

# Shakespeare in Contemporary Romanian Advertising

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## Abstract

*Shakespeare's presence in the Romanian culture has been mainly ensured, for a long time, by translations and theatrical performances. Yet, nowadays, in a context in which reading the classics (or, in general, reading literature) in print seems to be losing ground to digital media and the theatre, as an institution, is subject to a major crisis, relying only on these 'highbrow' forms of cultural appropriation of Shakespeare's works is no longer enough to preserve the interest in Shakespeare as a literary icon and a cultural phenomenon; other forms of intertextual encounter with Shakespeare that belong to popular culture may, hopefully, contribute to propagating the 'Shakespeare myth' among mass Romanian audiences. Focusing on one particular product of contemporary popular culture, namely TV advertising, the paper explores the few Shakespeare-related TV commercials aired on various Romanian TV channels during the first decades of the new millennium, to see to what extent the re-contextualisation of Shakespearean words, images, characters or themes in these cultural products may function as an effective means to reinforce Shakespeare's cultural authority in the Romanian collective consciousness.*

**Keywords:** Shakespearean drama, adaptation, intertextuality, television commercials, consumerism

Shakespeare has not been a 'stranger' to Romanian audiences since the nineteenth century. The efforts of the Romanian intellectual elite of the 1830s to arouse interest in the work of "the greatest genius of the English theatre", as Cezar Bolliac put it (qtd. in Gavriliu 2006: 86), circumscribed to the process of Shakespeare's Europeanisation, led to establishing, through literary debates, translations (starting from the 1840s) and theatrical performances, Shakespeare's status as a cultural icon and an influential literary model in the Romanian context. Of major impact on the forging of new patterns in the Romanian literature and culture of the second half of the nineteenth century, which is confirmed, among other things, by the assimilation of Shakespearean influences in the works of Mihai Eminescu, Bogdan Petriceicu-Hașdeu or Barbu Delavrancea (Gavriliu 2006: 85-90),

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Shakespeare's iconic profile was shaped as an epitome of artistic maturity, sophistication and authority, accessible, above all, to the educated milieu.

The more and more explicit coding of Shakespeare as high culture (Lanier 2012: 506) that characterised the Anglo-American cultural space in the first half of the twentieth century seems to have affected his Romanian reception too. Not only did translations into Romanian of Shakespeare's plays increase significantly in number, but they also improved in quality as a result of the translators turning to the original English texts (rather than to indirect French and German sources as it happened in the previous century). That academic studies and Shakespearean translations came to be strongly interconnected is perhaps proven by the fact that the best (and the most prolific) Romanian translator of Shakespeare in the 1940s was Professor Dragoş Protopopescu, the founder of the English Department of the University of Bucharest (Volceanov 2006: 207)<sup>1</sup>. Critical studies focusing both on the English original and the Romanian translated texts, theatre reviews that praised or censured theatrical productions staging Shakespearean plays, the intersections with Shakespearean texts traceable in the literary works of writers like Mihail Sebastian and Ion Luca Caragiale, all reflect the same orientation, in the first half of the twentieth century, towards the appropriation of Shakespeare primarily for the benefit of "the cultured classes of society" (Stern in Matei-Chesnoiu 2007: 83).

Later on, in the second half of the twentieth century, while Romania was under Communist rule, the 'popularization' of the Bard's work still relied extensively on translations. That may account for the issuing of "the first Romanian 'complete' Shakespeare" between 1955 and 1960 by a highly heterogeneous (from a social-professional perspective) group of translators coordinated by Mihnea Gheorghiu (Volceanov 2006: 206-208), which bears enough marks of the refashioning of Shakespeare's image along the lines of Communist ideology, as well as of at least some of the translators' striving for philological orthodoxy (which made these translations hardly actable on stage - see Volceanov 2010: 8, Colipcă and Stan 2011: 86). Even when a revised version of Shakespeare's *Complete Works* in Romanian was issued between 1982 and 1995, coordinated by the great Romanian scholar and translator Leon Leviţchi, the translations, though improved, remained mainly philologically-oriented, fit for academic study (especially since this particular edition was provided with an introductory study and comments by Professor Leviţchi, as well as explanatory notes by Virgil Ştefănescu-Drăgăneşti). As for the theatrical performances of Shakespeare's plays, attempts were made to somewhat render more 'popular' these artistic

manifestations still implicitly considered as emblematic for high culture by producing Shakespearean plays for the National Radio Theatre and broadcasting them on Radio Romania, having live theatrical performances of Shakespearean plays filmed and broadcast on the national television channel, or putting on Shakespearean plays as part of the Romanian television drama shows.

In the aftermath of the 1989 Revolution, throughout the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century, however, Shakespeare's reception and appropriation in Romania has undergone significant changes against the background of the transformation of the Romanian society into a capitalist, consumerist one, in which social and cultural dynamics are heavily influenced by globalization. The tendency towards the harmonization with current trends in the global reception of Shakespeare as a cultural icon seems to have characterised, more and more explicitly, all forms of appropriation of the Bard's work in the Romanian cultural space since the beginning of the new millennium, in some cases, being closely entwined with the desire to continue pre-existing Romanian 'traditions' in 'interacting' with the Shakespearean heritage. A good case in point is that of the new attempt at translating Shakespeare's complete works into Romanian. Initiated in 2010, coordinated by George Volceanov, this series undeniably connects back, in many ways, to the previous endeavours of producing complete Shakespeare editions and to translation models they relied on, yet, tributary to postmodern attitudes, it also seeks solutions to 'dilemmas' that the predecessors left unsolved. For one thing, George Volceanov and his collaborators' translations are intended for reading, addressing particularly students and academics, 'traditionally' perceived as the target audience for the Shakespearean text (which accounts for the rich critical apparatus that accompanies the translated texts, consisting of "comprehensive prefaces by Romanian Shakespeare scholars" and "numerous, well-documented notes", Colipcă and Stan 2011: 87), as well as for performance on the Romanian stage. In addition, the translators' adopting the strategy of "liberalisation" (Delabastita 2004: 113), i.e., using a "somewhat 'rougher' language" (slang, bawdy terms, neologisms, idiomatic constructions) in rendering the Shakespearean text, hints at their hoping to efface thus "the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture" (Jameson 1992: 165), to "naturally fill the 'gap' that separates the text from the readers and/or spectators" (Colipcă and Stan 2011: 88). Whether this series will succeed in attaining its goals of overcoming highbrow/lowbrow boundaries and reviving Romanian audiences' interest in

Shakespeare's works on page and on stage is difficult to say at the moment as the series is still in the making.

Yet, in this age in which reading printed books has been losing ground to digital media and in which "theatre suffers from being seen as an increasingly irrelevant art-form" (Burnett 2007: 9), Shakespeare's popularization at the global level has been largely relying on film, television, advertising and other media. It is worth mentioning, in this context, that, after previously successful forms of 'popularizing' Shakespeare in Romania, like radio drama or television drama shows, have considerably lost their appeal, there have been attempts, even if for now not very numerous, within the frame of the contemporary Romanian culture, to follow the general trend and to transcend the highbrow/lowbrow dichotomy by incorporating Shakespeare in mass-cultural products like TV series and commercials, while simultaneously adapting the representation of Shakespeare's image to the expectations and particularities of the present-day Romanian public. This study focuses on the few Shakespeare-related television commercials that have been aired on Romanian TV channels since 2000 and aims at identifying the forms of intertextuality that advertisers have resorted to in integrating Shakespeare into the web of cultural patterns encoded in their productions, as well as at revealing the symbolic meanings attached, on the local - Romanian - market, to the 'Shakespeare myth' that has been widely circulated and reshaped in the globalizing process. In the "generalized game of human relations" that Baudrillard sees in advertising, given by the "simulated intimacy" created between advertisers and customers, on the one hand, and customers and advertised products, on the other (Ritzer in Baudrillard 1999: 13), the intertextual relationship with Shakespeare, which becomes part of the montage of elements from different cultural reference systems that underlies the advertisements (Odih 2007: 13), plays an important part in "the attribution of symbolic value to commodities" (Odih 2007: 13) and functions as a key component of the "test [...] liberating response mechanisms according to stereotypes and analytic models" (Baudrillard 1983: 120) to which Romanian customers are subject to when trying to decode the message conveyed by the media construct.

Despite the fact that one might be tempted to see in the use of Shakespeare in advertising an example of postmodern practice, its early days can be traced back to the eighteenth<sup>2</sup> and the nineteenth centuries. As a matter of fact, according to Douglas Lanier, one of the few scholars who have recently focused on this particular topic,

Shakespeare's use in advertising can be divided into three phases: the late Victorian period, a heyday for Shakespeare-oriented marketing; the modern period, from the First World War through the 1950s and early 1960s, in which Shakespeare played a relatively minor role in marketing; and the contemporary period, from the 1960s to the present day, in which Shakespeare-themed advertising has enjoyed a modest resurgence. Each of these periods' advertisements deploy Shakespeare in distinctive ways, for reasons arising not only from changes in media, advertising strategies, and the nature of mass production, but also from Shakespeare's changing ideological valence and relationship to the public. (Lanier 2012: 500)

It seems that, in the British and American cultural spaces in the late nineteenth century (1875-1900), Shakespeare's being "an established cultural touchstone, both popular and eminently respected, a status bolstered by [his] prominence in the theatre" did not make the creative use of Shakespeare for advertising heretical or controversial (Lanier 2012: 501). Continuing a pre-existent "tradition of referring to Shakespeare irreverently" and drawing on the presumably broad knowledge of and familiarity with Shakespeare of the late nineteenth-century public, advertisers tapped into the collective representation of Shakespeare as "familiar, wholesome, superlative, trustworthy" to answer the consumers' concern about the quality of the advertised goods and to persuade them to buy them (Lanier 2012: 500-501). That accounts for the use of Shakespearean names as brands and for the more or less witty exploitation of allusions to a wide range of Shakespearean plays in late nineteenth-century advertising cards (Lanier 2012: 502).

Nevertheless, with the deepening of the highbrow/lowbrow cultural divide throughout the period 1900-1960, Shakespeare came to be commonly "cast as the very epitome of traditionalism, elitism, and specialist knowledge", a symbol of high culture (related, above all, to theatrical performance and academic study), hence he "could no longer be deployed as a voice of popular authority in advertising" (Lanier 2012: 506). In the context of the shift in advertising from "product-information" to "product-image", i.e., from the stress on the product's uses and quality to its "symbolic significance for the consumer", advertisers chose, more often than not, to resort to "a bundle of connotations with which to identify or contrast their products" (Lanier 2012: 506). Only in advertising luxury products was Shakespeare valued as a symbol of "elitism and exclusivity", otherwise he was perceived as being at odds with the advertisers' (and the customers') preference for "modernity, urban life, convenience, speed,

accessibility, fun, democratization”, hence being used “as a connotative foil” (Lanier 2012: 506-507). The list of strategies used in 1900-1960 to integrate familiar Shakespearean phrases and Shakespearean references in advertisements was completed by treating Shakespeare as “a comic intensifier”, refashioning the Shakespearean material to make the references more oblique, and transforming Shakespeare into “a vehicle for corporate image-laundering” (Lanier 2012: 508-509).

Such an overview of strategies used to incorporate Shakespeare in the advertising discourse on the British and American markets proves necessary when one seeks to understand the representation of Shakespeare in the second half of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the new millennium because, as Douglas Lanier points out, “contemporary Shakespeare-themed marketing certainly exhibits many continuities with earlier history” (2012: 510). Most often playing on well-known Shakespearean phrases (chief among which “to be or not to be”), on commonplaces of a handful of Shakespearean plays (including the ‘skull routine’<sup>3</sup> in *Hamlet*, the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* or Julius Caesar in his toga in *Julius Caesar*), or on the famous Droeshout portrait, post-1960 ads produced in English-speaking societies seem to favour the same “irreverent treatment of Shakespeare and use of Shakespeare as a high-cultural foil”, while simultaneously “work[ing] to place the target consumer among a knowing elite, though the bar for ‘knowing’ is set low” (Lanier 2012: 510-511). Particularly in television advertising, Lanier notices the scarcity of Shakespeare-related commercials mainly accountable for by television addressing “the widest possible audience and thus [being] antithetical to the kind of specialist knowledge supposed necessary for understanding Shakespeare” (2012: 511). Yet, as a novelty in Shakespeare’s use in advertising from the 1960s to the present, Lanier also remarks the tremendous influence on Shakespeare-themed advertising of recent film adaptations, with special stress on the groundbreaking *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) directed by Baz Luhrmann (and not only). The film-mediated strengthening of the link between Shakespeare and youth culture has obviously encouraged, in Lanier’s opinion, both the reconsideration of Shakespeare “as a positive connotative resource” for advertisers and the increasing appeal of Shakespearean advertising on various cultural markets around the world, in brief, its globalization (2012: 513).

It is precisely against the background of the aforementioned tendencies in contemporary Shakespeare-themed advertising that the TV commercials making up the corpus for analysis of the present study should

be considered. When remarking that “Shakespeare has made few substantial inroads into radio and television advertising” (2012: 511) Douglas Lanier most likely had in mind the British and American cultural spaces; yet, his statement turns out to be an equally valid description of the relationship between Shakespeare and advertising on the Romanian market. In other words, the number of advertisements that capitalize on the Shakespearean heritage and that have been aired in Romania is actually very small. Hence, the corpus of the present study is reduced to five Shakespeare-related TV commercials produced on/for the Romanian advertising market since the beginning of the new millennium. Dated to the first decade of the twenty-first century (about 2000? and 2008, respectively), three of them lend themselves easily to discussion within the framework of adaptation studies as they playfully adapt the Shakespearean hypotext (to use Genette’s term, 1997) to arouse the Romanian viewers’ interest in pay-as-you-go offers launched by two mobile phone network operators on the Romanian market, namely Connex and Cosmote. More recent (2015 and 2016), the other two develop an intertextual relationship with Shakespeare that is based on allusion and citation to advertise products that belong to different fields of consumption, i.e., food, in the case of the Univer ketchup ad, and drink, in that of the Neumarkt beer ad. In these media texts in focus, not only is Shakespeare used to seduce Romanian consumers into purchasing various products (prepaid mobile phone cards, ketchup and beer), but the approach to him as a cultural icon and the connotations attached by advertisers to characters, images and phrases in his work are illustrative for different meaning-construction strategies which, as the subsequent analysis endeavours to demonstrate, signal glocalization, being both reminiscent of the pre-established Shakespeare advertising practices gradually embraced at the global level and relevant for particularities of the Romanian cultural space and of the reception within its framework of the ‘Shakespeare myth’.

About the turn of the new millennium (in 2000?), when the mobile telecommunications market had barely started to develop in Romania and the competition between the two mobile phone network operators, MobiFon/Connex<sup>4</sup> and MobilRom/Dialog, was very tight, the Romanian viewers’ attention was drawn by a couple of commercials that used the historical figures of Julius Caesar and his opponent, Brutus, to promote a newly introduced pay-as-you-go service provided by one of the two competitors on the Romanian market, namely Connex. These commercials had been commissioned to D’Arcy, an advertising company that had been

founded in 1992 by the American Joe and Alana Perez and which would come to be seen as the first of the great 'schools' for Romanian advertisers, functioning at a time when advertising was an industry in becoming in Romania<sup>5</sup>. The conception of these media texts betrays the advertisers' awareness of an "aesthetics of reception" (Jaus 1982 qtd. in Ahuvia 1998: 153) that builds on repetition and on the television viewers' expectations that the advertisement should take the form of "a short drama featuring the product" (Ahuvia 1998: 153). That accounts for the moulding of the 'old' conflict between Julius Caesar and Brutus in the form of 'a drama in two acts' that implicitly makes one establish intertextual links with the history of the Roman empire and the Shakespearean play that turned a key moment in the fight for power in ancient Rome into a pretext for reflection on the nature of the ruler, conflicting value systems and the mechanisms of political manipulation, *Julius Caesar*. Starting probably from the assumption that the reference back to the Roman past would appeal to the Romanian audiences as Romanian national identity was in full reshaping process in the aftermath of major societal changes (much like the representatives of the Romanian intellectual elites of the nineteenth century, scholars and translators who took particular interest in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*<sup>6</sup>), D'Arcy advertisers seem to have equally taken into account the 'tradition', long established on the British and American advertising markets, of humorously, even irreverently, treating Shakespeare, hence their approach to the characters of Julius Caesar and Brutus. In the "enchanted simulation" (Odih 2007: 200) put forth in "Caesar vs. Brutus. Part 1" and "Caesar vs. Brutus. Part 2", as the two now 'legendary' commercials have come to be referred to in Romanian advertisement archives still available on the internet, a postmodern rewriting of a story from the (historical and literary) past seen "through our own pop images and stereotypes about the past" (Jameson 1992: 171) takes a parodic twist in the attempt to seduce the audiences and to endow the advertised object, i.e., the Connex Go! bundle, with symbolic meanings "mapped onto [their] desires, motives and experiences" (Odih 2007: 126).

Both parts of the advertisers' defamiliarizing representation of the tense situation opposing Brutus to Julius Caesar follow the same structural pattern, hence the effect of repeating narrative in Part 2, and favour shifts in perspective by their mixture of subjective and objective filming. To be more specific, both ads begin by making the viewers see through Julius Caesar's eye as the introductory extreme close-ups reveal the reflection on Caesar's blue iris of images of entertainers – a female lyre player in Part 1 and a young man eating grapes in Part 2 – that remind of the lascivious



lifestyle of the Roman ruling classes. Yet, in neither of the two parts, as the objective long shots suggest, would the self-absorbed, pensive Caesar, dressed up in his red toga and wearing a golden laurel wreath, be deterred from his scrutinizing the horizon and, one might guess, his meditating on state affairs. He appears to be unaware of the fact that Brutus, here wearing a Roman general's costume, sneaks along the wall of the triclinium, which provides the setting of the advertisement, to stab him in the back. The oversimplification of the plot is obvious, since the 'bloody deed' is not to take place in the Senate and Brutus is not supported by Cassius or any of the senators. The alteration of character structure is most evident in the case of Brutus who is far from the noble, though inflexible, idealist in Shakespeare's play, whose actions, though motivated by 'honourable' intentions and political principles, ultimately lead to civil war. Last but not least, the parodic reinvention of the past irremediably alters character relationships by condemning Brutus's attempts at murdering Caesar to failure. The close-ups which the advertisers' visual portrayal of Brutus is supported by reveal a spiteful character, with a face almost deformed by hideous grins, and embittered by rage and the desire to take revenge especially after the first failed attempt at murdering Caesar (in Part 1), which brought about the attacker's severely injuring himself in his plunging over the balustrade. (In Part 2, the viewers are given access to Brutus's mind by means of a blurred flashback of the moment of the fall from Part 1, which serves as an incentive for Brutus's second, equally failed, attack on Caesar.) It is precisely in this frame that the advertised product finds its place in the narrative structure of the media texts. In both parts Caesar's life is saved by the ringing of the phone. In Part 1, ignorant of Brutus's intentions and attempt to stab him to death, Caesar bends down to pick up the mobile, answers it ("Brutus? Brutus is not here. No." - my translation) and, when he spots Brutus fallen under his window, he feels sorry for not having put him through before ending the call. The dramatic situation is thus "debased for comic effect" (Dobson and Wells 2001: 4) and without the advertisement establishing an explicit connection with the Shakespearean tragedy. The non-diegetic voice-over just introduces the object of the advertisement by a witty choice of words ("A legendary service providing instant mobile connection" - my translation) that is meant to pay homage to the great Roman past and, obliquely, to Shakespeare, as well as to urge the viewers to take interest in the qualitative Connex services which are most likely to keep customers coming back (see The Ken Blanchard Companies 2016), and ends by

drawing attention to the slogan of the Connex Go campaign: "Connex Go! What's yours is all yours!" (my translation). In the absence of an explicit reference to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, "Caesar vs. Brutus. Part 1" appears as an appropriation based on embedded intertextuality that "depends crucially upon the [viewer's] recognition of the subtexts and intertexts involved" (Sanders 2006: 2, 77). In Part 2, however, the ringing of the mobile phone causes Caesar to turn unexpectedly towards Brutus, who cowardly hides the dagger behind his back, and to exclaim "Et tu, Brute?/You too, Brutus?", as he is pleasantly surprised to discover that Brutus is using the same pay-as-you-go service. The character's line renders the intertextual engagement with the Shakespearean tragedy explicit, hence the possibility of labelling "Caesar vs. Brutus. Part 2" an adaptation that creatively transposes a now more easily identifiable source (Sanders 2006: 2 and Hutcheon 2006: 8). Of course, the pleasure of recognizing in the advertising discourse an adaptation of the Shakespearean text remains unavoidably dependent upon the receivers'/ viewers' being acquainted with the adapted source (Hutcheon 2006: 21). Anyway, whether more obliquely or more explicitly pointing back to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, the two hypertexts highlight the advertisers' endeavours to hail technological progress (i.e., the introduction of pay-as-you-go services by a major player on the Romanian mobile telecommunications market) by capitalizing on Shakespeare as a 'legendary' cultural icon. The implicature here appears to be that, just as the historical Julius Caesar and Brutus left their mark on the evolution of the ancient Roman state and Shakespeare, who rewrote their story into a dramatic meditation on power and politics, changed his contemporaries' and the subsequent generations' reception and understanding of history, art and human nature, the Connex Go! pay-as-you-go service, given its high quality, could make a major difference in the lives of those individual consumers who would buy it, bringing them 'life-saving' benefits, like freedom of movement and fast communication. If one might look for a polemical dimension (that Dentith finds defining 2000: 9, 16-17) in these postmodern parodies, it might be related to the so-called fixity of historical truth, as history may be rewritten, and to the highbrow/lowbrow hierarchies which they seek to overcome. Yet, Shakespeare's association with high quality and elitism is useful in their case to suggest that, by purchasing the advertised pay-as-you-go service that is made available to mass consumption (at the end of Part 2, Caesar triumphantly shows the mobile phone to the cheering crowds), Romanian

customers could become part of that privileged group of individuals who know how to appreciate innovation and technological advance.

Several years later, in 2008, another mobile phone network operator on the Romanian market, rebranded as Cosmote in 2005 (after having functioned since 1998 under the name Cosmorom), resorted to Shakespeare to advertise one of its pay-as-you-go bundles. The TV commercial, which played on one of the most popular commonplaces of Shakespeare advertising, *Romeo and Juliet*, was produced by Ogilvy & Mather Group Romania, a subsidiary of the famous international Ogilvy advertising network (itself part of WPP, one of the largest multinational advertising and public relations companies in the world) (SMARTpromo 2008). Taking this aspect into account, there is no wonder then that the advertisers' choice of story and strategies employed to render it in the Cosmote commercial is significantly influenced by global practices in Shakespeare-themed advertising. One might suspect that awareness of the low value attached to literature, in general, and to Shakespeare, in particular, especially in youth culture, at both the global and the local levels, may have determined the advertisers to avoid openly acknowledging their indebtedness to the source text, i.e., Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Identifying their target audience as consisting of young mobile phone users to whom the (then new) All Inclusive Cosmote pay-as-you-go bundle could grant the freedom to make more in-network calls, to send more text messages in the Cosmote network, and, above all, to make more calls to any other national network, the advertisers claimed that they conceived the commercial as a comic/parodic reinterpretation of the 'old' boy-loves-girl-but-the-girl's-father-is-against-the-relationship cliché, making the mobile phone network which they used the 'bone of contention', in order to highlight the absurdity of the situation and to generate humour (SMARTpromo 2008). But, though not explicitly indicated as a reference point, the Shakespearean hypotext is at least in the back of the advertisers' mind and that is hinted at by certain elements of the visual text. For instance, the beginning of the commercial shows the blond, blue-eyed Juliet, who wears a pink T-shirt that singles her out as the romantic heroine of the story, walking across a park accompanied by a dark-haired girlfriend, wearing a green T-shirt. The image of the two girls might make one think of Shakespeare's Juliet and her cousin Rosaline, as depicted in Romeo's famous speech in the balcony scene: "Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,/ Who is already sick and pale with grief,/ That thou her maid art far more fair than she:/ Be not her maid, since she is

envious;/Her vestal livery is but sick and green/And none but fools do wear it..." (II.2.4-9).

Since "[t]elevision permits the advertising of commodities to be woven into vignettes of everyday life" (Odih 2007: 13), the Cosmote commercial incorporates the advertised pay-as-you-go bundle into the story of a couple of "star-crossed lovers" that belong to an easily recognizable contemporary urban society. That is part of the advertisers' strategy of making the Shakespearean source "easily comprehensible to new audiences (...) via the processes of proximation and updating" (Sanders 2006: 18). Brought closer to the audiences' temporal and social frames of reference, the advertisement replaces the Capulet's ball with socializing and game-playing in a town park, and the rivalry between the Montagues and the Capulets with the competition between mobile phone network operators seeking to gain as many loyal customers as possible. For more verisimilitude, the floor is given, from the beginning, to Juliet, whose voice guides the viewers through the narrative: "That day I fell in love with him! I was simply struck. I instantly fell in love with him. But then my father found out he was the customer of a different mobile network" (my translation). The visual text sustains the verbal one when punning on 'strike': Juliet is accidentally struck on the head by Romeo's ball and she falls in love with him at once as, gentleman-like, he lifts her up. The Shakespearean balcony scene is relocated in the park where, without much talk or hesitation, Romeo steals a kiss from Juliet. But later, the couple's harmony and happiness is spoiled by the violent intervention of Juliet's father who tears to pieces the cute plushy Romeo has offered Juliet and who warns his daughter against changing the mobile network operator ("No one in our family has ever changed the mobile network operator!" - my translation). Still, no one can stop Romeo from being reunited with his Juliet: on a rainy night, he returns to Juliet's place and, as she joins him, he dispels her worries (Juliet: "And what shall we do about my father?" - my translation) letting her know about the new All Inclusive Cosmote pay-as-you-go bundle: "You may call him any time. With the Cosmote pay-as-you-go, you get enough minutes to make calls to any mobile network!" (my translation). It is obvious that, in the process of creatively transposing the myth of romantic, yet cursed love into the contemporary context, the advertisers considerably altered the original Shakespearean plot, character structure and character relationships. Even if the story is told from Juliet's perspective, her character loses much of the passion, strength, determination and maturity of the Shakespearean character, being reduced

to a weak 'lady-in-distress' figure oppressed by an authoritarian father and waiting to be rescued by her 'knight in a shiny armour', Romeo. The latter is equally transformed: like the Shakespearean lover, he is bold, passionate, ready to defy parental authority and to take any risk just to be with his Juliet; yet, he lacks the immoderation characterising the Shakespearean Romeo that contributes to the Shakespearean play's tragic outcome, and turns out to be capable of self-control as well as resourceful, seeking the best solution to reconcile his and Juliet's private desires with the oppressing social forces here represented by Juliet's father. In addition, the advertisers' re-vision of the Shakespearean hypotext allows for a direct confrontation between Romeo and Juliet's father and, most importantly, provides a different ending, a happy one, to the initial dramatic situation. Hence, one may describe this Cosmote commercial as an appropriation (Sanders 2006: 26 and Hutcheon 2006: 18) of the Shakespearean play that, as previously stated, does not explicitly acknowledge its source, but takes up its story, rethinks and filters it through the interests and expectations of the postmodern youth culture to ultimately create a new cultural product meant to serve commercial purposes.

It is also worth mentioning that the encoding of Shakespeare as a cultural icon in the Cosmote TV commercial may be regarded as the result of a complex intertextual game involving more than just the Shakespearean text. At the end of the commercial, a green curtain drops on the image of Romeo and Juliet kissing, happy that, owing to the Cosmote pay-as-you-go bundle, all communication problems have been solved. This may, naturally, be perceived as another visual element which contributes to reinforcing the idea that the advertisers turned primarily to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in creating their hypertext. But, at the same time, it may remind one of the movie theatre curtains that used to cover the screen in the 'old days' of cinema. And this is but one of the signs indicating that the advertisers might be tributary to the new, globally spreading style in Shakespeare-themed advertising that has founded the attribution of positive connotations to Shakespeare on "the power of recent Shakespeare films to reinvigorate Shakespearean cultural capital for a new generation" (Lanier 2012: 513). The image of Romeo and Juliet in the commercial, all wet and passionately kissing in front of Juliet's house, echoes perhaps that of Baz Luhrmann's protagonists in *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) as they come out of the swimming pool making love vows, or as Romeo, wet with rain, joins Juliet for the consummation of their wedding night. Water imagery in the commercial carries the same symbolism as that in Luhrmann's film,

pointing to baptism and new beginnings, as well as to escape, for, as Luhmann explained, his *Romeo and Juliet* “escape into water” and “use water for silence, for peace, and their ‘there’s a place for us’ moments” (qtd. in Lehmann 2010: 191-192). Along these lines, the advertisers’ strategy in the Cosmote commercial may be looked upon as illustrative for what Richard Burt calls “glo-cali-zation”, implying “both the collapse of the local and the global into the ‘glocal’ and the retention of ‘Cali’ (or Hollywood) as the center of the film industry” (2003: 15). Altogether, the analysed TV commercial, advertising improvements in the services provided by the mobile phone network operator Cosmote, seeks to seduce its young would-be customers by putting forth a story about love, conflict and technology which is actually an oblique appropriation of the Shakespearean *Romeo and Juliet*. However, reimagining a storyline of the Shakespearean source text in the contemporary context, looking at it through a humorous lens and complicating the intertextual relationships at the heart of the resulting hypertext by subtly hinting at “Shakespeare’s cinematic repopularization” (Lanier 2012: 512) are the strategies by means of which the advertisers hoped to counter the reception of their creation in terms of the ‘traditional’ understanding of Shakespeare as “a symbol of oppressive high culture” (Lanier 2012: 512) and to tune it to the target audiences’ values and expectations related to modern urban life, fun and technological progress.

Over the years following the coming out of the previously discussed Shakespeare-themed Cosmote TV commercial, the interest in Shakespeare on the Romanian advertising market seriously declined and was somewhat revived only at the moment when the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare’s death was nearing and, in various cultural spaces around the world, preparations were being made to mark it. In 2015, for instance, the Univer Group, “a prominent player in Hungary’s food industry and trade field” (Univer Plc 2015), issued a new TV commercial for its ketchup, which draws attention, among other things, by its playing on references to Shakespeare. Since, as Pamela Odih puts it, “[s]pace, it seems, is no longer an obstacle to global capitalism” (2007: 16), this particular advertisement was aired in Hungary but also dubbed for broadcasting on various TV channels on the most significant foreign market of the company, i.e., in Romania, where the Univer Group has a subsidiary known as Univer Product S.R.L. (Univer Plc 2015).

The media text is constructed in a rather conventional form as a “dramatized commercial vignette” (Odih 2007: 13) meant to provide a demonstration of the product, in this case ketchup, set within the

framework of a domestic environment. From the very first shots and verbal exchanges between the characters one may detect marks of the social and cultural patterns – family relations, gender issues, and... Shakespeare – that underlie the process of meaning construction. Thus, wife – husband interaction becomes the perfect opportunity for the introduction in the advertising discourse of an allusion to Shakespeare's *Othello*: while cooking, rather deep in thought, a young woman is taken by surprise by her husband who, putting on an oven glove, jocularly poses as an Othello ready to strangle his Desdemona. The threatening nature of his gesture is humorously undercut by the husband's using the oven glove and saying: "Have you laid the table, Desdemona?" (my translation). Leaving aside the comic twist given to the Shakespearean hypotext, the implicit oversimplification of the complexity of the original plot does away with Desdemona's independence of spirit and power of speech and reduces her image to that of a submissive, faithful wife. It is precisely that image that the advertisement projects on its female character: confined to the domestic sphere, this woman is shown cooking, laying the table, silently and patiently putting up with her husband. The stereotypical picture of womanhood in patriarchal terms is soon completed by the introduction of a third character in the advertisement, namely the couple's daughter, which adds motherhood to the list of traits of the young adult woman that the advertisement features. Next, the father – daughter interaction provides further hints at the major lines along which the male character of the commercial is conceived. Suddenly emerging from under the table, the father tries to convince the daughter to take a bite ("Just one bite, my princess!" – my translation), but his large, exaggerate gestures and his theatrically dropping his head on the table do not impress the child who looks bored, leaning her cheek upon her hand. Though so far he has failed to get his 'audience's' attention, the father continues his show, fooling with a French fry in his hand and uttering with a serious mien: "To eat or not to eat, that is the question" (my translation). The mother and the daughter are amused, yet the latter is determined to put an end to this ridiculous performance – "Dad, please, you're not on stage!" (my translation) – because she is hungry. The advertisers' play on the phrase that "has become the favourite Shakespeare reference in advertising" (Lanier 2012: 510), i.e., Hamlet's "To be, or not to be – that is the question" (III.1.55), functions here as "a comic intensifier" (Lanier 2012: 508), and their having the daughter explicitly label the father's behaviour as theatrical stresses that Shakespeare is primarily associated here with the high-culture art of the theatre. If, on the one hand, the mapping of meaning in the Univer TV

commercial relies on such dichotomies as man/woman and private/public, the explicit association of the father figure with the public sphere completing the picture of the typical patriarchal family in a masculine society in which gender roles are clearly delineated, on the other hand, it stresses the opposition nature/ (high) culture. Once the father has dropped the actor's mask, the family may finally enjoy their meal which, as the (female) non-diegetic voice-over explains, "tastes better when it's all natural" (my translation). The keyword is obviously "natural": at the denotative level, it emphasises what differentiates the advertised ketchup from other similar products ("That's why the Univer ketchup is E-free. It's natural, i. E. ketchup Univer!" - my translation); at the connotative level, nevertheless, it implies that Shakespeare as a cultural model stands for artificiality and sophistication, hence it functions as "a connotative foil" (Lanier 2012: 507) for the product.

Relatively similar strategies for the integration of Shakespeare in the advertising discourse are adopted by the producers of another advertisement aired on Romanian television channels in early 2016 to inform the consumers of Neumarkt beer that the product is available in a new form of presentation, i.e., in glass bottles. Confirming that repetition is a basic mechanism in advertising in more than one sense, the new Neumarkt ad addresses the target consumers, i.e., exclusively men (as part of the slogan indicates: "For real men/ Rightfully male" - my translation), having a middle income and mid-level education, to remind them what individualises Neumarkt beer and why they like it so much ("the strong, bitter taste" - my translation), as well as to add one more 'episode' to the relatively long series of Neumarkt advertisements that are centred on the same male protagonists. In this case, the picture of the lifestyle the consumers may identify with is enriched with the image of a casual party held in a log house/ chalet, where the cheerfully conversing guests drink Neumarkt beer. A young man leaves his group of friends to get some beer from the fridge, but his access to it is made difficult by three 'guardian'-like figures (two of them at least easily recognizable from previous Neumarkt 'episodes'). The verbal exchange they engage in deviates from an ordinary issue like beer consumption to evolve into an awkward, verging on the absurd, metaphysical debate on the problem of existence:

*Speaker 1:* Can I have a beer?

*Speaker 2:* Of course! How would you like your Neumarkt: in a plastic or glass bottle?

*Speaker 1:* Why, does such a thing as glass-bottled Neumarkt exist?

*Speaker 3:* Do we exist?



*Speaker 2:* Life exists in the true sense of its existence.

*Speaker 4:* That is the question.

*Speaker 2:* What question? (my translation)

The characters' mock-philosophical discourse is constructed upon a rhetorical question, a tautology and a quotation from the famous opening of Hamlet's soliloquy in III.2. Less popular than the first part of the same line ("to be or not to be"), this quotation from Shakespeare puts the viewers' memory to the test, but only by recognizing its source and linking it with the visual text, could they fully grasp the meanings underlying an apparently entirely ridicule association of words. As he refers to "the true sense of existence", the second speaker hands a glass bottle of Neumarkt to his young interlocutor (speaker 1), thus seemingly suggesting that, for men like them, there can be no doubt about Neumarkt beer being an essential ingredient of their lifestyle. This same speaker's reaction to the fourth speaker's quotation from Shakespeare, which voices Hamlet's existential dilemma as he is plagued by doubt regarding the course of action he should take, lends then itself to double interpretation. On the one hand, one might see it as evidence of the second speaker's actual ignorance hidden behind a veneer of sophistication, of his being unfamiliar with the source of the quotation and, therefore, incapable of understanding the link the fourth speaker tried to establish between the previous statements on existence and the Shakespearean text. On the other hand, if one assumes that the second speaker has indeed the background necessary to get the point of his friend's quoting from *Hamlet*, his question is just an ironic expression of his definite rejection of any doubt about the importance of Neumarkt beer in his and his friends' life. As for the young man who started the conversation and unwillingly triggered the burlesque 'show' referred to above, after a few moments of puzzlement, his expression lightens up, whether he has finally understood the 'subtle' meaning of the exchange or he is just happy to have got his beer bottle. In any case, it is clear that Shakespeare's association with sophisticated, philosophically-oriented thinking, erudition and specialist knowledge has been used by the advertisers who produced this Neumarkt commercial to emphasise the contrast between these values and those that would be attached to the advertised product, namely simplicity, popularity and fun.

Even if for almost two hundred years Shakespeare's reception in the Romanian cultural space has been mainly mediated by translations and theatrical performances, the late decades that have witnessed the rise of a

postmodern, capitalist, consumerist society in Romania have brought about the emergence on the Romanian cultural market of other forms of appropriation of the Shakespearean heritage, deeply anchored in the contemporary popular culture, like television advertisements, for instance. As one can hardly speak of a tradition in Shakespeare advertising in Romania, naturally, the advertisers who created Shakespeare-themed commercials in these early years of the new millennium have been largely influenced by the main trends in the well-established practice of drawing on the Shakespeare 'myth' for commercial purposes that developed first in the British and American cultural spaces but then started to spread worldwide in the "postmodern age of cultural recycling" (Hutcheon 2006: 3). That explains their engaging, in their advertisements, in the construction of various forms of intertextual relationships with Shakespeare's work, ranging from adaptation and appropriation, which involve a more complex process of interaction with the source text and transposition into a new cultural construct, but differ in "how explicitly they state their intertextual purpose" (Sanders 2006: 2), to "the more glancing act of allusion or quotation, even citation" (Sanders 2006: 4). In addition, that accounts for the penetration on the Romanian advertising market of specific strategies of integrating Shakespeare into the frame of cultural references sustaining meaning-construction in the advertising discourse, including parody and even irreverent treatment of Shakespearean characters, themes and famous phrases, the updating of Shakespearean storylines so that they could be more easily understood by the new generations of viewers/customers, as well as the dialogue with both the Shakespearean texts and their recent filmic adaptations which have revived (at least to a certain extent) the interest in Shakespeare in the contemporary youth culture. As Douglas Lanier remarks, "advertising typically is not a source of new ideas about Shakespeare" (2012: 499). So, in dealing with Shakespeare as a cultural icon, advertisers have been working on the symbolism attached to it in the long-lasting process of its appropriation and assimilation in the Romanian culture, which actually happens to display values that are akin to those determining Shakespeare's reception on a larger, global, scale. Shakespeare seems to be irremediably coded as a paragon of high culture, associated with the world of the theatre and the academic environment, hence connoting elitism, sophistication and specialist knowledge. The TV commercials produced on/for the Romanian customers after 2000 range next to other similar postmodern attempts, made at the global level, to efface the highbrow/lowbrow divide by projecting a high-culture model

like Shakespeare against a low-culture background provided by the advertising discourse. What distinguishes them is the Romanian advertisers' choosing the subject of their intertextual games with Shakespeare taking into account not only the globally-acknowledged Shakespearean commonplaces (like Romeo and Juliet or Hamlet's "to be or not to be") but also the popularity of certain Shakespearean plays (like *Julius Caesar*) with the Romanian audiences, as well as their using Shakespeare to create the image of a lifestyle that the Romanian consumers appreciate and to communicate values and hierarchies (high/low, old/new, culture/nature, "agelessness/innovation"-Lanier 2012: 507) that they may identify with. Even so, one cannot but agree with Douglas Lanier when he states that "despite post-modernism's supposed levelling of high/low distinctions, Shakespeare remains a signifier of residual highbrow tradition" (2012: 510) and the statement aptly applies to Romanian TV commercials too, as Shakespeare tends to be rather presented as a foil (sometimes not even identified as a reference point) and positively perceived only when elitism associates with technological advance or when, owing to the impact of film adaptations, Shakespeare's image is re-fashioned more to the taste of the young generation. Therefore, one must wonder why Shakespeare-related advertisements, few as they are in the Romanian cultural space, matter. Such intertextuality-marked media texts may not, indeed, change ideas about Shakespeare among the Romanian audiences but they do contribute to increasing Shakespeare's mobility across geographical and cultural borders and to keeping his memory alive in the Romanian collective consciousness. If at least some Romanian viewers' curiosity about Shakespeare's work is aroused by these TV commercials so that they may try to get acquainted with it, if only because they want to feel the pleasure of recognizing the source drawn upon and to better grasp the meanings encoded in the media discourse, then the benefits of such advertising are undeniable.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Dragoş Protopopescu translated twelve Shakespearean plays, namely *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, *The Winter's Tale*, *King Lear*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Othello*, *Coriolanus*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Tempest* and *Twelfth Night*. His translations were published in various editions between 1938 and 1945 (Volceanov 2006: 207 and Matei-Chesnoiu 2007: 192-193).

<sup>2</sup> According to *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* (2001), the earliest record of Shakespeare being used in advertising is dated to 1710 when an image based on

the Chandos portrait of Shakespeare was adopted as the publisher Jacob Tonson's trademark (Dobson and Wells 2001: 3).

<sup>3</sup> The phrase is taken from a famous appropriation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the form of a hilarious sketch referred to as *A Small Rewrite*, performed in 1989, starring Hugh Laurie as William Shakespeare and Rowan Atkinson as the editor of Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy (III.2).

<sup>4</sup> MobiFon S.A. emerged on the Romanian mobile telecommunications market in April 1997 launching the first GSM network in Romania under the brand Connex. After acquisition by the multinational telecommunications company Vodafone Group, the network operator was rebranded Connex-Vodafone until October 2005. Since April 2006, it has been simply known as Vodafone Romania (Tomck@t 2014).

<sup>5</sup> The advertising company D'Arcy dissolved in 2004, after 12 years of activity on the Romanian advertising market, as a result of its being involved in financial scandals and of the decision of some of its best employees to resign in quest for better job opportunities (either as employees of other major international advertising companies or as founders of their own private advertising agencies) (Badicioiu 2006 and Ardelean 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Statistically speaking, *Julius Caesar* seems to have been one of the most popular Shakespearean plays with Romanian translators from the 1840s to the end of the nineteenth century. Reference should be made, in this respect, to the translation, by Gheorghe Bariț, of a fragment from *Julius Caesar*, published in *Foaie pentru minte, inimă și literatură* in 1840, as well as to the four translations of the whole play published until the end of the century by S. Stoica (1844), Adolph Stern (1879), Barbu Lazureanu (1892) and Scarlat Ion Ghica (1895-1896). See Matei-Chesnoiu 2006: 197-199.

### Corpus

D'Arcy (2000?). *Connex Go! Caesar vs. Brutus. Part 1* [online] available from <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vw6q19MkPY>> [15 May 2016]

D'Arcy (2000?). *Connex Go! Caesar vs. Brutus. Part 2* [online] available from <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rizZUvBxiHE>> [15 May 2016]

Neumarkt (2016). *Reclama Bere Neumarkt la sticlă* [online] available from <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPuVqJzyt08>> [15 May 2016]

Ogilvy & Mather (2008). *Cosmote Romeo și Julieta* [online] available from <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRod0PfQ478>> [15 May 2016]

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hs8Y6LouX1w>> [15 May 2016]

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