International
Journal of Human Studies
Uluslararası İnsan Çalışmaları Dergisi ISSN: 2636-8641

Cilt/Volume 6 Sayı/Issue 11 Yıl/Year: 2023 Alındı/Received: 01-12-2022 – Kabul/Accepted: 09-06-2023

"Better than Shakespear?": G. B. Shaw's Postmodernism and Shakespeare

"Shakespear'den Daha İyi?": G. B. Shaw'un Postmodernizmi ve Shakespeare

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Abstract

Although G. B. Shaw tends to associate himself with Shakespeare in his different works, much of the difficulty in understanding Shaw's conception of the playwright stems from his adverse criticism of Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies. When Shaw's prose works are examined, it can be observed that he either praises Shakespeare or defames him. However, what matters to us in Shaw's plays is that the impetus to criticise Shakespeare leads Shaw to revise the canonical playwright's works for different reasons. From the beginning of the twentieth century to the end of his career, Shaw both rewrites Shakespeare's plays and presents Shakespeare as one of his characters. In these works, Shaw relocates Shakespeare and his plays by making use of postmodernist literary characteristics in a way that Shakespeare

Öz

G. B. Shaw farklı eserlerinde kendisini Shakespeare ile bağdaştırmasına rağmen, Shaw'un oyun yazarına dair düşüncesini anlamaktaki güçlük Shakespeare'in trajedi ve komedilerini olumsuz eleştirisinden kaynaklanmaktadır. Shaw'un düz yazı eserleri incelendiğinde, onun ya Shakespeare'i övdüğü ya da onu küçük düşürdüğü gözlemlenebilir. Ancak, Shaw'un oyunlarında bizim için önemli olan, Shakespeare'i eleştirme dürtüsünün Shaw'u farklı sebeplerle kanonik oyun yazarının eserlerini değiştirmeye itmiş olmasıdır. Yirminci yüzyılın başından kariyerinin sonuna kadar Shaw, hem Shakespeare'in oyunlarını yeniden yazmaktadır hem de Shakespeare'i karakterlerinden biri olarak

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becomes an impetus of postmodernism for Shaw. This paper explores Shakespeare's postmodern agency in Shaw's selected plays, namely *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898), *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* (1910), "Macbeth Skit" (1916), *Cymbeline Refinished* (1937) and *Shakes versus Shav* (1949).

Keywords: George Bernard Shaw, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, "Macbeth Skit," *Cymbeline Refinished, Shakes versus Shav*, Shakespeare, Postmodernism

sunmaktadır. Bu eserlerde Shaw, Shakespeare ve onun eserlerini postmodernist edebi özellikleri kullanarak başka bir yere taşımaktadır; öyle ki, Shakespeare Shaw'u postmodernizme iten güç olur. Bu çalışma, Shaw'un *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898), *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* (1910), "Macbeth Skit" (1916), *Cymbeline Refinished* (1937) ve *Shakes versus Shav* (1949) adlı seçilmiş eserlerinde Shakespeare'in postmodern eylem gücünü incelemektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: George Bernard Shaw, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, "Macbeth Skit," *Cymbeline Refinished, Shakes versus Shav*, Shakespeare, Postmodernizm

Introduction

In one of his last works, *Farfetched Fables* (1948), George Bernard Shaw declares himself as a reincarnation of Shakespeare, saying: "The British themselves, influenced by a prophet whose name has come down to us in various forms as Shelley, Shakespeare, and Shavius" (Shaw, 1965c, p. 1395). It is true that Shelley's identity as a vegetarian, socialist and atheist has an influence on early Shaw. Later on, Henrik Ibsen's theatrical approach shapes Shaw's drama centred on issue-based plays. However, when his relationship with Shakespeare is considered, it is not easy to define it at first glance. Shaw's writings on the playwright are puzzling in the sense that he both highly appreciates Shakespeare and severely censures him. On the one hand, Shaw fashions himself as a good reader of Shakespeare by declaring the latter's characters as his own life companions: "When I was twenty I knew everybody in Shakespear, from Hamlet to Abhorson, much more intimately than I knew my living contemporaries" (Shaw, 1961, p. 55). Moreover, it might not be wrong to claim that Shaw admires Shakespeare. Indeed, Shaw does not hesitate to reveal his admiration in his different writings. Once he states that

> I pity the man who cannot enjoy Shakespear. He has outlasted thousands of abler thinkers, and will outlast a thousand more. His gift of telling a story provided (some one else told it to him first); he is enormous power over language, as conspicuous in his senseless and silly abuse of it as in his miracles of expression; his humor; his sense of idiosyncratic character; and his prodigious fund of that vital energy which is, it seems the true differentiating property behind the faculties, good, bad, or indifferent, of the man of genius, enable him to entertain us so effectively that the imaginary scenes and people he has created become

> more real to us than our actual life – at least, until our knowledge and grip of actual life begins to deepen and glow beyond the common. (Shaw, 1961, p.55)

More than this admiration, as can be seen in the quotation from *Farfetched Fables* above, there is a strong sense of identification with Shakespeare. That is the reason why Shaw announces that "[l]ike Shakespear again, I was a born dramatist" (Peters, 1987, p. 304).

Yet, it has to be recognised that Shaw grows highly critical of Shakespearean style. Originally published in the *London Daily News* (1905), Shaw's twelve statements on Shakespearean drama are a sort of a list in Shaw's critique of Shakespeare. Although Shaw affirms Shakespeare's quality of musical language and appreciates his approach and subject matter in problem plays, he definitely rejects the latter's romanticism, pessimism, materialism and the use of blank verse elaborated in Shakespeare's plays (Shaw, 1961, pp. 3-5). The generic qualities of Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies do not satisfy Shaw to the extent that he feels obliged to owe Ibsen an apology when it comes to a comparison of the two playwrights: "The comparison does not honor Ibsen: it makes Shakespear ridiculous: and for both of their sakes it should not be drawn. If we cannot for once let the poor Bard alone, let us humbly apologize to Ibsen for our foolish worship of a foolish collection of shallow proverbs in blank verse" (Shaw, 1961, p. 238). Although Shaw develops an anachronistic attitude with his attempt to look for Ibsenian elements in Shakespeare's works, the absence of the Ibsenian essence enrages Shaw in that he argues that "Shakespeare is as dead dramatically as a doornail" (Shaw, 1961, p. 43).

What matters more in Shaw's praise or harsh remarks about Shakespeare is how he integrates these points in his own works. In this light, it is possible to claim that Shakespeare becomes an agent of postmodernism in Shaw's dramatic works. Even though postmodernism emerges in the 1960s and there is a tendency to recognise Shaw as a pioneer of modern drama on the British stage, it is the particular argument of this paper that we can observe the use of postmodern elements in Shaw's works by means of Shakespeare before this period. From his *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898) to his last work, *Shakes versus Shav* (1949), Shaw constantly alludes to Shakespeare's image and works by making use of postmodern techniques of rewriting and different types of intertextuality such as pastiche, parody and bricolage. Thus, his criticism of Shakespeare performs a new function in his own plays in a novel way that he presents some elements of postmodernism before the term becomes popular in fiction writing and in drama. In this regard, the aim of this paper is to unveil that Shakespeare becomes an agent of postmodernism in Shaw's selected plays, namely *Caesar and Cleopatra, The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* (1910), "Macbeth Skit" (1916), *Cymbeline Refinished* (1937) and *Shakes versus Shav*.

Shaw's Rewritings of Shakespeare's Plays

Before moving on to the discussion of Shaw's selected works in terms of their postmodern elements, a brief look at the concept of postmodernism and its practice in drama is necessary here. To begin with its broad definition, postmodernism, a socio-cultural, philosophical and political disposition, emerges as an avant-garde movement in different branches of art and literature. In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, postmodernism, broadly speaking, is delineated as a term related to

> the phase of 20th-century Western culture that succeeded the reign of high modernism, thus indicating the products of the age of mass television since the mid-1950s. More often, though, it is applied to a cultural condition prevailing in the advanced capitalist societies since the 1960s, characterized by a superabundance of disconnected images and styles –

> most noticeably in television, advertising, commercial design, and pop video. ("Postmodernism," 2001, p. 201).

In literature, however, postmodernism's relation to modernism is a matter of discussion since it either replaces modernism or initiates another phase of modernism.[2] Steven Connor throws light on the difference between the two literary movements with the claim that modernism accomplishes to "consume the world" whereas postmodernism seeks to "outdo the world" (2004, p. 71). What is beyond dispute is that postmodernism has its own distinct literary elements, diverging from modernism, which comes to the fore with experimentalism, a sceptical approach and the challenge of grand narratives. Accordingly, the main tenet of postmodernism in literature appears to be the confrontation of realistic means and techniques as it surpasses the conventional understanding of narrative and character. While postmodern works highlight the fragmented position and identity of characters in a playful manner, they decentre the author's place at the top of the hierarchical structure. Putting the privileges of certain concepts into question, postmodernism favours eclecticism, intertextuality and the active interaction between the text and the reader and makes use of parody, pastiche, bricolage and self-reflexivity. It is also instructive to pinpoint the act of rewriting in postmodern literature which is deemed relevant to intertextuality and adaptation theory. Considering that the postmodern practice is based on the questioning of metanarratives, the prominent stories, historical narrations and well-known myths are reworked with an emphasis on the interconnectedness of texts by contesting the ideas of originality, reality and authority. As a literary device, rewriting dovetails with adaptation as "a transpositional practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mode, an act of re-vision in itself" (Sanders, 2006, p. 18). Gordon E. Slethaug clarifies the link between postmodernism and adaptation in that "the adaptation exceeds the limits of the source/s, denying hierarchy and suggesting that meaning is indeterminate for both origin and adaptation. Indeterminacy and de-hierarchization, then, are key features of this postmodern enterprise" (2014, pp. 28-29). Drawing on these components of postmodern literature, it is important to see that dramatic works are loaded with postmodern literary devices. "Postmodern drama," in Kerstin Schmidt's words, "disturbs and subverts [conventional dramatic] features and constituents by transforming them" (2005, p.11), some of which can be detected in Shaw's plays. Although Shaw takes a firm hold of the realist drama, associated with modern drama in Britain, under the influence of Henrik Ibsen, his works in different stages of his long career have a revealing case to suggest that Shaw deconstructs dramatic elements associated with realistic tradition in modern drama. At the heart of this paper lies the claim that Shaw's use of Shakespeare's works and Shakespeare as a character in his plays unmask some elements of postmodernism. The rest of the study deals with the examples from Shaw's works to clarify this point.

The first sign that Shakespeare appears as an element of postmodernism in Shaw's *oeuvre* is his rewritings of the playwright's works. The fact that Shaw is a good reader of Shakespeare's works and also a critic of his plays' performances enables him to recreate and reinterpret the latter's works. The act of rewriting features postmodernism in different veins according to Linda Hutcheon's three definitions of adaptation in the following: "An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works / A creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging / An extended engagement with the adapted work" (Hutcheon, 2006, p.8). In Hutcheon's terms, Shaw transposes Shakespeare's works to his age by re-interpreting the familiar works in a novel way. Accordingly, his

[2] In a similar fashion to the discussion about the relationship between modernism and postmodernism, the place of metamodernism in the 21st century is questioned in terms of its differences from the two movements. Considering the period that Shaw produces his works, a further analysis of metamodernism is not essential in this paper.

three plays, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, "Macbeth Skit" and *Cymbeline Refinished* can be analysed in terms of adaptation and types of intertextuality.

To begin with *Caesar and Cleopatra*, this play is an appropriated work of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (1599) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606) since Shaw's play critically envisions the two works and makes a comeback with the portraits of Caesar and Cleopatra. This play can be regarded as an example of appropriation since it is a product of Shaw's critical readings of Shakespeare's plays. To borrow from Julia Sanders, there is a significant difference between adaptation and appropriation as the first one "constitutes a more sustained engagement with a single text or source than the more glancing act of allusion or quotation, even citation, allows [whereas] appropriation carries out the same sustained engagement as adaptation but frequently adopts a posture of critique, even assault" (2006, p. 4). Since Shaw grows highly critical of Shakespeare's themes and his representation of characters in the two plays, his own rewriting resists the Shakespearean development of famous characters, Cleopatra and Caesar. Including this play in what he calls "plays for Puritans," Shaw voices the problematic aspect of his source texts. In the Preface where he uses a subtitle, "Better than Shakespear?," Shaw explains the reason why he reinterprets the work:

> Shakespear's *Antony and Cleopatra* must needs be as intolerable to the true Puritan as it is vaguely distressing to the ordinary healthy citizen, because, after giving a faithful picture of the soldier broken down by debauchery, and the typical wanton in whose arms such men perish, Shakespear finally strains all his huge command of rhetoric and stage pathos to give a theatrical sublimity to the wretched end of the business, and to persuade foolish spectators that the world was well lost by the twain. (1901a, pp. xxvii-xxviii)

While Shaw's subtitle indicates his endeavour to better or defeat Shakespeare, it shows his judgment of the main characters' representation featured by debauchery and licentiousness. He is also bothered by Caesar's characterisation as Shakespeare's version ignores the strength of the real hero and the political and military leader in a historical sense (Shaw, 1901a. p. xxix). Evaluating Shakespeare's works from his 19th-century perspective, Shaw casts doubt on the way that Shakespeare develops his themes and characters so that he borrows from the two texts and rewrites a new version by composing a different combination. That is to say, Shaw experiments with the tradition of writing history play in Shakespearean understanding to the extent that he "sets himself up as a historian who can see through Shakespeare's prejudices and limitations" (Wikander, 1998, p. 206).

At the crossroads of Shakespeare's two plays, Shaw's adaptation is of a different nature because he offers new stories for two characters from two different plays. He goes back in time and deals with the period before Cleopatra meets Antony. She appears to be an inexperienced girl as one of the Egyptians, Belzanor, refuses to wait for her commands as a queen: "Command! a girl of sixteen! Not we. At Memphis ye deem her a Queen: here we know better" (Shaw, 1901b, p. 97). For the first time when Caesar meets Cleopatra who does not recognise the ruler, Caesar also depicts her as "a child" (Shaw, 1901b, p. 104). The queen, unaware of Caesar's identity, forms a bond of attachment to Caesar who starts to act as a mentor to the young Queen: "Cleopatra: shall I teach you a way to prevent Caesar from eating you?" (Shaw, 1901b, p.107). Depicting Caesar as Cleopatra's mentor, Shaw actually dwells on the child queen's naivety, weakness and her rites of passage in her process of becoming the legendary queen. In this reinterpretation, Caesar and Cleopatra have different identities than those in Shakespeare's version. Excluding the theme of sexual desire, the play unveils the process in which the immature queen learns how to govern and protect her rights in a journey in which Caesar becomes her role model. Although Cleopatra claims that Caesar needs "a sorcerer to make a woman of me [her]"

(Shaw, 1901b, p.107), Caesar accompanies her during her rites of passage from girlhood to womanhood. Initially, Caesar teaches her how to command and rule her subjects as a queen without any fear. In this process, the play sets Caesar as a role model for Cleopatra as he exhibits his wisdom, power and political strategies as a ruler in contrast to his depiction in Shakespeare's play. Although Shakespeare's Caesar is "disappointing" from a historical perspective and because of his limited presence in the play, Shaw's Caesar dominates the appropriated work (Lüdeke, 1955, p. 241). In Shaw's play, we observe how Caesar sneaks up on Cleopatra's throne by gaining her trust (Shaw, 1901b, p. 113), how he strategically acts to save himself in dangerous cases (Shaw, 1901b, p. 159) and how he accepts his failure without affecting his status as a leader (Shaw, 1901b, p. 160). Cleopatra affirms his powerful position when she states that "we are all Caesar's slaves – all we in this land of Egypt" (Shaw, 1901b, p. 168).

Then, the play features Cleopatra as another dominant character who orders Ptolemy, her brother and husband, to sit on the throne (Shaw, 1901b, p. 120) and as a daring woman who goes against a Roman soldier, Sentinel, when he tries to stop her: "How dare you? Do you know that I am the Queen?" (Shaw, 1901b, p. 144). The guidance and encouragement of Caesar enable Cleopatra to fashion herself as a strong ruler figure. Moreover, in reference to Shakespeare's play, the last scene in which Caesar bids Cleopatra farewell illustrates that he will send Mark Antony to her as an apology for his forgetting Cleopatra before leaving and as compensation for the young queen (Shaw, 1901b, pp. 199-200). According to R. N. Roy, this scene embodies Shaw's "outrage on history" (Roy, 1976, p. 41) as he avoids a close connection between Cleopatra and Caesar. More than this, the last promise directly connects Shaw's play with Shakespeare's work and manifests that Shaw extrapolates Cleopatra's story from his source. What Shaw produces is a precursor for Shakespearean Cleopatra, but he advances her portrait by situating her into his own time's moral concept so that he leaves the sexual tension out of his play. In this rewriting, Shaw brings the old texts into his age and goes beyond the sense of connectedness in terms of intertextuality considering that "Shaw establishes a wholly new purpose for drama that was absent in Shakespearean texts. It is not simply that Shaw is creating a new, anti-conventionalism morality for his plays; he is inserting into the dramatic genre a morality that never existed in Shakespeare in the first place" (Papreck, 2005, p. 33). This type of relocation can be understood in terms of appropriation rather than adaptation since the playwright not only shifts Shakespeare's work into his own cultural, moral and social space but also presents his own version shaped by his critical remarks. As appropriation is about the critical adaptation of former texts, Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* appears as the appropriated text of Shakespeare's plays and displays Shaw's postmodern practice as a critical rewriting.

"Macbeth Skit" is a rewriting of Act 1, scene 5 and scene 7 of *Macbeth* (1606) in which Shaw focuses on the dialogue between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth who are about to plan the murder of King Duncan (Shakespeare, 1990, 1.5.1-63; 1.7.38-88). This short piece exhibits postmodern parody because it imitates Shakespeare's style by degrading its elevated language. In Shaw's revision of the scenes, he directly borrows Lady Macbeth's lines from Shakespeare, but he playfully works on Macbeth's answers. In response to Lady Macbeth's original lines, Macbeth speaks in prose by mocking the use of blank verse and artistic vocabulary:

> Lady M. [. . .] Wouldst thou have that
> Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
> And live a coward in thine own esteem,
> Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'
> Like the poor cat i' the adage?

Macbeth. Like what?
Lady M. (Louder) Like the cat.
Macbeth. Oh, the cat. In the what, did you say?
Lady M. In the adage.
Macbeth. Never heard of it. (Shaw, 1967, p. 346)

The humorous dialogue between the two signals the fusion of the past and the present on the grounds that Macbeth's choice of words does not belong to Shakespeare's dictum represented in Lady Macbeth's lines. This attitude echoes Linda Hutcheon's understanding of parody in the postmodern context as follows: "Parody seems to offer a perspective on the present and the past which allows an artist to speak to a discourse from within it, but without being totally recuperated by it" (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 35). In this light, Shaw's imitation of Shakespeare's style and the infusion of the past and the present by means of linguistic differences highlight his criticism of Shakespeare's style in a playful way as Macbeth responds to Lady Macbeth: "Your language is beyond me, my dear girl" (Shaw, 1967, p. 346). Moreover, in his new lines, Macbeth rejects killing the king which challenges the tragic hero's depiction in the original source. Stating that he is "afraid of the police" (Shaw, 1967, p. 346), Macbeth tries to persuade Lady Macbeth to give up this plan: "It sounds all right; but one doesn't do these things, believe me. Besides, Duncan wont [sic] behave in that way: he was weaned about 75 years ago. Suppose we fail?" (Shaw, 1967, p. 347). While the reader/audience observe how the two characters are linguistically distant from one another, Shaw's rewriting challenges Shakespeare's scene on the level of character since Macbeth is bereft of ambition. The new funny dialogue, the lack of communication between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth (as a result of the obvious time gap on the linguistic level) and Macbeth's new identity evidence postmodern playfulness enmeshed with parody. What is more, another postmodern approach governs the ending of the play. In the last lines of Shaw's play, Macbeth still cannot grasp Lady Macbeth's words and mistakes the word "feat" for "feet" (Shaw, 1967, p. 348). At this moment, fact and fiction are blurred as Lillah McCarthy, an English actress and a manager, interrupts Macbeth's lines, saying that "Gerald: come off it. I shall never make a Shakespearian actor of you"(Shaw, 1967, p. 348). Bernard F. Dukore explains that Shaw wrote this play for Gerald DuMaurier and Lillah McCarthy who previously performed Lady Macbeth (1967, p. 344). The ending of the play returns to real-life figures, Gerald and Lillah, and refers to their failure in acting in Shakespearean roles. Thus, the intervention highlights the fictional status of the play as it destroys the illusionary structure when it refers to reality outside the text in reference to its performance process.

Cymbeline Refinished, a rewriting of *Cymbeline*'s (1611) last act, can be analysed into another postmodern term that is bricolage: "[A] French term for improvisation or a piece of makeshift handiwork. It is sometimes applied to artistic works innocence similar to collage: an assemblage improvised from materials ready to hand, or the practice of transforming 'found' materials by incorporating them in a new work" ("Bricolage"). As this work is an improvisation of Shakespeare's last act, it can be identified as bricolage. What lurks behind this kind of transposition is twofold. The first one is practical; when Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* was rejected to be performed for Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1937 because of its last act, Shaw suggested rewriting only the last part:

> *Cymbeline*, though one of the finest of Shakespear's later plays now on the stage, goes to pieces in the last act. In fact I mooted the point myself by thoughtlessly saying that the revival would be all right if I wrote a last act for it. To my surprise this blasphemy was received with acclamation; and as the applause, like the proposal, was not wholly jocular, the fancy began to haunt me, and persisted until I exorcised it by writing the pages which ensue" (Shaw, 1936)

However, this is not the only reason. Shaw is also critical of the last act himself. He is at pains to entail changes, particularly in the character of Imogen:

> The more childish spectators may find some delight in the revelation that Polydore and Cadwal are Imogen's long lost brothers and Cymbeline's long lost sons; that Iachimo is now an occupant of the penitent form and very unlike his old self; and that Imogen is so dutiful that she accepts her husband's attempt to have her murdered with affectionate docility. I cannot share these infantile joys. Having become interested in Iachimo, in Imogen, and even in the two long lost princes, I wanted to know how their characters would react to the éclaircissement which follows the battle. The only way to satisfy this curiosity was to rewrite the act as Shakespear might have written it if he had been post-Ibsen and post-Shaw instead of post-Marlowe. (Shaw, 1961, p. 64)

What is hinted at above is Shaw's interest in the woman's representation and his desire to re-envision the ending under the influence of Ibsen. Now, Imogen actively gets engaged in the dialogues about the plot concerning her fate. She openly rejects to Iachimo and Posthumus, saying: "You at least / Have grace to know yourself for what you are. / My husband thinks that all is settled now / And this is a happy ending!" (Shaw, 1965a, p. 1287). Unlike Shakespeare's Imogen who is willing to serve others in the end (Shakespeare, 2003, 5.5.490-491), Shaw's Imogen does not easily reconcile:

> Imogen. All is lost.
> Shame, husband, happiness, and faith in Man.
> He is not even sorry.
> [. . .]
> Oh, do not make me laugh.
> Laughter dissolves too many just resentments,
> Pardons too many sins.
> [. . .]
> I will not laugh.
> I must go home and make the best of it
> As other women must. (Shaw, 1965a, p. 1289)

Even though Shaw derives 89 lines from Shakespeare's text, the rest of his act (375 lines in total) creates Imogen's resistance against the patriarchal figures who harm her. It is true that the closing lines directly echoe Shakespeare's lines, but not Imogen's portrait and her probable future life. Although Shaw's reworking with blank verse fails according to his contemporaries (Pierce, 2011, p. 128), he thematically foregrounds a critical point about Shakespeare's silent female characters. Imogen's raising voice against her husband and others rests on Shaw's feminist point of view. That is to say, Shaw again critically handles Shakespeare's play although his main aim is to shorten the piece for the practical reason of performance. Moreover, his style of rewriting recalls pastiche as "imitation, mimicry, and *homage*" of/to Shakespeare's work (Mason, 2007, p. 245) on the grounds that Shaw is not parodic or satiric of Shakespeare's approach in his re-interpretation. Regarding the influence of Ibsen on Shaw's own writing, it becomes clear that Shaw critically brings out the problem of female agency in the patriarchal society of his age.

Shakespeare as a Character in Shaw's Experimental Plays

In the three plays analysed above, postmodern elements have emerged as a result of Shaw's critique of Shakespearean works. In the last two plays under scrutiny here, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* and *Shakes versus Shav*, the essence of postmodernism emanates from Shaw's blurring the

lines between fact and fiction, metadramatic qualities and self-reflexivity in an experimental way. What is common in both plays is that the historical Shakespeare appears as a fictional character in a way that the reader/audience witness Shaw's "theatricalized views of Shakespeare" in Sally Peters's words (1987, p. 301).

To begin with *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, it is necessary to note that Shaw includes Shakespeare, Elizabeth I and the dark lady of Shakespeare's sonnets called Mary as his characters who recite some lines from *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* (1599-1601). The use of historical and fictional figures distances the reader/audience from historical reality and proposes an alternative story in which "contemporary knowledge of the past [appears to be] a product of fiction" (Mason, 2007, p. 143). This provides an example of historiographic metafiction in Shaw's play as a constructed historical account comes into light in his work of fiction. Thus, at the heart of this play's postmodernism lies Shaw's use of Shakespeare and Elizabeth I as characters, fictionalising historical figures and attaching them with new stories.

In this humorous play, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets,* Shakespeare mistakenly has a liaison with Queen Elizabeth, thinking that she is his dark lady, Mary. While waiting for the dark lady, Shakespeare finds out that Mary also has an affair with Lord Pembroke as he chats with the beefeater. When he meets the Queen talking and walking in her sleep, reciting lines from *Macbeth*, the dialogue between her and Shakespeare the character unveils Shakespeare the playwright's writing process, and how he uses and borrows from other people around him, taking notes of their sayings in comical and parodic way:

> The Lady. [rubbing her hands as if washing them] Out, damned spot. You will mar all with these cosmetics. God made you one face; and you make yourself another. Think of your grave, woman, not ever of being beautified. All the perfumes of Arabia will not whiten this Tudor hand.
>
> The Man. "All the perfumes of Arabia"! "Beautified"! Can this be my Mary? [To *the Lady*] Why do you speak in a strange voice, and utter poetry for the first time? Are you ailing? (Shaw, 1965b, p. 646)

After Shakespeare writes down the Queen's sayings for his further writings, he kisses her. At that moment, the dark lady appears and strikes both. While the dark lady tries to save herself from the Queen's punishment, the playful dialogue between the three actually testimonies the suffering of the dark lady who complains about her position in Shakespeare's poems:

> The Dark Lady. [angrily] – ay, I'm as like to be saved as thou that believest naught save some black magic of words and verses – I say, madam, as I am a living woman I came here to break with him for ever. Oh, madam, if you would know what misery is, listen to this man that is more than man and less at the same time. He will tie you down to anatomize your very soul: he will wring tears of blood from your humiliation; and then he will heal the wound with flatteries that no woman can resist. (Shaw, 1965b, p. 648)

Shaw, putting historical characters and a fictional one in his play, gives a voice to the dark lady unjustly treated in Shakespeare's sonnets. Transgressing the borders between reality and fiction here, Shaw creates a useful means to criticise Shakespeare's misogynistic attitude once more. He previously comments on the treatment of the dark lady as follows:

> Shakespear treated the dark lady as Hamlet treated Ophelia, only worse. He could not forgive himself for being in love with her; and he took the greatest care to make it clear that he was not duped: that there was not a bad point in her personal appearance that was lost on him even in his most amorous moments. He gives her a list of her blemishes: wiry hair, bad complexion, and so on (he does not even spare her an allusion to the 'reek' of her breath); and his description of lust, and his revulsion from it is the most merciless passage in English literature. (Shaw, 1961, p. 209)

On the one hand, Shaw plays with the dynamics of history in his alternative universe where he designs a different web of relationships, challenging the boundaries and composing historiographic metafiction. The parodic subversion of historical characters contains criticism of Shakespeare's misogyny. While there is no space for any kind of romanticism in Shakespeare's world, his attitude to women and people of colour is denounced by Shaw: "For how can I ever be content with this black-haired, black-eyed, black-avised devil again now that I have looked upon real beauty and real majesty? / He hath swore to me then times over that the day shall come in England when black women, for all their foulness, shall be more thought on than fair ones. [. . .] Oh, he is compact of lies and scorns. I am tired of being tossed up to heaven and dragged down to hell at every whim that takes him" (Shaw, 1965b, p. 649). This constitutes an issue-based agenda in which Shaw constructs an internal reality of fiction by making use of historical characters.

Shaw's last play, *Shakes versus Shav*, presents an array of postmodern elements: intertextuality, self-reflexivity, metadrama, fragmentation of identity, and self-consciousness. The puppet play, resonating with punch and Judy shows, epitomises Shaw's rivalry with the canonical playwright in a humorous way. Speaking in blank verse, Shakes comes to the stage and challenges Shaw:

> Hither I raging come
> An infamous impostor to chastize,
> Who in an ecstasy of self-conceit
> Shortens my name to Shav, and dares pretend
> Here to reincarnate my very self,
> And in your stately playhouse to set up
> A festival, and plant a mulberry
> In most presumptuous mockery of mine. (Shaw, 1965d, p. 1403)

Shakes, then, uncovers all plots and lines that Shav actually takes from his works and tries to prove his superiority over the other: "Couldst write Macbeth? / You stole that word from me" / These words are mine, not thine" (Shaw, 1965d, pp. 1403, 1404). Intertextuality is centred in the play which constantly refers to other plays both by Shakespeare and Shaw. More interestingly, there is a play-within-a-play scene in which Shakespeare's Macbeth and Walter Scott's (who rewrote *Macbeth)* Rob Roy have a duel, replacing Shakes and Shav, at the end of which Rob Roy cuts Macbeth's head. Recalling St George plays, the scene explores metatheatrical self-referentiality and signifies the fictional status of the play. Meanwhile, the characters are also aware of their fictional nature as Shakes alludes to the time gap between the two: "Younger you are / By full three hundred years, and therefore carry / A heavier punch than mine; but what of that?" (Shaw, 1965d, p. 1403). The fact that Shakes and Shav specify their identities as dramatists and cite each other's characters and works adds up to the sense of self-consciousness as part of the play's postmodern tenets. Christopher Wixson contends that the play "muses over the ramifications for the Shavian texts upon the death of the author" (Wixson, 2013, p. 80) and further argues: "While Shaw carefully adapts the theatrical material explicitly and self-

consciously for a reader, his stage direction moves far beyond ordinary expository description, seeking to appropriate models of prose narration in order to determine more powerfully the theatrical text" (Wixson, 2013, p. 82). In this web of intricate relationships between the text and the author, the text and characters and the author and characters, it becomes clear that Shaw experiences the fragmentation of identity: Shaw as the author of the play, Shaw as the character within his play, Shaw as the subject matter of his text and Shaw as the audience in the play-within-a-play scene, through which the boundaries between fact and fiction transgressed in a postmodern understanding. This idea can be traced in Schmidt's understanding of postmodern identity in drama as follows:

> The effort to delineate as well as conceive of a postmodern sense of self is intertwined with the metadramatic concern in postmodern drama. In this sense, postmodern drama refers to and reflects upon itself while simultaneously exploring the condition of the self in postmodernity and the concept of dramatic character in postmodern drama. Since the fragmentation of the self is inherent in dramatic form at large, postmodern drama uses and thrives in the space that the actor/character split opens up. (Schmidt, 2005, p. 44)

More interestingly, Shaw's last play and his presence in the work turn the text and the playwright into a critic of his dramatic endeavour at the end of his career since Shaw discusses the idea of imitation, plagiarism and the limits of intertextuality and composition when he forces himself to face his life-long rival, the dead Shakespeare. This short piece ends with a strong sense of mortality which might be associated with Shaw's autobiographical reflection as an old man now: "Shav: We both are mortal. For a moment suffer / My glimmering light to shine. / Shakes: Out, out, brief candle! [He puffs it out]. Darkness. The play ends" (Shaw, 1965d, p. 1404).

Conclusion

It is true that Shaw establishes himself as a strong voice of modern drama on the British stage under the influence of Ibsen. His issue-based works, the long prefaces to discuss his contemporary subject matters and the problematisation of social troubles on stage evidence his attempt to bridge life and art. In different phases of his career, it has to be considered that he becomes quite experimental, particularly at the turn of the 20th century, when he frequently makes use of either Shakespeare's works or Shakespeare himself in his own plays. There are some studies that trace elements of postmodernism in Shaw's works such as Jean Reynolds's analysis of *Pygmalion* (1913) in terms of postmodern linguistic inclusiveness and deconstruction (1999), Tony Stafford's analysis of Shaw's *Misalliance* (1910) as with its experimental features and criticism of capitalism (2009). However, it is rather in his Shakespeare adaptations and fictionalised Shakespeare stagings that Shaw aptly uses postmodern elements even before the rise of postmodernism in various genres. The act of rewriting, different shades of intertextuality, parodic playfulness and the fragmentation of temporality and identity by means of Shakespeare or Shakespeare's works address that Shakespeare is the impetus of postmodernism in Shaw's dramatic career. Given the evidence, it is necessary to reconsider Shakespeare's influence on Shaw's dramatic career rather than locating his admiration or rivalry as a Shakespearean critic.

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