
APPROPRIATING SHAKESPEARE IN CRIMINAL MINDS

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Abstract: Appropriating and adapting Shakespeare, I will adopt Julie Sander's distinction between the two, for television has become a prolific and lucrative field. Terence Hawkes called it fittingly - Bardbiz. Nowadays, more and more shows, and films for that matter, are quoting Shakespeare or using his plots. There is no doubt that he is more popular today than at any other time after his death. Hence, the question that we are all asking is: why is he so popular today? The first reason lies in his adaptability, and not universality, since the latter term has become outdated and rather disliked. Therefore, perhaps, it is better to say that Shakespeare is not universal, but rather he is universally adaptable. The second reason lies in his credibility and profitability, since he is after all *Shakespeare*. It is reasonable to note that not all appropriations and adaptations are used for financial gain. Some are used for acknowledgement of Shakespeare and others for giving validity to their own work. For example, TV shows are traditionally considered low culture, so 'joining forces' with one of the greatest names in literature is a strategically wise move. *Criminal Minds* is a successful police procedural crime drama that has been on television for a solid fifteen seasons. The elite squad of FBI profilers analyzes the motivation, emotional triggers, and offender behavior. Their work is to conduct psychological profiling and not just to arrest the unsubs (unknown subjects) as other crime shows do. During the fifteen seasons, the writers occasionally used lines from Shakespeare and/or appropriated some of his motifs/plots. According to Freud, the unconscious is a place of no morality, logic, or doubt. It is a place of endless desire and mobile energy (cited in Bartolovich, 2014). In *Criminal Minds*, such behavior is taken to the extreme, so that it is individually and socially destructive. Shakespeare was intrigued with what such energy, desire, and the lack of prohibition it could lead to. Hence, the scope of this paper, such as it may be, is to try and offer some possible answers to this question in regards to the TV show *Criminal Minds*, which has been going strong for more than a decade on prime-time American television. When I say "possible answers" it is only because this phenomenon is still unfolding and developing, and it is not possible to offer decisive answers - yet.

Keywords: Shakespeare, television, appropriation, adaptation, Bardbiz, presentism

*No longer an epiphenomenon, adaptation is now understood
as an essential condition of transmission for Shakespearean
texts.¹*

Katherine Rowe

Even though younger generations would not know it, there is a schism between the (scholarly) literary and the audiovisual interpretation of Shakespeare. As Rowe (2008) points out in her essay, not many mid-career Shakespeareans will admit that they log in many ours in front of the TV. Yet, the audiovisual is not completely ignored. Documentaries are valued more than film, and film is favored more than TV shows. I tend to ask attendees at conferences what show(s) they watch, and it usually comes down to the History or Discovery channel, while some, apologetically and rather shyly, admit that they *do* watch TV shows. Why is this? Why is it degrading to watch TV shows? I watch all kinds of TV shows, and I have to admit there is a lot of Shakespeare out there. Sometimes it's just symbolically a quote here or there, a coffee mug with his lines, a poster of one of his adaptations, or a simple "talking to the skull" moment as in the TV show *Dresden Files*. Nowadays, more and more TV shows, and films for that matter, are quoting Shakespeare or using his plots. There is no doubt that he is more popular today than at any other time after his death. Hence, the question that we are all asking is: why is he so popular today? The focus of this paper is to try and offer some possible answers to this question in regards to the TV show *Criminal Minds*, which has been going strong for fifteen seasons on prime-time American television. When I say "possible answers" it is only because this phenomenon is still unfolding and developing, and it is not possible to give any definitive answer - yet.

Criminal Minds is a successful police procedural crime drama that has been on television for a solid fifteen seasons. The elite squad of FBI profilers analyzes the motivation, emotional triggers of the offender(s)' behavior. Their work is to conduct psychological profiling and not just to arrest the unsubs (unknown subjects) as it is done in other crime shows. During the fifteen seasons, the writers occasionally used lines from Shakespeare and/or appropriated some of

¹ Rowe, Katherine. "Medium-Specificity and Other Critical Scripts for Screen Shakespeare." In Henderson 35.

his motifs/plots. For this analysis, I adopt Julie Sander's² distinction between adaptation and appropriation. According to her, adaptation is a re-casting of one work in one media to fit another media such as recasting of plays for television scripts, while appropriation, on the other hand, is the re-working of a source text and adding more material to it. By these definitions, the use of Shakespeare in *Criminal Minds* is an appropriation. I feel that this distinction needs to be made since the term adaptation has been used for both.

Furthermore, Freud needs to be mentioned. According to Freud, the unconscious is a place of no morality, logic, or doubt. It is a place of endless desire and mobile energy.³ In *Criminal Minds*, such behavior is taken to the extreme, so that it is individually and socially destructive. Shakespeare was intrigued with what such energy, desire, and lack of prohibition could lead to. The interest of Freud's, and one can argue also Shakespeare's, work is to show the suppressed desires in individuals. They also share the interest in sexual drive and how it affects the individual and family/society alike. The motives of the unsub in the show are driven by the same untamed desire and energy that Freud and Shakespeare wrote about in their different ways. This paper will focus on the relevance of Shakespeare in this show; although, it has to be noted that any episode's psychological investigation can be traced back to Freud's own investigations into the unconscious, fetishes, violence, incestuous relationships, and many other mental illness and moral deviations. Hence, the scope of this paper, such as it may be, is to see how and why Shakespeare is appropriated for this TV show.

Perhaps it is best to begin with a quick overview of how the quotes are used before or after certain episodes, and what those episodes are about. In season 3 episode 9 "Penelope," the quote used is "Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none," which is from *All's Well That Ends Well*. Penelope Garcia, one of the BAU agents, otherwise known as the savvy computer geek secretly encrypts the teams movements, which turns out be a violation, in order to look into the cases on her own and help the families of the victims. At the same time, she is wooed by an attractive police officer, who in the end tries to kill her, because he was the murderer in three of those cases. His MO was to kill the people and then turn up as the first responder. In the end, officer Baylor is shot to death, while Penelope is assisted by a colleague and fellow geek, Kevin, who will be her love interest in the following few seasons. She ends the episode by concluding that maybe everything that happened was for a good reason, since now she is finally in a meaningful relationship. Apart from Penelope being sneaky and rather adept in action as is Helena in the play, the above quote fits perfectly with the issue of trust, but has no meaning as far as the plot of the actual play.

In season 3 episode 12 "Limelight," the quote is: "It is a wise father that knows his own child," which is from *The Merchant of Venice*. The episode begins with an auction in which a person buys a storage unit, which is a kind of a casket, only to find items that might belong to a serial killer. As the BAU build the profile of the unsub, they find four bodies with indicators that there may be more. The local case agent (interesting coincidence and choice of words), Jill, wants to make a name for herself and her department, and in order to do so she manufactures evidence. Once the unsub sees what she is doing and how popular both of them have become in the media, he kidnaps her and the reporter working on the story. Jill is right about the serial killer, but she is not true to her department and calling by swindling the FBI into helping her. In the end, her media escapade cost the city a few more victims leading her to regret her actions and to wonder if all of it was worth it. In a weird way, she got what she wanted but the consequences were unforeseen and, perhaps, for her ones that she will have a hard time living with. There is a similarity in the cunning nature between Jill and Jessica from the play. Jill, too, is rather callous regarding the reputation of her department as is Jessica with her father's.

In season 4 episode 10 "Brothers in Arms," the quote is: "...for he today who sheds his blood with me shall be my brother." The title of the episode and the quote are obviously from *Henry V*. The BAU is called out to Phoenix to investigate rather methodical shootings of police officers. Apart from the unsub killing only police officers, he also takes their badges. The sense of comradeship between the police officers who are a band of brothers prevails throughout the whole episode. Almost any of Henry's quotes would have worked fine for this episode. When viewing it Evelyn Gajowski and Ewan Fernie come to mind. They both wrote on the importance of this play not only after World War II, but also after the 9/11 attacks. Politicians in order to assert patriotism and the will to act have used lines, parts of the play, or the whole play over the years. The lines are also used as an ominous warning on what could happen if "enemy forces" used "fierce agency."⁴ These are the messages that such speeches and performances are sending in order to achieve governmental agendas. Similarly, in this episode the spirit of unity with and among the police members can be seen as a message from the creators of *Criminal Minds*, because in the end it is a crime-fighting TV show.

² Sanders, Julie. (2008). *Adaptation and Appropriation*. New York: Routledge.

³ Bartolovich, Crystal, David Hillman, and Jean Howard. (2014). *Marx and Freud: Great Shakespearians*. New York: Bloomsbury, 101.

⁴ Fernie, Ewan. "Action! *Henry V*." (2007). In Grady and Hawkes, eds., *Presentist Shakespeares*, Routledge, New York, 117.

In season 5 episode 4 "Hopeless," the quote is: "These violent delights have violent ends," which is from *Romeo and Juliet*. The episode is about three young men, wronged by bosses or society in some way, lashing out their rage on random couples by beating them to death. Their actions are so violent that the victims are mostly unrecognizable. They are not organized in any way, and they act instinctively. The BAU goes back to the first vandalized house only to figure out that the killing began when a contractor irritated three of his workers and they killed him and stuffed him in the wall. In the end, the unsub goes out in a blaze of glory gunned down in front of a house they were living in. The last scene is somewhat reminiscent of the fencing scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. In their weird and twisted way, they are men defending their honor. By no means am I comparing one of the men to Romeo, but just as Romeo answers the challenge in the play, so do these men in their grotesquely damaged way.

In season 7 episode 14 "Closing Time," the quote used is: "For trust not him that hath once broken faith." This is from *Henry VI Part 3*. The BAU is called out to California where bodies with their genitals cut off are found hidden on the beaches. Apparently, someone is punishing cheaters. The investigation leads them to a bartender who is suffering from a nervous breakdown after he found out that his wife cheated on him. Somewhere in his sick mind he thought that he would help others by punishing those who betrayed them. Some kind of indirect and sketchy reference can be made to all the betrayals and deaths in the play; although, such a comparison would be highly inappropriate and a stretch to say the least. For the most part the quote suits the plot only as much as the part regarding a person losing faith in loved ones and love. In this show, as mentioned before, such cases are taken to the extreme, and the unsub assumes the role of the ultimate vigilante; someone who has no inhibitions in punishing those who betray the trust of others. Perhaps, a similarity between the unsub and Richard III can be seen, since he, too, had no inhibitions and moral constraints when it came to getting the throne. Although, it is highly unlikely that the creators of this show had that in mind.

In season 8 episode 10 "The Lesson," the quote is: "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the *mind*." This one is from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This episode is quite interesting, since the bodies that are found are pierced through the hands and feet, while all the joints are dislocated. Additionally, the victims are male and their hair is dyed black and their nails painted red, while the only female victim is still missing. Their careful analysis of the unsub's personality and traumas leads the BAU to a run-down theater where they find the unsub with the female victim and latest male victim. He has hallucinations and imagines that he is a boy in a theater and the two victims are living marionettes on strings. It is actually in his mind's eye that he envisions the puppet show, while the people who are abducted actually are transferred to a different place and transformed into characters they are not. The obvious reference to the play is quite a twisted version of what happens in the play.

In season 10 episode 4 "The Itch," the quote is: "What's the matter, you dissentious rogues, that rubbing the poor itch of your opinion make yourselves scabs?" It is from *Coriolanus*. It is interesting that they chose this quote from Shakespeare, since they could have chosen some other one that has scratching or itching in it. The quoted itching is the only link to the episode in which a local reporter with strange scabs is hit by a car. The BAU investigates and finds out that he was working on a case regarding vaccines. What could possibly be a case involving privately owned facilities making medication and vaccines turns out to be a case about a man who suffers from horrific delusions that he has bugs crawling under his skin and has to scratch until he gets to the bone. The unsub actually worked for the CDC and had to get constant shots, which led to/brought out his mental illness. His victims were people who worked on vaccinations or were somehow connected to them. It is interesting, though, that it is the only reference⁵ in Shakespeare pertaining to a disease accompanied by an unpleasant sensation. Itching is mentioned in other plays, but with the meaning of the uneasiness of the skin or even a teasing desire in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

It is worth mentioning that there are two more quotes in the show that are attributed to Shakespeare although they are not his. They are: "When a father gives to his son, both laugh; when his son gives to his father, both cry" and "Nothing is so common as the wish to be remarkable." The first one is a Jewish proverb and the second is a quote from Oliver Wendell Holmes's "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table" (1857), and both have mistakenly been attributed to Shakespeare over the years. It is a common mistake to attribute them to him; however, it is a bit puzzling that people who work on the show and do such great research made these mistakes. Also, in season 7 episode 19 "Heathridge Manor," the unit investigates a murder of a woman dressed in Renaissance clothing, and they mention Shakespeare, but apart from that nothing else is relevant to him or his works.

At this point, as I would like to direct the attention back to Shakespeare and Freud, I would like to mention a specific episode from season 10 Episode 8 titled "If the Shoe Fits." The unsub is a young woman who grew up with a father who was a pedophile. At some point, the father left her, and she was placed through the foster care system in an abusive family that had two other daughters. The girl developed a warped Cinderella syndrome. She finds handsome and rich young men, and when they turn out to be only interested in taking advantage of her she kills

⁵ Schmidt, Alexander. (1971). *Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary*. Vol 1. New York: Dover, 601.

them with a stiletto heel. So, Prince Charming who does not fit into her fantasy is killed. After a lot of profiling, the BAU finally catch her when one of the younger members of the unit, Spencer Reid (Matthew Gray Gubler), plays into her fantasy by telling her that he has been looking all over the city for her. After that, he offers her a shoe (it's actually a hilarious moment when he takes a shoe out of an evidence bag) and puts it on her foot just before he escorts her to their chariot (the BAU SUV). Freud wrote about the "Cinderella" story in the essay in which he uses Shakespeare's texts as examples "The Theme of the Three Caskets"⁶ in which he discussed *The Merchant of Venice* and *King Lear*. He compares the choosing of the casket to a man choosing between three women, which is a theme that has also appeared in *King Lear* (Lear chooses between three daughters) and many other folk tales among which is "Cinderella." Freud also reminds us of the fact that Shakespeare did not invent his stories; he borrowed them from others who told them in similar ways. Which makes one wonder: if he did not invent new and dazzling stories, why is he so popular, and why are his versions adapted and appropriated so much today? There are few answers that I am contemplating on.

The first reason lies in his adaptability, and not universality, since the latter term has become outdated and rather disliked. Perhaps it is better to say that Shakespeare is not universal, rather he is universally adaptable. The approach that he uses to telling a story, and the often not so perfect endings he gives them (sometimes rash and hasty endings leave the reader puzzled. Tolstoy wrote his famous, or rather infamous, critique of *King Lear* and pointed out the flaws in it), intrigue readers/viewers, and become directors and screen writers to participate in shaping the stories and giving them their own take on them. Perhaps it is the shifting of the place and time that leaves the play open to various places and times or it is simply the diversity of themes that he explores. Shakespeare's profound insight into everlasting social problems provides unique, and exploitable, grounds for adaptations and appropriations. It is undisputed that Shakespeare is also adaptable in non-Anglophone cultures as well. As Sarah Hatchuel, Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, and Victoria Bladen⁷ have pointed adaptation and appropriation are products of a cultural moment; hence, politics and society highly determine how a text will be adapted. *Coriolanus* would most certainly not be presented the same way in the communist China, as it will be in the United States as Zhouhua Lin's 2007⁸ theater production has shown. By the same token, the racial problem in *Othello* will be interpreted and staged variously in different cultures, while the magic in *Macbeth* is viewed and adapted differently in South Africa, Jamaica, or India than it is in Western societies mainly due to their different perspective on witchcraft and magic. Hence, his distinctiveness enables his texts to be adjusted and 'fitted' into other quite different cultures.

The second reason lies in his credibility and profitability, since he is after all *Shakespeare*. Frequently, in novels the author uses (and sometimes misuses) Shakespeare's lines. For example, in the popular *Twilight Saga*, the main character Edward recites Romeo's lines in class, while his beloved "Juliet" sits next to him. There is no better way of making a work "legit" than incorporating Shakespeare somewhere and somehow. When using quotes from Shakespeare's text and the works of other famous authors in *Criminal Minds*, the creators of the show seem to use the credibility of these authors to assert the value of this tv show, while at the same time distinguishing it as more serious from other similar shows. It can even be argued that Shakespeare's name itself gives validity and importance to a prolific and presentist popular culture, which dominates over high culture. Thus, Shakespeare, as Christy Desmet impartially puts it, is a global intermedial brand endlessly appropriated and adapted⁹.

Adam G. Hooks writes that Shakespeare's death was both "a matter of fact and a matter of business. The author was a function of the marketplace." So, according to him, since Shakespeare's death his works have been defined more in commercial than aesthetic terms.¹⁰ With today's consumerism, this claim seems to resonate even more. The manic desire of networks, to reach more audiences and have better ratings propels them to explore any options that may give them advantage. Shakespeare's global existence makes his works convenient for such an endeavour. The list of TV shows, films, and books that used some of his lines is endless. Nevertheless, Hooks asks is such representation of his texts faithful to what Shakespeare wanted to convey and achieve with them? His texts were intended to be performed for the audience. Profit was not the first and most important goal. His authorial intention was performance. Without opening a whole new discussion, one has to notice that that adaptations today are used mostly for profit, and, therefore, are going against the authorial intention. Yet, the author is dead, and the question of

⁶ Freud, Sigmund. (1959). "The Theme of the Three Caskets." Vol 4. In Jones, ed., *Sigmund Freud: Collected Papers*. 5 vols. New York: Basic Books, 244.

⁷ Hatchuel, Sarah, Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, and Victoria Bladen. Eds. (2014). *Shakespeare on Screen: "Macbeth."* Mont-Saint-Aignan, France: Publications des Universites de Rouen and du Harve.

⁸ Bakkalapulo, Maria. "Chinese Metal Bands' Miserable Faith and Suffocated Become Symbols of Rebellion in a Shakespearean Adaptation, Sponsored by the Ministry of Culture."

⁹ Fischlin, Daniel. Ed. (2014). *OuterSpeares: Shakespeare, Intermedia, and the Limits of Adaptation*. Toronto: Toronto UP, 260.

¹⁰ Hooks, Adam G. "The Author Being Dead." Callaghan and Gossett 153-157.

authorship and authorial intention is a topic for another discussion. Still, discussing any adaptation or appropriation requires at least the mention of this issue.

The third reason is the expansion of media. For centuries, it used to be the theater and bookstores that offered Shakespeare to the public. Unfortunately, not everyone could read or could afford the theater. Hence, Shakespeare belonged mostly to the elite. The twentieth century brought into fashion film, TV, and a multitude of other media, which made Shakespeare available worldwide. He became a global phenomenon easily accessible and available to all. The 1990s and Kenneth Branagh made him even more than that. A plethora of adaptations flooded the movie theaters and young movie stars like Leonardo DiCaprio made Shakespeare likable. This was an important shift in adapting Shakespeare. It is this popularity that has propelled the Bardbiz and made Shakespeare not only sought out but also, as mentioned above, profitable. One could say that the death of the author, discussed in the previous lines, could have brought on the birth of the auteur, which according to Samuel Crowl is the movie director. Conversely, it is also worth mentioning that television, film, and other media were not blithely accepted by influential intellectuals, critics, scholars, philosophers, social scientists, and consequently, across academia:

For Walter Benjamin, the newspaper and novel destroy the “chasteness” and embedded life of storytelling; for Frederic Jameson, photography challenges the fullness of novelistic representation. For many years television played the aesthetically impoverished and dangerous newcomer but web-based electronic media now regularly inhabit that role.¹¹

There was a fear in academia of the alienating affects of technology and the media. In essence, skepticism derived from the query could the director and the audiences interpret plays while preserving the high culture standard? The fact of the matter is that the same reservations that scholars once had toward the role of the reader were transferred to the audience. Emma French discusses this issue and says that the Frankfurt School understanding that the audience is passive and can be manipulated by the media - has changed. French proposes a neo-Gramscian approach to reception in which the audience is active and is an important participant for the film [and television] industry.¹² The relevance of the reviews that follow the premier of the films shows how significant film or television reception is. Another example that supports this claim is *Hamlet Live*. In 2020, The Globe team presented a live streaming of the play. Hence, *Hamlet*¹³ streamed around the globe and was widely viewed. The live streaming made the play available globally in the literal sense. The reception showed that the diverse audience shared emotions and gave new perspectives. It also showed that there is not one worldview and, because everyone could participate in the discussion, it enriched the understanding of literature. Additionally, the number of YouTube clips and mashups regarding any of the characters from the play, or just the play, is countless.

Last but not least, some decades ago, Terence Hawkes wrote about institutionalized education and the way that the government used Shakespeare. His thoughts make me think about the place Shakespeare has in today's education. Shakespeare is a part of the regular curriculum (for example *Julius Caesar* and *Romeo and Juliet* are widely read in high schools) in many countries around the world. Colleges also offer Shakespeare courses. There are many people, who came in touch with Shakespeare academically (or in some toher way), who nowadays work on film and TV. It is their knowledge of Shakespeare that permeates into TV scripts such as the one in *Criminal Minds*. It is highly unlikely to study drama or cinematography without at least taking one course dedicated to Shakespeare's works and/or the effects they have on film, theater, and/or television. Nevertheless, these are just some possibilities to be further discussed. So, why are lines from Shakespeare's plays used in *Criminal Minds*? The best answer would probably be "all of the above." Undoubtedly, the show would be a success even without quoting famous authors. Yet, the creators felt that by using Shakespeare's and other notable author's lines would give a certain seriousness and credibility to their work. There is a global discussion on Shakespeare taking place, and whether or not the film and television industry is deliberately (or not) participating in it, time will show.

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¹² French, Emma. (2006). *Selling Shakespeare to Hollywood: The Marketing of Filmed Shakespeare Adaptations from 1989 into the new Millenium*. Hatfield, UK: U of Hertfordshire P, 7.

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