Postmodern Openings
ISSN: 2068-0236 | e-ISSN: 2069-9387
Covered in: Web of Science (WOS); EBSCO; ERIH+; Google Scholar; Index Copernicus; Ideas RePeC; Econpapers; Socionet; CEEOL; Ulrich ProQuest; Cabell, Journalseek; Scipio; Philpapers; SHERPA/RoMEO repositories; KVK; WorldCat; CrossRef; CrossCheck

2020, Volume 11, Issue 3, pages: 303-317 | https://doi.org/10.18662/po/11.3/216

Shakespeare's Vivid Presence in the Age of Postmodernity

Esther PETER (ANDRAŞ)[1]

[1] Ph.D. Student in Philology. "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad Interdisciplinary Doctoral School, Arad, Romania,
esther_peter2004@yahoo.com

Abstract: This paper aims to address the complex interrelations between William Shakespeare's theatrical work and Postmodernism, substantiating the idea that the Bard has not become obsolete in contemporary culture. The playwright's timelessness and transcendence do not require acknowledgement as the postmodern world continues to embrace his aesthetics ardently. Many social issues of Shakespeare's plays have determined ideas that we consider universally true: ideas about human character, ethics, leadership, love and betrayal, gender and race. These topics have been reimagined in postmodern literature, film and in the fields of psychology, sociology, business, political theory and law. In wrestling with the provocative questions and scenarios Shakespeare created, we question our own assumptions and beliefs, clarify our own thoughts, and become better thinkers. Although Shakespeare's plays may not always anticipate postmodern ideologies, they definitely generate a wide array of discussions relevant to the age of Postmodernity due to the universality of the themes, tendencies and attitudes, ranging from history to politics, from tragedy to comedy. Considering Shakespeare's popularity as the most quoted and appropriated author, it is hardly surprising to discover that contemporary critics have been concerned with re-examining his plays in order to strengthen or defy certain postmodern discourses. Far from exhausting all possibilities, the present article seeks to produce generalizable knowledge and encourage further transdisciplinary research.

Keywords: *Shakespeare; postmodernism; intertextuality; race; gender; sexuality; law.*

How to cite: Peter (Andraş), E. (2020). Shakespeare's Vivid Presence in the Age of Postmodernity. *Postmodern Openings, 11*(3), 303-317.
https://doi.org/10.18662/po/11.3/216

1. Introduction

According to Terence Hawkes (1992, p. 3) in *Meaning by Shakespeare*, each age reinterprets Shakespeare for itself, producing new meanings that could not have existed. Thus, for the twenty-first century individual it is impossible to read *The Merchant of Venice* (Shakespeare, 1998a) without thinking of the consequences of the European anti-Semitism in the 1940's or to examine *The Tempest* (Shakespeare, 1998b) or *Othello* (Shakespeare, 1998c) without considering the enslavement of Africans or European colonial projects of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. As ever age reads, performs and criticizes Shakespeare's work through the lens of its own concerns, the playwright becomes the canvas on which every age designs its meaning, or as Hawkes eloquently states: "Shakespeare doesn't mean: *we* mean *by* Shakespeare" (Hawkes, 1992, p. 3).

If we disapprove of Hawkes' (1992, p. 3) assumption, we accept the belief that there are meanings in Shakespeare's texts still latent and waiting to be discovered. This direction of thinking allows critics an equal claim to Shakespeare, the right to formulate an argument, to engage in debates, to defend or revise their position. As Gabriel Egan (2007, p. 3) notes in *Shakespeare*, [...] "we could take the importance of Shakespeare to be not the inherent value in the works but the value that societies have, over the past 400 years, attached to the works. Such an approach might allow our interpretations to slip free of simply being 'for' or 'against' Shakespeare and enable more subtle engagements that open up rather than close down debates about Shakespeare's relevance in the modern world."

Placed by critics in the company of classical Greek and Latin writers, rather than his contemporaries in the English theatre, Shakespeare appears as a prolific dramatist who has provided a rich source of literary material and inspired many following authors. The ideas embedded in Shakespeare's work have prompted postmodern writers to either return to these problems in their appropriations and reinterpretations or respond to the way in which Shakespeare presents them. The Bard's influence has transcended the limits of the field of literature and film, contributing to the development of concepts in sociology, psychology, law, political theory and even advertising.

2. Shakespeare's enduring power to inspire

Shakespeare as an institution has been consolidated since the middle of the eighteenth century, resulting in the cultural veneration of the Bard or even the constantly disputable "Bardolatry". The playwright's memorial

home in Stratford-upon-Avon and the rebuilt Globe theatre are at present some of the most famous tourist sites in the world. Also the existence of a large number of towns called Stratford and Globe theatres in Canada and the United States speak about the cultural role of Shakespeare. The immense success of the adaptations of Shakespeare's plays into novels or films suggests that both reading and watching Shakespeare has not become out-dated.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, not only scholars who read Shakespeare but also writers, politicians and philosophers cite the Bard freely and follow his line of thought. The playwright's words have the capacity to move hearers by adding a touch of weightiness to ordinary utterances. Displaced from their dramatic context, the analogues and quotations become universal judgments, representing the sum of the entire world's wisdom. Citing Shakespeare confers solemnity to political discourses. When a US senator intended to choose carefully grave words to describe the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, he resorted to Shakespeare, stating that: "Shakespeare wrote, 'Grief hath changed me since you saw me last.' We are all changed. Yesterday changed all of us" (Garber, 2005, p. 50). Although the senator disregarded the literary context of the line from *The Comedy of Errors*, "O, grief hath changed me since you saw me last" (Shakespeare, 1998d, p. 184), which does not express grief at unimaginable loss, the name of the Bard produced the desired effect on the audience.

It is very likely that the postmodern consumer may find Shakespeare in a slogan within an advertising campaign. Lady Macbeth's words during the sleepwalking scene, "Out damned spot" (Shakespeare, 1998e, p. 880) are so familiar that they have been used to advertise for stain removers, acne lotions or cosmetic concealers. A visual logo which appeared in an airline's magazine, "2B or not 2B, that is the question", indicated the passengers' option to choose their seats electronically. Shakespeare sites are all over the internet, the newest medium to date, making it impossible to counter the sheer weight of evidence that the playwright is still overwhelmingly popular. In a newspaper article in BBC on 23 April 2016, the editor, Will Gompertz (2016) explains why Shakespeare is more popular today that at any point since his death four centuries ago: "There is no writer on the planet who has as much work in daily play as that produced by the Sweet Swan of Avon - as Ben Jonson called him (Jonson, 1963). Not even JK Rowling or Bob Dylan can better the Bard. The man and his words permeate the lives of billions of people."

Shakespeare's characters speak to the postmodern audience just as assertively as they did when the Bard was writing. The impressive omnipresence of Shakespeare in our lives is explored by Marjorie Garber (2005) in her book *Shakespeare After All* who contends that the playwright's language and characters have established a lexicon which remains valid in our days: "The Macbeths have become emblems of ambitions, Othello a figure for jealous love, Lear a paradigm of neglected old age and its unexpected nobilities, Cleopatra a pattern of erotic and powerful womanhood […] Romeo and Juliet are ubiquitous examples of young love, its idealism and excess" (Garber, 2005, p. 13). Our society incorporates a colourful tapestry of individuals who are easily identifiable in Shakespeare's astounding depth of description. As Abbasi & Saeedi observes, "these features are at the service of decentering the language and making different layers of meaning which is a pivotal postmodern concept" (2014, p. 260). Arguably what makes Shakespeare's work so enduring is that he doesn't provide easy answers. He does not tell us *wha*t to think, he teaches us *how* to think. His characters and the situations they find themselves in are complex enough to guarantee continued investigation four centuries later.

Written four hundred years ago, Shakespeare's plays can obviously tell us little about today's general law which has improved since, but they can open up discussions about a wide range of concepts that will turn from abstract into applicable in real life. In *A Thousand Times More Fair: What Shakespeare's Plays Teach Us About Justice* (2011), legal scholar Kenji Yoshino explores the relationship between the concepts of law and justice in Shakespeare's plays and modern-day American events and cases (Posner, 2011). He addresses two matters of justice in *Titus Andronicus* (Shakespeare, 1998f), the actions of a private citizen in the name of justice within a society which disregards the law and the consequences of revenge that triggers revenge and generates chaos. Yoshino (2011) points to Bush's invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq which must have been animated by revenge, as well as directed against all Muslims, not just against Al Qaeda. His interpretation of current events may not have reached its goal as a parable of Bush's administration and while Yoshino (2011) defends fictional characters by describing the complexity of human motivation, he does not plead for sympathy in the name of contemporary figures. In *Measure for Measure* (Shakespeare, 1998g), a play that has always fascinated lawyers, Yoshino (2011) illustrates Shakespeare's efforts to find a middle path between the extremes of rigid legalism and infinite mercy. Also, this argument supports President Obama's comment that judges should be "empathetic" and act upon liberal constitutional jurisprudence instead of the Republican

strictness. In Yoshino's (2011) view *Hamlet* (Shakespeare, 1998h) serves as an illustrative example that intellectuals are not competent rulers because their idealism prevents them from approaching administrative matters pragmatically. Shakespeare's greatest plays offer provocative and creative questions and solutions regarding civil rights and discrimination law, a good starting point to elucidate the most troubling issues in contemporary life.

The issues of race, an important aspect of postmodern culture and literature, are prominently prefigured in Shakespeare's plays like *Othello* (Shakespeare, 1998c), *The Merchant of Venice* (Shakespeare, 1998a), *The Tempest* (Shakespeare, 1998b) and *Titus Andronicus* (Shakespeare, 1998f). In *Othello* (Shakespeare, 1998c), the play's main theme is announced from the very beginning in its subtitle, "The Moor of Venice" which unveils the juxtaposition of terms denoting two irreconcilable cultures. Consequently, the play follows the struggle between Othello's Venetian identity and his pre-modern Moorish identity, with the latter dominating towards the end. The prejudice against Othello relies on the non-western cultures' incapacity to govern their passions and natural instincts. When Iago calls Othello "an old black ram" (Shakespeare, 1998c, p. 819) or "barbary horse" (Shakespeare, 1998c, p. 819), he alludes to the alleged prevalence of his instincts and emotions over reason. In a similar way, *The Merchant of Venice* (Shakespeare, 1998a) revolves around a strong binary between the white Venetian Christian identity versus Shylock, "The Jew" and other ethnically different characters. This difference is devised both theologically and aesthetically to demonstrate that "otherness" always exists in relation to what it derives from. Shylock holds a mirror to the society that produced his malice and its uncanny foresight speaks of the past and an obdurate present altogether: "The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction" (Shakespeare, 1998a, p. 401). An obvious concern that persists at the core of *The Tempest* (Shakespeare, 1998b) is the idea of the alienated Other, in the person of Caliban, proving Shakespeare's complex perspective on the role and implications of colonization on the lives of the natives. Postcolonial readings have considered the play as a paradigmatic example of the encounter between the colonizer and the colonized. In *Titus Andronicus* (Shakespeare, 1998f) Shakespeare reinforces racial stereotypes. Aaron's blackness is associated with evil and barbarity, Tamora's the queen of Goths is seen as a menace in the Renaissance imagination about power structures in Europe. In the Age of Discovery, interaction with other cultures caused great anxiety in the English sensibility. Regrettably, four hundred years later, prejudice based on race is still a strong force which determines how opportunity is distributed in our society.

Garber (2008) so eloquently states that "[t]hrough our encounters and conversations with the Shakespearean text, meanings are disclosed, debated and assessed. The play comes to stand for, to intercede on behalf of, to bear the weight of, our most profound hopes, fears, identifications and desires."(Garber, 2008: XXIX)

3. Gender and sexuality in Shakespeare

Although feminism was not a concept present in Shakespeare's time, today it represents a critical movement that is radically changing the field of Shakespeare studies. The stage rules in Shakespeare's lifetime unquestionably played a great part in the creation of his characters. It is a well-known fact that women were not allowed to perform on the English public stage and the female roles in Shakespeare's plays were imagined for and performed by male actors, usually boy players whose voices had not yet changed. Despite these conventions, Shakespeare portrayed classic female characters who have stood the test of time, becoming universal icons. Women characters like Cleopatra, Katherine, Desdemona, Portia and Lady Macbeth are depicted as very strong and independent women. In many ways, they prefigure the condition of postmodern women. Kate's "[…] final performance […] seems to represent not an abandonment of her earlier independence, but a revised understanding of what freedom means, in sexuality and in marriage" (Garber, 2005, p. 93). Desdemona, a white woman who marries a black man against her father's will, asserts herself both in civic matters and romantic like. Unlike Othello, Desdemona is from the first moment we see her determined, self-confident and generous, an articulate and ardent woman who participates in the political discussions reserved for men. Lady Macbeth appears to be the strongest character in the play, often conceived as seductive, manly and resolute.

As the women's movements have addressed new issues over the last decades, these changes are reflected in the critical analysis of Shakespeare's work. Several approaches emerged, some contradicting each other at certain points, others generating controversy and ambiguity. All studies analyse Shakespeare's construction of different models of gender based on sexual identity and the nature of erotic relationships. The themes of male-bonding, female friendship and homoeroticism have been investigated as they constitute an important aspect of postmodern culture. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Bassanio promises his unfortunate friend Antonio to "[…] lose all, ay, sacrifice them all" (Shakespeare, 1998a, p. 410) to release him. These noble sentiments cannot be expressed without challenge. However, it is

difficult to enunciate whether a relationship in Shakespeare is truly erotic or if it is only the views that our contemporary society is placing on it. Male homoerotic bonds are not always supported as the structures of patriarchal society in early Modern England fostered passionate male friendship. Friendship existed in its ideal form between men of similar rank, intellect and morals and only the male construct was believed to be capable of resisting the rigour of such powerful emotions.

Disregarding the general assumption that arduous friendship was only attributed to men, Shakespeare created pairs of female friends such as Rosalind and Celia (*As You Like It*) (Shakespeare, 1998i) and Hellena and Hermia (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) (Shakespeare, 1998j) who are as devoted as their male counterparts. Celia and Rosalind's friendship appears atypical for many of the characters in the play who illustrate their love as "dearer than the natural bond of sisters" (Shakespeare, 1998j, p. 616). Celia's innocent and open confession that "[she] cannot live out of her [Rosalind's] company" (Shakespeare, 1998j, p. 617) may highlight the idea that their relationship was much beyond that of friends. Nevertheless, the questions and the tension this theme raises are universal and make room for interpretations and reinterpretations which will always offer other voices and perspectives. Valerie Traub (2001, p. 129) asserts that "[t]he analysis of gender and sexuality allows us to understand the variety of ways that Shakespeare responded imaginatively to sex, gender, and sexuality as crucial determinants of human identity and political power."

The bawdy language of the Elizabethan playwright which describes the figurations of sexuality within the cultural context of his time urges the contemporary reader to reflect upon the unconscious cultural attitudes towards the body. Guides to Shakespeare's bawdy language were published to expound the full range of erotic meanings to Shakespeare's language and characters - e.g. Gordon Williams' (1997) *Shakespeare's Sexual Language – A glossary*. Shakespeare's erotic and bawdy writing during the seventeenth century, although constrained by the conventions of his time, can be easily embraced in a post-Freudian society in which sexuality seems to be the ultimate means of self-expression. Postmodern scholars appreciate Shakespeare's bawdy jokes and puns and see past the comic significance of the clever wit of his sexual innuendo. Eric Partridge (2001) states that "[Shakespeare] was no mere 'instinctive' sensualist, but an intellectual voluptuary and a thinker keenly, shrewdly, penetratingly, sympathetically probing into sex, its mysteries, its mechanism, its exercise and expertise, and into its influence on life and character" (Partridge, 2001, p. 5).

Literary criticism has always been open to suggestion and ideas from other disciplines such as history, anthropology, psychology. The prolific interaction with the field of psychoanalysis is not surprising since it provides valuable insight into human behaviour, language and identity. Psychoanalysis is another broad approach to Shakespeare's plays which has emerged as a significant direction of criticism in the postmodern age. Philip Armstrong's study *Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis* (2006) focuses on both the impact of psychoanalytic theories on the interpretation of Shakespeare and the Bard's decisive influence on the development of psychoanalytic theory: "Shakespeare has been both subject *to* psychoanalysis and a constitutive presence *in* psychoanalysis at least since Freud's inaugural formulation of the Oedipus complex" (as cited by Brown, 2015, p. 95). He examines the advantages and the limitations of this approach, contending that psychoanalysis has assisted critics in the "normalizing" of Shakespeare's texts, and proposing the disconcerting idea of separating Shakespeare and psychoanalysis. Indeed, early approaches to Shakespeare are greatly indebted to Freud and because his theory revolves around the Oedipus complex, they expand on family ties, the relations between fathers and sons, jealousy, anxieties, unconscious desires and incest as the main area of close scrutiny. After the 1980's, psychoanalytic scholars examine different topics such as psychosexual maturation, transgenderism, transvestism and dream theory. As many other theoretical approaches have established a compatible and even complementary relationship with psychoanalysis, there is little doubt that this direction will continue to expand and pique scholars' interest.

In *Crossing Gender in Shakespeare: Feminist Psychoanalysis and the Difference Within* (2010), James W. Stone investigates the exacerbated androgyny of male characters who attempt to reassert their masculinity, the transvestism of female protagonists, the feminization of heroes and the masculinization of heroines, indicating the daunting crossing of the boundaries between the sexes. According to Stone (2010), Viola's cross-dressing in *The Twelfth Night* (Shakespeare, 1998k) can be viewed as "hermaphroditic anamorphism, the quality of being and simultaneously not being one sex" (as cited by Brown, 2015, p. 93). Additionally, Malvolio is considered her hermaphroditical correlate, the male character who is tricked into playing the eunuch. Stone (2010) argues that although transvestism may appear to create chaos, it ultimately contributes to a desirable resolution of the play.

4. Envisaging Postmodernist literary practices and trends

As Hugh Grady (2001) remarks, "we are now witnessing the emergence of a postmodernist Shakespeare through the development of critical paradigms which incorporate aspects of contemporary postmodernist aesthetics" (Grady, 2001, p. 207). Shakespeare's intermingling of styles and genres which defies the generic convention of the day suggests that the playwright's work can be regarded as postmodern even before postmodernism. Although most Shakespearean plays follow the traditional generic division of contemporary times, the author adapted several of his works to tailor specific needs. The main reason is that the audience applauded great variety in their theatrical entertainment. Susan Snyder (2001) observes that "[w]hile the plays overall confirm the generic divisions laid out by the Folio table of contents, it is clear […] that there was considerable commerce between those subcultures of comedy, history and tragedy" (Snyder, 2001, p. 93). It also seems that some of the Folio designations are not accurate. *Troilus and Cressida* (Shakespeare, 1998l) is illustrative in this respect, as during the first two generations after World War II, editions of Shakespeare's complete works labelled it as a tragedy, while recently the play is associated more often with the comedies. In an attempt to delineate *Troilus* as ironic tragedy, contemporary critics have introduced the play in a group of "problem plays" along with *Measure for Measure* (Shakespeare, 1998g) and *All's Well That Ends Well* (Shakespeare, 1998m). These plays reveal social aspects of class division, individual and collective perversion which distance the story from a promising fairy-tale. *Troilus* is regarded as a generic experiment dictated by the changes in theatrical fashion at the beginning of the seventeenth century. *Cymbeline* (Shakespeare, 1998n), *The Winter's Tale* (Shakespeare, 1998o) and *The Tempest* (Shakespeare, 1998b) also responded to recent developments on the theatre scene and the popularity of masks at court. They may be perceived as a subcategory of comedy due to their harmonious denouement or as a combination of tragedy and comedy if we take into account the prolonged suffering before the reconciliatory ending.

Shakespeare was a rewriter himself and he created his plays by adapting and appropriating former literary works and historical chronicles. Over the centuries, the playwright has been accused of "borrowing" phrases, lines and even entire poems from the works of Greek and English poets and dramatists. Also ballads, myths, fairy-tales and proverbs served as valuable sources of reinterpretation. "If a particular subject matter or characters appealed to an audience as told by one playwright, then surely the same audience would return for a different interpretation on the same or slightly

different theme, with the same or only slightly different characters" (Pearce, 2013, p.230). It is believed that Shakespeare significantly rewrote *Hamlet* (Shakespeare, 1998h), *Othello* (Shakespeare, 1998c) and *King Lear* (Shakespeare, 1998p) some years after their original composition in order to revise them for his own artistic reasons. Considering Shakespeare's use of earlier texts, the question of authorship may be re-examined and the Bard's status as the superior literary figure becomes contested by some critics. An enumeration of the sources of Shakespeare's plays includes Plutarch's (2015) *The Life of Mark Antony - Antony and Cleopatra* (Shakespeare, 1998q) -, Chaucer's (2001) *Troilus and Criseyde* (*Troilus and Cressida*), Thomas Lodge's (2005) *Rosalynde* (*As You Like It*), Arthur Brooke's (1875) *Romeus and Juliet - Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1998r) - which was inspired by a fifteenth-century Italian novella. The list could go on and it demonstrates that intertextuality, with most of its forms i.e. quotations, allusions, imitation, parody and travesty, is much older than postmodernism. The hallmark of Renaissance, intertextuality has become one of the most significant features of postmodernism, revealing that Shakespeare's works offer one version of an already existing story and not the final literary product.

Considering the fact that Shakespeare was a prolific appropriator of former texts, it is possible to regard the playwright as a link within a cycle of rewriting practices, not as its beginning or its end. Douglas Lanier in *Shakespeare Rhizomatics* (2014) proposes an examination of the playwright's works and his adaptations in terms of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1987) concept of rhizomatic structure which displays "the vast web of adaptations, allusions and (re)productions that comprises the ever-changing cultural phenomenon we call 'Shakespeare'" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2014, p.28). Unlike the tree, whose branches have all grown from a single trunk, the rhizome has no unique source from which all development occurs. It can be entered from many different points, all of which connect to each other. The rhizome does not have a beginning, an end, or an exact centre. Within the Shakespearean rhizomatic structure, the Shakespearean text is not a root but a node which might be situated in relation to other adaptational rhizomes. Thus the Shakespearean rhizome is not a stable object but a perpetually reconfigured field as new adaptations result from it. Such an approach demonstrates how texts transform each other retroactively and proleptically, focusing on the new potentialities each version produces in its predecessors and in the group.

The literature of Renaissance anticipates the postmodernist concern with the indeterminacy and relativism of truth. It is a general belief in the postmodern era that mankind cannot find absolute truth and has abandoned

the search for it, resulting in ambiguity and inconclusiveness. Shakespeare's plays offer ample instances of indeterminacy and ambiguity. The twentieth century critic who opened the path to a sceptical analysis of Shakespeare's work in terms of ambiguity was William Epson, in his book *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1966), who argues for a multi-dimensionality of the playwright's work which denies single meanings. Established at a time when the theory of relativity dominated physics and literary study was emerging as a science, Epson's (1966) viewpoints prefigured deconstructive techniques, ambivalence, paradoxes and contradictions, determining a healthy tolerance of diversity in Shakespearean criticism. As Zhu (2019) argues, "metaphysical things that haven't been explained by science yet will always be appealing to human beings." (Zhu, 2019, p.384)

Hamlet's world is one of perpetual ambiguity. The protagonist is plagued with the burden of various contemplations and questions and this sense of unknown restricts his ability to act. Many famous lines in the Shakespeare canon seem to refer to the postmodernist paradigm which rules out the possibility of meaning: "To be or not to be" (Shakespeare, 1998h, p. 688), "Fair is foul and foul is fair" (Shakespeare, 1998e, p. 858). Approached from the point of view of poststructuralism, Shakespeare's plays only offer a constant interplay of signifiers without establishing a final and definite signified. In other words, the meaning of the text is constantly changing and always incomplete. This delineates the difference between structuralism and poststructuralism. While structuralists consider literary works final products, poststructuralists regard texts as open to multiple interpretations. A poststructuralist reading of *King Lear* (Shakespeare, p. 1998) reveals a web of meanings which raises many questions. A deconstructive approach may confer effectiveness to the text by shedding light into the established assumptions of Elizabethan society, human nature and family bonds. The reader is encouraged to create his own play of meanings, an assumption reinforced by Olsson (2013) who states that "Shakespeare in the 21st century is not a single monolith but a multitude of continually evolving author constructs" (Olsson, 2013, p. 29).

Brian McHale (2004, p. 10) argues that postmodernism marks a shift from epistemology, characteristic of the modern era, to ontology which focuses on questions regarding the very nature of existence. From *Hamlet*'s (Shakespeare, 1998h) "To be, or not to be", *Macbeth*'s (Shakespeare, 1998e) "Nothing is/ But what is not" to *Richard II*'s (Shakespeare, 1998s) "I must nothing be", Shakespeare displays a pervasive interest in the inner nature of human beings which determines their deeds and fate. In *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 1998e) the dramatis personae are confronted with ontological

confusions, the intermingling of the worlds of magic, dream, hallucination and reality. *The Tempest* (Shakespeare, 1998b) erases the boundaries between reality and dream/hallucination and Prospero, questioning the very nature of being, infers that human life is nothing but a fantasy. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare, 1998j), the world and magic of the forest induces the characters towards uncovering an ontological state where they exist as compatible lovers. It can be argued that the lovers had been leading illusory lives until they entered the forest and became acquainted with their authentic selves and the possibility of a true relationship. Postmodern critics explore the ontological implications of how an individual escapes such a disenchanted world by creating a new world which provides reason to existence itself.

5. Conclusions

Shakespeare's status as the most honoured and celebrated author in English and in world literature, makes his works ideal for studies which seek to reveal the multifaceted meanings and ideas hidden beneath the surface. Or, as Bickley and Stevens (2013) remarked, "[t]o unpack Shakespeare's language is to discover meaning and nuance as well as beauty and sensuousness" (Bickley & Stevens, 2013, p. 5). The Bard has become so colossal that he is able to encompass all the possibilities of critical imaginativeness. Shakespeare has been acclaimed for his superlative aesthetic virtue and as the exponent of high culture as well as the advocate of popular culture against the decadent aristocracy. He was both an expression of the ideologies of his age and a constant reactionary who undermined authority. In our time, the field of literary criticism has been the battleground of opposed theories, directions and perspectives. The diversity of opinion is so great and the interpretations so divergent that it is difficult to provide a final answer in the quest of meanings produced by the Shakespearean texts, both in their own social context and in the postmodern era.

References

Abbasi, P., & Saeedi, A. (2014). On The Postmodernist Elements in Shakespeare's The Tempest. *Epiphany*, *7*(1). http://dx.doi.org/10.21533/epiphany.v7i1.95

Armstrong, P. (2006). *Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis*. Taylor &Francis e-Library.

Bickley, P., & Stevens, J. (2013). *Essential Shakespeare*. Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare.

Brooke, A. (1875). *Romeus and Juliet*. P. A. Daniel (Ed.), The New Shakspere Society. London.

Brown, E. C. (2015). *Shakespeare and psychoanalytic theory*. Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare.

Chaucer, G. (2001). *Troilus and Criseyde*. Global Language Resources, Inc. http://triggs.djvu.org/djvu-editions.com/CHAUCER/TROILUS/Download.pdf

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press.

Egan, G. (2007). *Shakespeare*. Edinburgh University Press.

Epson, W. (1966). *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. New Directions. USA.

Garber, M. (2005). *Shakespeare After All*. New York: Anchor Books.

Garber, M. (2008). *Profiling Shakespeare*. Taylor & Francis.

Gompertz, W. (2016, April 23). Why is Shakespeare more popular than ever? *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-36114485

Gordon, W. (1997). *Shakespeare's Sexual Language – A glossary*. Biddies Ltd., King's Lynn.

Grady, H. (2001). *Modernity, Modernism and Postmodernism in the Twentieth Century's Shakespeare*. New York: Routledge.

Hawkes, T. (1992). *Meaning by Shakespeare*. Routledge. London and New York.

Jonson, B. (1623). To the Memory of my beloved, the Author Mr. William Shakespeare: and what he hath left us. In *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*. Published according to the True Originall Copies, known as the First Folio, London.

Lanier, D. (2014). Shakespearean Rhizomatics: Adaptation, Ethics, Value. In: Huang A., Rivlin E. (eds) *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation. Reproducing Shakespeare: New Studies in Adaptation and Appropriation*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137375773_2

Lodge, T. (2005). *Rosalynde Rosalynde or, Euphues' Golden Legacy*. The Athenæum Press.

McHale, B. (2004). *Postmodernist Fiction*. Taylor & Francis e-Library.

Olsson, M. R. (2013). Making Sense of Shakespeare: a Cultural Icon for Contemporary Audiences. *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal*, *5*(3). http://dx.doi.org/10.5130/ccs.v5i3.3640

Partridge, E. (1968). *Shakespeare's Bawdy*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Pearce, D. (2013). Shakespeare Remembers! Shakespeare Remembered! *Actes des congrès de la Société française Shakespeare*, 30, 225-237. https://doi.org/10.4000/shakespeare.1963

Plutarch, D., J. (2015). *Plutarch's Lives: Life of Mark Antony*. Palatine Press.

Posner, E. A. (2011, April 14). The Court of Literature. *The New Republic.* https://newrepublic.com/article/86238/thousand-times-more-fair-kenji-yoshino

Shakespeare, W. (1997a). The Merchant of Venice. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 388 - 415). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1997b). The Tempest. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 1135 - 1159). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1997c). Othello, The Moor of Venice. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 818 - 857). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1997d). The Comedy of Errors. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 166 - 186). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1997e). Macbeth. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 858 - 884). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1997f). Titus Andronicus. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 139 - 165). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1997g). Measure for Measure. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 786 - 817). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1997h). Hamlet, Price of Denmark. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 670 -713). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1997i). As You Like It. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 611 - 640). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1997j). A Midsummer Night's Dream. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 279 - 301). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1997k). Twelfth Night; Or, What You Will. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 641 - 669). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1997l). Troilus and Cressida. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 714 to 752). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1997m). All's Well That Ends Well. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 753 - 785). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1997n). Cymbeline. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 1061 -1101). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1998o). The Winter's Tale. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 1102 -1134). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1998p). King Lear. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 885 - 923). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1998q). Antony and Cleopatra. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 924 - 964). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1998r). Romeo and Juliet. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 245 - 278). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Shakespeare, W. (1998s). King Richard the Second. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Wordsworth Special Edition) (pp. 359 - 387). Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Snyder, S. (2001). The genres of Shakespeare's plays. De Grazia, M., & Wells, S. (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies*. Cambridge University Press.

Stone, W. J. (2010). *Crossing Gender in Shakespeare: Feminist Psychoanalysis and the Difference Within.* Routledge.

Traub, V. (2001). Gender and Sexuality in Shakespeare. De Grazia, M., & Wells, S. (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies*. Cambridge University Press.

Zhu, L. (2019). Supernatural Elements in Shakespeare's Plays. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *10*(2), 391-395. http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1002.22

Yoshino, K. (2011). *A thousand Times More Fair: What Shakespeare's Plays Teach Us About Justice.* Harper Collins Publishers.