

their inherent talent. The problem with this—and which should become apparent across the course of *Shakespearean Celebrity in the Digital Age*—is that for many high-profile performers their success intersects with other forms of privilege which have invariably helped them advance further than pure talent would alone. This is true of a high proportion of British performers in particular: the Sutton Trust reported in 2016, for instance, that 42% of British BAFTA winners were privately educated and 35% attended grammar schools (Kirby 2016). Commenting on the report’s findings, the Chairman of the Trust Sir Peter Lampl observed, ‘your chances of reaching the top in so many areas of British life are very much greater if you went to an independent school’ (Gurney-Read 2016). Although further studies have not drilled down into social differences between and across the acting profession, it is only to be expected that Shakespearean actors are assisted by the proximity between social and cultural capital given that the playwright’s name exists as a common shorthand for intellectual sophistication and good taste.

The British actor and focus of Chapter 3, Tom Hiddleston, is certainly proof of this phenomenon and the seemingly associated requirement that contemporary Shakespearean celebrity is articulated both through and as proof of social capital. Hiddleston is best known for his performance as the villainous Norse trickster God, Loki, in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU): the sprawling transmedia franchise that includes film adaptations of the comic books series *Thor*, *Iron Man*, *Hulk* and *Captain America* (among others).³ As the chief antagonist of *Thor* (dir. Kenneth Branagh, 2011) and *Avengers Assemble* (dir. Joss Whedon, 2012) and a rehabilitated but still unreliable presence in sequels *Thor: The Dark World* (dir. Alan Taylor, 2013) *Thor: Ragnarok* (dir. Taika Waititi, 2017) and *Avengers: Infinity War* (dir. Anthony Russo and Joe Russo, 2018), Hiddleston’s success speaks to Hollywood’s long investment in British theatrical actors, in what Ian Shuttleworth describes as ‘easy shorthand to denote a certain kind of “class”, whether romantic, intellectual or villainous’ (1995, 242). A rising international star, Hiddleston, received a double first from the University of Cambridge in Classics and graduated from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) in 2005 before joining Cheek by Jowl for *The Changeling* in 2006 and *Cymbeline* in 2007, playing Alonso and Posthumus/Cloten, respectively. This was followed in 2008 by *Othello* and *Ivanov* in which he starred opposite Kenneth Branagh, a relationship that would lead to *Wallander* (TV, 2008–2012) and, most notably, *Thor* in which he would first play Loki. By this point, Hiddleston had started to establish himself as a

theatrical performer of note, earning the Ian Charleson Award (Third Prize) and the Laurence Olivier Award for Best Newcomer in 2007 for his role as Cassio. The actor continued to cement this association with literariness in his early television career with dramatic roles in period pieces such as *The Gathering Storm* (TV, 2002), *Miss Austen Regrets* (TV, 2008) and *Cranford—Return to Cranford* (TV, 2009). In all three roles, Hiddleston is positioned similarly as a gentlemanly ideal (upper-middle class, intelligent and romantic)—an archetype Hiddleston continued in the naïve but noble Captain Nicholls in *War Horse* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 2011), the suave former World War Two pilot Freddie Page in *The Deep Blue Sea* (dir. Terence Davies, 2012) and the aristocratic Sir Thomas Sharpe in *Crimson Peak* (dir. Guillermo del Toro, 2015).

The association of Hiddleston's identity with upper-class masculinity has persisted, confirming Martin Shingler's statement that the individual's attainment of stardom 'rests on being pigeon-holed'. This is something that happens in spite of the star possessing 'several different kinds of identity' (2012, 121), their own multifaceted character and those they portray. In Hiddleston's case, this has largely resulted from a focus by the press on his upper-middle class upbringing and its apparent cultivation of a Shakespearean performer identity that is variously quintessentially English, courtly, old-fashioned and sophisticated. Educated first at Eton (boarding at the same time as Prince William), then at Pembroke College, University of Cambridge where he studied Classics, Hiddleston's upbringing indeed testifies to his upper-middle-class status and the world of privilege and tradition still evidenced in such institutions.⁴ For both casting agents and the media, this distant and foreign world of privilege and tradition is one that evokes a sense of a time gone by. Jan Moir, for instance, remarks that Hiddleston 'is possessed of a surfeit of British old-world charm not seen since the halcyon days of David Niven' (Moir 2016), while Xan Brooks expresses this nostalgia for a type of masculinity long past in his description of Hiddleston as the individual who 'best embodies fragile, gilded youth' (Brooks 2011). This fascination with Hiddleston's biography and its apparent romantic glamour extends almost to the self-parodic with one journalist noting drily, 'Hiddleston, as it is compulsory to note in all interviews, was educated at Eton' (Naughton 2013). As the rest of Naughton's article testifies, however, such self-consciousness is usually absent in the media's often effusive depictions of the star. Despite the exclusivity of the establishment, James Mottram writes that, 'with his Eton education, [Hiddleston]

seems quintessentially English' (2014). Giles Hattersly observes adoringly that Hiddleston is 'spookily perfect', 'costume drama fodder' and 'straight out of a Rattigan play' (2013). Ben Beaumont-Thomas, meanwhile, commenting on Hiddleston's 'brand' of 'guileless, old-school grace', notes that it is 'small wonder' that producers 'want to cast him into the past, installing him as an emblem of the [...] sweet, sad decline of the landed gentry' (2013).

The press's focus on Hiddleston's perceived 'quintessential' Englishness is, though effusive, nevertheless significant. It indicates the field of reception which the star's performer identity has to negotiate and the proximity between Shakespearean celebrity and conventionally middle- to upper-middle-class social capital. The media's insistence of repeating his biographical details, for instance, underlines the same connection between Hiddleston's class and that of the characters performed in his early career; as Hiddleston acknowledges, 'I suppose I fill a slot' (Beaumont-Thomas 2013). In the case of Jan Moir's description, the publication of her comments in the right-wing newspaper, the *Daily Mail*, also suggests the investment of not only individuals but institutions in particular notions of English identity— notions which familiar class stereotypes such as Hiddleston's clear diction, Home Counties accent and measured eloquence further confirm. His tendency to dress smartly on most occasions (for example wearing a shirt, tie, navy suit trousers and matching waistcoat to Wimbledon in 2013) as well as the classical rather than trendy cut of his hair contribute similarly to an overall impression of poise and a seriousness of intent which often veers into the earnestness for which Hiddleston is well-known. These personal qualities illustrate that the associations drawn between Hiddleston and a paradigm of English gentility are not only constructed by the press, but purposefully cultivated by the actor. His 'quintessential' Englishness simultaneously ghosts and animates Hiddleston's status as a Shakespearean to the extent that the actor's Englishness and his Shakespeareanism function synecdochically for each other.

DETERMINING SHAKESPEAREANISM

Hiddleston's example (explored further in Chapter 3) demonstrates the potentially exclusionary nature of a Shakespearean celebrity defined by the potent combination of cultural and social capital. There are indeed a number of difficulties to navigate when the determination of certain