy" of one's audience; second, to borrow Shakespeare's "cultural authority" for one's own characters and/or work; third, "cultural reconsideration," to "re-think" or talk back to Shakespeare (2007, 408-409; see also Sanders 2006, 46). Pragmatically, Tempera has demonstrated that Shakespeare's works are often chosen by scriptwriters over modern literature since he is out of copyright, saving on time and money spent wrangling with estates (2008, 246). Additionally, she observes that what unites instances of quotation is the program-makers' need for references to be understood, the insistence that they speak universally about human nature, so that particular phrases or memes dominate. Trying to synthesize a single function for incidental appropriations of Shakespeare is difficult because of the range of genres, agendas, and intersections involved. Looking at representations of Shakespeare's humanity and iconicity is a task problematized by the sheer heterogeneity of perspectives (often contradictory) accommodated by use of Shakespeare in any one program. What is perceptible, however, are the ways in which each of these programs constructs multiple visions of Shakespeare's humanity, iconicity, and icon-making powers, constituting a strength in numbers as regards his reputation: it is difficult for any one writer, academic, or program-maker to refute all three of these qualities at any one time.

### Shakespeare in Four British Television Programs

Before analyzing their representations of Shakespeare's humanity, iconicity, and icon-making powers, I will outline briefly the content of the four broadcasts that interest me here. "The Shakespeare Code" was first broadcast in 2007 on BBC1 (Palmer and Roberts 2007). The Doctor and his assistant, Martha, travel back in time to London in 1599 to investigate the lost Shakespearean work *Love's Labor's Won*. This leads to their encounters with a shamelessly flirtatious Shakespeare and the discovery of a plot, already in progress, by the witch-like Carrionites to place a code name into the play's closing speeches by bewitching Shakespeare during the writing process. In its focus on this element, the episode appears to be in dialogue with *Shakespeare in Love* as a source text as much as anything — a phenomenon in adaptation/appropriation that has been noted by Sanders (2006, 62). Dr. Who and Martha learn that when the altered speech is enacted, it will enable the rest of the Carrionite species to invade Earth and supplant the human race. A crisis is averted only by Shakespeare's and Martha's improvised use of what the Doctor terms "powerful words." The audience applauds the battle between Shakespeare and the Carrionites, believing it to be part of the show's "special effects," but the script is lost in the fracas.

While *Dr. Who* fictionalizes Shakespeare to imagine an answer to a very real academic puzzle, the second program that I will focus on uses expert testimony and historical re-enactment to explore his life and works. In 2008, BBC2 aired an Elizabethan-focused episode of *The Supersizers Go . . .* series (2007), in which the restaurant critic Giles Coren and the comedienne and broadcaster Sue Perkins inhabit the lives and dining rooms of a "married couple" from different historical periods. The aim of the series is to explore humorously how the diet and daily life of those eras impacts on the bodies of its twenty-first century hosts. Giles and Perkins undergo a medical assessment at the beginning and end of each episode to ascertain how the lifestyle of each period has impacted their overall health. For example, this episode includes hosting a feast, visiting the Elizabethan Southbank, taking a barge up the Thames, and doing other activities deemed to represent the life of an Elizabeth merchant family, all of which are illustrated with reference to Shakespeare's biography and plays.

Both "The Shakespeare Code" and *The Supersizers Go Elizabethan* revisit the figure of Shakespeare in his own historical period as an integral part of their content. The third program, however, deploys the iconicity of his work and the idea of Shakespeare as an icon-maker as a vehicle for a story of theatrical tempers and scholarly ambition. In 2009, ITV1 broadcast an episode of *Lewis*, the sequel to the Inspector Morse series, titled "The Quality of Mercy," in which a group of vain and bitchy students, hungry for success and recognition, stage a production of *The Merchant of Venice*, but in the process lose both the actor playing Shylock and a critic. Cryptic notes featuring quotations from *Hamlet* ("neither a borrower nor a lender be") and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ("I

will lead them up and down") are discovered with the corpses. Lewis and his aptly-named sergeant, Hathaway, must untangle a web of intrigue involving debt, drugs, sex, plagiarism, a madrigal-singing English professor, and the players themselves to find their Shakespeare-citing killer.

C4's *Jamie's Dream School* unintentionally offers a rarely foregrounded insight into the ways in which both Shakespeare and Simon Callow — one of his "greatest" interpreters — lack iconicity for some young people. Screened over seven weeks in March and April 2011, *Dream School* is a pedagogical experiment devised by Jamie Oliver to see whether using celebrity "expert" teachers and giving them both more freedom and greater resources than many schools can afford could re-engage students at risk of dropping out of education or training.<sup>2</sup> The school is made up of twenty sixteen to eighteen-year olds with a handful of GCSEs between them (qualifications traditionally marking the end of formal education for those in Britain leaving school at sixteen), and a long list of difficult educational and personal circumstances. I focus on just one strand of the students' schooling, Callow's attempts to teach them Shakespeare.

Scholars have discussed already the *Dr. Who* episode, which features in the epilogue to Andrew Murphy's *Shakespeare for the People* and in an article by Peter Holland, which is considered below. I have found no existing discussion of Shakespeare in the *Lewis* or *Supersizers* episodes, although Susan Greenhalgh's chapter on television in *Shakespeares After Shakespeare* explicitly omits discussion of "television adaptations of novels whose authors reference or invoke Shakespeare in title or content," including "the Oxford-based Inspector Morse" series, "partly for reasons of space" (2007, 663). *Jamie's Dream School* is perhaps still too recent to have received much critical attention. An exception is the essay by Rob Smith, who analyzes the success of Callow's pedagogy from the point-of-view of a professional teacher (2012, 11). Although not featured widely in established print journals, however, these programs do garner comment in more youthful, concise media: tweets, blogs, Facebook groups, discussion threads and exclusively online journals such as *Borrowers and Lenders*.

### Shakespeare the Man

One aspect of Shakespeare's construction in these programs is as a human being, a phenomenon noted by Peter Holland in his discussion of "The Shakespeare Code." Shakespeare's human qualities, those characteristics that make him "one of us," a "mere mortal" — that emphasize his lived experience — have been circulated in biographical accounts from Shakespeare's lifetime on. Holland draws out "the different senses of 'humanity' used in different versions of Shakespeare in popular and elite culture" (Holland 2012). Yet these senses are also evident in the writing of Shakespeare's near contemporaries. Some praise the exemplary goodness (humaneness) of his

nature, extolling the deceased Shakespeare's honor, gentleness, friendliness, wit, and spontaneity (though they had not always written of him so kindly when he was alive). Ben Jonson's "I love the man and honor his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any," for instance, evokes the binary of a beloved *man* and worshipped *icon* that began to emerge almost immediately after Shakespeare's death (cited in Welles 2005). Another tradition of Shakespeare's humanity, which casts him not as an example of humankind at its best, but as a fallible human (stressing his "human-ness"), has also been evident since Shakespeare's day, Greene's description of Shakespeare as "an upstart crow" being among the first of these references (cited in Wells 2005).

Although Roberta Pearson and William Uricchio have criticized the lack of attention given to "the mutability of Shakespeare's image," in comparison to the "mutability of Shakespeare's works" (2006, 197), "Shakespeare the man" has achieved renewed interest from academics. The serious engagement of senior academics with fact and fiction around Shakespeare's life in response to the film *Anonymous* and the renewed authorship debate is attested to by the significant number and stature of academics involved in the counter-project, *Sixty Minutes with Shakespeare* (2011), and the free e-book coedited by Stanley Wells and Paul Edmondson (*Shakespeare Bites Back: Not So Anonymous*).

The tradition of lauding Shakespeare as an exemplary human is evident still, even in ostensibly objective, academic attempts at biography. Park Honan, for example, praises Shakespeare's insight into and "sympathy for the human predicament," which is presumed to have extended beyond his writing into his life and being (1998, 408). Apart from its roots in warm eulogies, this view derives from the assumption that to create "so many three-dimensional and fully realized characters, Shakespeare must have been unusually open-minded and sensitive to others" (Castaldo 2007, 410). Stanley Wells's *Shakespeare: A Dramatic Life* speculates about Shakespeare's nature, with the caveat that these are "personal impressions from the external record": he "cared for his family and for his roots in Stratford but also cared for his career and was willing to make sacrifices in his domestic life in order to pursue it, a man who valued his reputation for integrity and preferred to keep out of trouble" (1994, 20). Unlike the unproblematized conceptions of Shakespeare as an exemplary human above, this depiction of Shakespeare presents us with a more rounded human being — one with streaks of pragmatism or ruthlessness, depending on individual interpretation. More negative assessments of Shakespeare's manly qualities are evident in the work of Katherine Duncan-Jones, who emphasizes the potentially ruthless, greedy, and selfish traits that enabled Shakespeare to succeed professionally and financially (2001, x-xi), and Germaine Greer, who accuses him of infidelity, of neglecting and humiliating his wife, and of being incapable of relating to women generally (2007, 356).

Shakespeare's humanity has also been represented in diverse ways on television in the twenty-first century, sometimes differently within the same show. His exemplary humanity has been coupled with his imperfection; his unsurpassed artistry with the assertion of his unimpeachable humanity. Michael Wood, in the documentary series *In Search of Shakespeare*, similarly invites viewers to strip away their iconic image of Shakespeare to perceive a human being viewers could relate to, would want to know, to dine with, today:

You have to think away that image of Shakespeare, the balding, middle-aged man in a ruff, the gentle bard, the icon of English heritage. This is a young blade in his mid-twenties. This is a young man, bold, ambitious in his art. He's funny, streetwise, sexy, and, by all accounts, extremely good company. (*In Search of Shakespeare* 2004)

In "The Shakespeare Code," Dr. Who sums up Shakespeare's unparalleled embodiment of the dual qualities of iconicity and humanity in a single line to Martha: "he's a genius, *the* genius, the most *human* human there's ever been" (Palmer and Roberts 2007). The superlatives with which the Doctor extols Shakespeare's humanity are frequently undercut, however, by the actions of the character Shakespeare throughout the episode. He rarely speaks profoundly and beautifully. Instead, he flirts, is rejected, tells jokes, stumbles over words, learns, ages, is balding, and has breath that "doesn't half stink," in Martha's words. These are experiences and attributes, mostly unidealized, that many people would categorize as a part of mundane, human life — things that could happen to *anyone*, and be empathized with by *anyone*. Beyond this ordinariness, Shakespeare is shown to be human in terms of his susceptibility to human follies such as vanity. He is shown to be excessively full of his own sense of celebrity, "soaking up the applause and admiration" of his audience at the Globe (Holland 2012). Pearson and Uricchio describe this phenomenon in television presentations of Shakespeare as the "continuity" strategy, a way of constructing Shakespeare that emphasizes the humanity we are assumed to share with him (2006, 200). They can also be interpreted as irreverent realities that potentially puncture the audience's trust in both the Doctor's fine, hyperbolically-worded vignette and in Shakespeare's sacred reputation. Burt has argued that such representations offer "an occasion to demystify Shakespeare's cultural authority" (2000, 206). I argue further that these characteristics (for the show's duration, at least) undercut his cultural authority. In this sense, "The Shakespeare Code" maintains an iconoclastic edge.

In "The Supersizers Go Elizabethan," Shakespeare's human qualities are again represented eclectically, although the program presents this as an exercise in biographical research rather than imagination, through the use of talking heads. Helping the supersizers re-enact a banquet, Stanley Wells paints a picture of Shakespeare as an aspirational proto-capitalist who worked hard to obtain



nice things. He comments that by 1597, Shakespeare "had accumulated some wealth, he'd bought new plate, and established a garden in which to grow salads" ("Supersizers Go Elizabethan" 2007). Presumably designed to engage audience empathy for a seemingly remote figure, the construction of Shakespeare's character is perhaps also a reflection of the program-makers' sensitivity to the presumed politics, socio-economic status, and even eco-credentials of BBC2 viewers, a middle-class audience whose members want "programs of depth and substance," "knowledge-building programming," and alternative "comedy, drama, and arts programming" ("Dig Shakespeare" 2011; "Inside the BBC" 2011). (*A film clip is available in the HTML version of this document.*)

Elsewhere in the same show, however, Shakespeare is presented as less respectable, more of a "lad," at least in his younger years. Constructing a narrative of Shakespeare as a "man of the people," the historian Nick Onslow relates the apocryphal story about Shakespeare's alleged run in with Lord Lucy over poaching his deer and writing a slanderous poem about the family. Shakespeare thus becomes so "down-to-earth" that he is almost criminalized, cast as an anti-hero — or at the very least, a rebel with a lack of respect for status and authority. The program-makers can in this way be viewed as "antipathetic to a Shakespeare . . . perceived as high-cultural, accessible only to the educated" (Hansen 2010, 152). In this construction of his humanity, Shakespeare is ironically cast in opposition to the iconic qualities with which he is attributed in other parts of the show.

In these two programs, it is also easy to discern the way in which Shakespeare's personality and biography (rather than his works) are figured as bountiful resources for popular culture. The appeal of this uncertainty is something that has been previously identified in mass media representations that are "interested in viewing Shakespeare's life as basically shrouded in mystery" (Burt 2000, 207), a view shared by Burnett and Wray: "his cultural leverage [is] reinforced by his being marketed as a mystery that is still to be deciphered, despite the knowable qualities that the plays appear to epitomize" (2006, 8). The holes in information about and minimal documentation of "Shakespeare the man" allow different permutations and retellings, even *within* constructions of Shakespeare's humanity.

In moving from discussing Shakespeare as a human to looking at representations of his iconicity in recent television broadcasts, I would like to highlight the interdependent nature of these two seemingly polarized qualities. The interest in Shakespeare, the human, can be seen as a refraction of that concerning Shakespeare the icon. Because he is an icon, there is a hunger to know more about his life, to search for the origins of the extra-ordinary in the ordinary: "Could someone with Shakespeare's education and background have written plays that represent such a wide variety of life?" is a common question in the authorship debate.

## Shakespeare the Icon

If valuing Shakespeare's humanity emphasizes the qualities he shares with the rest of the human race, valuing his iconicity emphasizes instead images and stories (both real and imagined) of Shakespeare that, through our reverence and adoration, elevate him above general humankind, figuring him as a god rather than a man. One of the definitions of the word "icon" is a "statue" or "monument," imagery that is invoked in literary criticism of Shakespeare by both those writers who see him as a model author and those who would problematize his idolization. For example, Simon Palfrey writes of Shakespeare's "towering reputation" (2005, xi), while critical references to Shakespeare's "monumentality" litter Terence Hawkes critiques of bardolatry (Hawkes 1973).

Such manifestations of Shakespeare's iconic status are also evident in television. Take *The Supersizers*: in a show about historical food and diet, the plays are ostensibly used as a record of the gastronomic landscape. Shakespeare's presence, however, is arguably more related to his ability to conjure up an essence of the Elizabethan, to contribute to the texture of the period when combined with references to other iconic elements, such as the monarch and bear-baiting. "The Shakespeare Code" plot, too, starts off predicated on the figure of the iconic and widely-recognizable author. On the surface this seemingly supports Burt's assertion that "the Romantic theory of literary authorship, with Shakespeare as the icon of the Author, is now alive and well in the mass media versions of Shakespeare" (2000, 207). During one scene, he is hero-worshipped by Martha, who calls out at the end of the performance, "Where's Shakespeare? I want to see Shakespeare. Author! Author!" Her idolization of the playwright is further played to by the Doctor, who later tells Martha "when you go home you can tell everyone you've met Shakespeare" (Palmer and Roberts 2007). Shakespeare, this line denotes, needs no introduction; he is universally recognized, a figure held in awe. As the episode develops, however, it cleverly defamiliarizes Shakespeare, forcing the audience to question their knowledge of his life, personality and abilities. It purports to show us the gap between the icon and its original, the icon and the human.

Shakespeare is only one of many icons used frequently in the *Inspector Morse/Lewis* franchise to denote quintessential Britishness. Others include Oxford University, Jaguar cars, real ale, and rolling countryside. Shakespeare is also used to assist with the characterization of Lewis, his colleagues, and their suspects in terms of their class, education, and creativity, through their ability (or inability) to quote Shakespeare (often ironically), and to recognize when he is being quoted. The way in which Shakespeare features continuously in the series — in titles such as "The Remorseful Day," taken from *2 Henry VI* (4.1.1-2) — also reflects the love of word play and intertextual references of Colin Dexter, Morse's creator, continued by the scriptwriters of the new series. "The

"Quality of Mercy" is also part of a long tradition of films and dramas that "prioritize theatrical shows and stagings of Shakespearean texts . . . Action is oriented towards the climactic event of an opening night; and Shakespeare is the dramatist whose works are selected for production, with the result that fragmented quotations from and allusions to the plays abound" (Burnett 2007, 7). This tradition evidently derives the treatment of Shakespeare on television from other media. Castaldo has noted a comparable tendency in detective literature: "A large number of novels, especially young adult novels and murder mysteries, have productions of Shakespeare as a backdrop" (2007, 411). Julie Sanders discusses the centrality of "backstage drama" to musicals such as *Kiss Me Kate* (2006, 29). The use of Shakespeare in the context of an investigation set in an Oxford college represents part of a movement, from the 1960s onwards, to represent Shakespeare on television as part of "establishment and 'school'" culture" (Longhurst 1988, 63).

Such popular cultural representations are informed by and further reinforce the iconic status of Shakespeare's works, particularly as a more general metonym for theater. Yet "The Quality of Mercy" does much to undermine the myth of Shakespeare as a universally recognizable, universally accessible icon, the assumption on which "The Shakespeare Code" and *The Supersizers* are predicated. In the episode, Inspector Lewis, a working-class Geordie-boy (in contrast to his university-educated, cultural-capital-stuffed colleagues Morse, Hathaway, Innocent, and Hobson), is shown struggling with the knowledge of canonical literature demanded by a career in this fictionalized Thames Valley police. While his deputy, Hathaway, calmly leafs through a copy of *Merchant*, noting exits and entrances to establish the time of the Shylock-actor's death, Lewis takes lessons in Shakespearean drama from the forensic pathologist, in the following exchange:

*Pathologist:* I found this note on the body. [Shows to Lewis: "Neither a borrower nor a lender be."]

*Lewis:* Shakespeare?

*Pathologist:* *Hamlet*.

*Lewis:* Wrong play.

*Pathologist:* Well, this *is* Oxford.

*Lewis:* Don't I *bloody* know it. ("Quality of Mercy" 2009)

Lewis tentatively identifies the quote as generically Shakespearean, but is exasperated at what he sees as the pretentious trickiness of the murderer in choosing a quotation from a work other than the one being rehearsed. The pathologist's comment "Well, this *is* Oxford" seems intended to remind Lewis that he is dealing with students likely to be familiar with more than one of the plays or who are deft and creative in their use of texts. Lewis's irreverence for such academic

posturing is hinted at in his response. Lewis's "ignorance" is perhaps compounded by the fact that the clue that he fails to recognize is a quotation from perhaps the most iconic Shakespeare play (quite literally, if one thinks of the numbers of images associated with Shakespeare featuring Yorick's skull). Initially Lewis's lack of cultural literacy looks set to jeopardize the case. The series being a murder mystery, however, there is a twist: Lewis triumphs in identifying the murderer despite his limited ability to engage with the constituent elements of Shakespeare's iconicity. Ultimately, Lewis's consummately professional knowledge of human nature, his capable interrogation, and investigative skills prove more valuable than familiarity with a high-status playwright. The students, reluctantly and incredulously, acknowledge his abilities, when, while watching him question a fellow cast member, one whispers to another "He's good." The quotations turn out to be red herrings, and Shakespeare is relegated to the periphery of the case, a plaything for literate villains, his iconicity outshone by that of the victorious, eponymous detective.

### Shakespeare the Giver of Iconicity

Unlike "The Shakespeare Code" and *The Supersizers*, "The Quality of Mercy," as demonstrated above, is not concerned with the historical figure of Shakespeare, either as researched or imagined. Although quotations from Shakespeare plays give the episode its title and some cryptic clues, the staging of a Shakespearean work is a vehicle for the story rather than integral to it: it offers scope for a plot involving theatrical tempers, ambitions, and desires, plagiaristic students, and morally dubious professors of Renaissance studies (as well as a subplot concerning Lewis's measured handling, if not forgiveness, of his wife's killer to which the episode title pertains). It plays on the association of Shakespeare with an older generation of "great English actors," such as Laurence Olivier and John Gielgud, and with a tradition of "classical performance" (Longhurst 1988, 63, 67). An outstanding feature of the episode is the construction of Shakespeare as an icon-maker. Many people have written about the way in which starring in, directing, and even teaching his plays is career-making. Carol Rutter comments on Shakespeare's prestige-begetting quality that "teaching Shakespeare massively empowers me. He gives me academic 'street cred' and departmental weight to throw around. He gives me national visibility . . . He even gets me through the private entrance into the Royal Palace of St James's" (2009, 224-25). "The Quality of Mercy" takes Shakespeare's capacity to confer iconicity on others to the extreme: the premise of the episode is that these students' participation in an open-air, college production of *Merchant* will catapult them to fame and fortune in the West End. As one playwright-character puts it, "We're all chancers. We're all looking for the Oxbridge shortcut into show business." The show's ambitious, talented, and only metaphorically cut-throat director refers to *Merchant* as "her calling card into the business." By

directing this play, she hopes that some of Shakespeare's genius will enhance her own reputation. In part, these students' unrestrained ambition builds up a group of characters with a motivation to kill: the show depicts their ruthlessness through their unwillingness to abandon the production despite the death of their lead actor, their lack of tears for their lost co-star, and lines such as "Don't make the mistake of thinking we're here because we want to make a lovely work of art. We're all self-centered. On the make. You could take all the envy and jealousy in this company, feed it into the grid, and light up the whole country." Beyond these elements, there is a symbolic interpretation to be had: that the promise of iconic status, through contact with Shakespeare, has murdered their humanity. Yet the show eventually undercuts such an impression, for the precocious students are ultimately absolved of the murders, leaving them free to seek fame, rather than infamy, from their association with Shakespeare. In terms of his iconicity, Shakespeare has demonstrably provided instrumental rather than intrinsic value for the students, the murderer, and the show's producers.

*Jamie's Dream School* takes an actor who has benefited from Shakespeare's capacity as an icon-maker — whether through starring in his plays or films about "the man," such as *Shakespeare in Love* — and shows his inability (not for want of energy, effort, or enthusiasm, it must be said) to impress Shakespeare's iconicity, or his own, on a new generation. The scenes in which Simon Callow teaches Shakespeare to the disadvantaged students contributes to an existing documentary genre in which the experience of studying and/or performing Shakespeare is extended to a socio-economically disadvantaged group. Other works in this genre — all of which feature *Romeo and Juliet* as a key text, and usually as the only key text — include Michael Bogdanov's *Shakespeare on the Estate* (BBC2 1994), Patterson Joseph's *My Shakespeare* (C4 2004), and *When Romeo Met Juliet* (BBC2 2010). (A film clip is available in the HTML version of this document.)

Callow's classes on *Romeo and Juliet* involve fraught exertions to deliver the background of the play and to interest students in Shakespeare's biography, historical context, and theatricality more generally by taking them to see his one-man-show, *Shakespeare — the Man from Stratford*; to teach them Shakespeare's craftsmanship by declaiming passages at them; and to read repeatedly through scenes from *Romeo and Juliet* involving the warring factions (such as 1.1; such writing is blithely assumed to be relevant to these students, despite the series presenting little evidence of gang violence in their daily lives, past or present). Callow's pedagogic approach, which combines the techniques with which directors might induct professional, experienced actors into rehearsing a show, such as a whole cast read-through (see Smith 2012, 11), with archaic teaching practices such as reading around the class while seated, largely fails to attract, let alone to hold, the students attention — although he fares better when he gets them on their feet and takes them to the Globe for stage fighting classes. He also tries hard initially to forge personalized connections to Shakespeare

for the students, asking them for their heroes, who range from Bill Gates to Katie Price, aka Jordan, the glamor model and reality television celebrity, and matching them with Shakespearean protagonists (the heavy editing, sadly, does not reveal his suggested likenesses for Gates and Price). Despite Callow being lauded by Jamie as a "genius drama teacher" and a few students being inspired to explore acting careers, a more skeptical reading of the series suggests that it depicts an overwhelming mismatch between Callow's idealizing of his methodology and the reality of it as experienced by his students.

That Callow's students in this series are shown to have little familiarity with Shakespeare is not surprising — for various reasons, they have become disengaged from the National Curriculum, a key piece of legislation in reinforcing and securing Shakespeare's iconic-author status. Indeed, they see no reason to laud Shakespeare, whose use of language, in their eyes, appears poor and perverse, inexpert and imprecise: "Can't he speak *English*?" spits Angelique. It is not surprising that they are neither aware nor respectful of Callow's own iconicity, his "brilliance," "brilliant mind," "genius," or his status as "one of the world's best actors" — all attributed to him in Oliver's voice-overs. They are too young to remember his appearances in widely and well-received films such as *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (again, flagged by Oliver). Their thoughts are understandably far more consumed by their own lives, families, problems and successes, and hopes and dreams than by critically-acclaimed cultural goods. For instance, several of their icons and enthusiasms have in common wealth and enterprise. Callow himself identifies that their conversation is characterized by a "preponderance of answers about money, success, power." They enjoy and excel in quizzing other celebrity teachers, including Alistair Campbell (Tony Blair's one-time "spin doctor"), Cherie Blair (Queen's Counsel and Blair's wife), and Robert Winston (scientist and broadcaster), about their careers and lifestyles; how they got there; and their earning power. However ill-equipped these students may be for financial success — whether this is their fault or the fault of the education system and the economy — they are preoccupied with the most fundamental skill required by contemporary capitalist society: how to make money in order to support themselves and their families. They vaguely recognize Callow's success in this task: "God, that man's proper posh." They are not willing, however, to take on board his assertion of the widespread assumption that Shakespeare will benefit *them* in *their* quest for improved wealth and status because he deals with those issues in his plays. They do not think that Shakespeare can make icons out of them. This is in stark contrast to Greenhalgh and Shaughnessey's finding from an older documentary, Michael Waldman's *My Shakespeare* (2004), that "There is no sense here of Shakespeare as an icon of privilege, or of exclusionary white culture . . . Shakespeare may be difficult and unfamiliar, but he is nonetheless there for the taking" (2006, 93). Rather than looking to literature for inspiration and

education, the *Dream School* students crave more immediate and tailored advice of the kind given, elsewhere in the program, by the millionaire businessman Alvin Hall. Callow's continued insistence on Shakespeare's relevance to their lives and his inherent value — "Shakespeare *is* theater, he wrote the *most* great plays ever" — appears, in the face of their refusal to accept these platitudes, to eradicate any vestiges of respect they have for either "great" man. Setting aside the aura of success that the series wants to generate, but about which even it manifests ambivalence in the final episodes, *Jamie's Dream School* incidentally presents Shakespeare as "the target of subversion and rebellion" (Longhurst 1988, 63) and offers a rare counter-representation of Shakespeare as a failed icon and failed icon-maker.

### Switch on for Shakespeare

Helen Cooper has argued that Shakespeare played a key role in the cultural transmission of medieval religious, literary, and dramatic traditions into the early modern period and beyond (Cooper 2011). His plays, as part of the popular culture of his time, preserve and rework texts that we have otherwise lost (including saints' and certain cycle plays). Along with other educational fora, such as school and academia, television in the twenty-first century plays a vital and continually underestimated role in keeping Shakespeare (man, icon, and works) in circulation. Appropriations of Shakespeare, in these programs, demonstrate the program-makers' awareness of "debates [and] divisions among critics" (Burt 2000, 223) and construct him diversely as a human, an icon, a non-entity, and a maker of others' iconicity. Additionally, *Jamie's Dream School* counters these depictions or clichés. These appropriations are conventional and radical, serious and satirical, proliferated and debunked, "fragment[ing] Shakespeare at the same time as they try to unite the shards of his cultural memory" (Burnett 2007, 26). Yet, whether Shakespeare's value is upheld, challenged by, or irrelevant to the program as a whole, it is most significant that *he* has been lighted on rather than any other cultural figure. The incidental appropriation of Shakespeare thus "helps sustain Shakespeare's cultural pre-eminence as much as it reveals fissures within it" (Castaldo 2007, 664).

The programs in this article largely do not conceive of Shakespeare in ways not already available in academic writing, from biographies to cultural materialist critiques; nevertheless, these incidental appropriations potentially pose "fundamental cultural questions" (such as "Why study Shakespeare?" in *Dream School*) and "contribut[e] to the much needed politicization of the 'Shakespeare' institution" (class politics in *Lewis*, sexual politics in *The Supersizers*, racial politics in "The Shakespeare Code" ) (Holderness 1985, 200). What television *does* do, however, is to disseminate widely those extant ways of thinking about Shakespeare's humanity and iconicity, so

that they enter the public consciousness on a massive scale. An audience of over 18 million viewers saw these programs on their first broadcast. 6.8 million people watched "The Shakespeare Code" when it first aired (Ware 2010). *Lewis* and *The Supersizers* average audiences of 7.7 million and 2.5 million, respectively. Viewing figures for *Jamie's Dream School* ranged between 1.4 and 2 million from episode to episode ("Latest News" 2010). Additional, unaccounted for numbers are of those viewers who watched repeats, replayed the episodes online, or watched the shows on DVD.

To put this into some perspective, in terms of the sheer volume of exposure to Shakespeare (ignoring differences in the quality, duration, focus, and purpose of exposure as well as recognizing the overlap between figures), around 690,000 British students currently study Shakespeare towards GCSE or A-level qualifications each year. In terms of those experiencing Shakespeare at the theatre, in 2011 the RSC sold 700,000 tickets to performances (Royal Shakespeare Company 2011), the Globe half that (Shakespeare's Globe Annual Review 2011), but these figures include sales to non-Shakespearean works, to visitors from outside Britain, and multiple attendances by individuals. Such statistics support Holderness's contention that "television is a universal medium to a far greater extent than theatre" (1988, 176) and Hawkes's contention that "television constitutes the only really 'national' theater our society is likely to have" (1973, 231). These statements are even more true now, in a society where multiple televisions per household is the norm and both live streaming and playback are readily available online, although, if accessible internationally, such online broadcasts may then constitute "global" rather than "national" theaters. Arguments that increased access to and hours spent using devices connected to and content provided by, or generated for, the internet challenges television's supremacy as the dominant, everyday medium of domestic entertainment ignores the way in which online access facilitates television viewing. A 2011 study found that twenty-seven percent of Britons watch television online every week, a figure higher than in the U.S. (Garside 2011). The significance of these very raw statistics, combined with my analysis of incidental appropriation in the four programs above, is that Shakespeare is experienced overwhelmingly by the British population through the medium of television by audiences necessarily intending to watch a program about him or in which he features: a cultural phenomenon that deserves yet more critical attention.

### Notes

1. See, for instance, Aebischer 2004; Bulman and Coursen 1988; Burnett 2007; Burnett and Streete 2011; Burt 2007; Burt 2003; Cartelli and Rowe 2007; Davies and Wells 2004; Greenhalgh 2007; Hatchuel and Guerrin 2008; Henderson 2006; and Holderness 2002).
2. The film is available at: <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/jamies-dream-school/4od>.



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