



Cerezo Moreno, Marta. (2022). *Critical Approaches to Shakespeare (1623-2000). Shakespeare for All Time*. Madrid: UNED. Pages: 339. ISBN: 978-84-362-7726-5

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In the last few years there has been an increased interest within the field of Shakespeare studies in criticism. The 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death was celebrated with the publication of *Shakespeare in Our Time. A Shakespeare Association of America Collection* (Callaghan & Gossett, 2016). This varied collection of essays, mostly written by former SAA presidents, examines key concerns and new critical approaches in the ever-growing field of Shakespeare studies. More recently, The Arden Shakespeare released *The Arden Research Handbook of Contemporary Shakespeare Criticism* (Gajowski, 2020), twenty chapters that provide a general overview of the most influential theoretical trends in Shakespearean criticism from the mid-twentieth century until the present. Unlike the aforementioned studies in *Critical Approaches to Shakespeare (1623-2000). Shakespeare for All Time* (2022) Marta Cerezo Moreno does not offer a general overview, but instead an in-depth analysis of the main critical currents that dominated Shakespeare studies during the last four centuries. To acquire a better understanding of Shakespeare in our time, one ought to look first at the historical schools of thought that have strongly influenced and, also, served as the basis for contemporary Shakespeare criticism. This is precisely the reason why *Critical Approaches to Shakespeare (1623-2000). Shakespeare for All Time* constitutes a valuable contribution to

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Shakespeare studies, as it provides a detailed discussion of the most significant terminology and theoretical schools that have contributed throughout history to the development of Shakespearean criticism.

The volume is divided into two parts. Part I “Shakespearean Critical History” offers a detailed analysis of the major theoretical approaches to Shakespeare throughout the last four centuries. Part I is subdivided into two chapters: “Critical approaches to Shakespeare. From Ben Jonson (1572/73-1637) to Cleanth Brooks (1906-1994)” and “Critical approaches to Shakespeare. Second half of the Twentieth Century.” In turn, each chapter is further subdivided into several sections that focus on either one historical period such as “The Late Nineteenth Century: The Victorians” (subchapter 1.4.), or one particular school of criticism such as “Post-Colonialism” (subchapter 2.5.). Thus, readers interested in gaining insight into a particular school, or schools, of criticism can directly go to the designated subchapter. Nevertheless, one of the features worth highlighting from the monograph is that each school of criticism is not studied in isolation. On the contrary, Cerezo Moreno recurrently invites the reader to draw connections between dissimilar theories by accentuating not only the differences but also the similarities found amongst diverse critical approaches and authors. This offers the reader a wider picture of the evolution in Shakespeare criticism, as one can easily establish points of contact and departure amongst different historical periods and critics. Furthermore, each subchapter ends with a section titled “Selection of Texts” that functions as an anthology. This section will prove particularly useful for lecturers in Shakespearean drama, who might be interested in using the volume in class. The texts selected are short and have the most important concepts highlighted in bold so as to facilitate a better understanding of the extract. Cerezo Moreno further aids the reader by providing a summary of the main ideas described in each selected text. Part II titled “The Shakespearean Text” combines Shakespearean criticism together with the practice of close reading applied to two canonical plays: “*Hamlet*” (chapter 3) and “*Macbeth*” (chapter 4). Both chapters begin with a historical and literary contextualisation of the play in question, followed by a discussion of the main critical approaches historically applied to each tragedy, and end with a close examination of the most prominent textual aspects and themes illustrated by each Shakespearean text. Both the structure and the methodology adopted in the book can be regarded as adequate, turning the volume into a pleasant reading whose pages are easy to navigate.

Chapter 1 is subdivided into five main sections. The first, “The Seventeenth Century: Neoclassical Criticism,” is devoted to the forerunners of eighteenth-century Shakespearean criticism: Ben Jonson, John Dryden and Thomas Rymer. Both Jonson and Dryden praised Shakespeare highlighting his virtues and his intellectual superiority. On the other hand, Rymer, credited with introducing into England the principals of French neoclassicism, criticised Shakespeare for his refusal to follow classical rules. The second subchapter, “The

Eighteenth Century: Editorial Criticism,” is centred on the age that gave birth to the major editions of Shakespeare’s complete works. The editors, in turn, became the founders of Shakespearean textual criticism. Shakespeare’s strong appreciation of nature and characterisation became worth praising in an age in which Shakespeare gradually starts to be regarded as a genius. However, there was also matter for condemnation in the lack of morality, the blending of genres or the absence of neoclassical unities displayed in the playwright’s works. “The Early Nineteenth Century: The Romantics” mostly focuses on Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s reverence for Shakespeare. Besides appreciating Shakespeare’s masterly characterization, Coleridge described Shakespeare’s plays as examples of unity of feeling and organic works generated by the poet’s imagination. “The Late Nineteenth Century: The Victorians” describes the views held by Edward Dowden and A.C. Bradley. The former continued emphasising Shakespeare’s ability to make characters appear as real human beings, whereas the latter is well known for exploring the psychological motivations of Shakespearean characters in his *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904). Chapter 1 ends with “The First Half of the Twentieth Century,” which describes the emergence of schools such as New Criticism, and new approaches to Shakespeare that underline: 1) poetry and language (G. Wilson Knight, Caroline Spurgeon and Wolfgang Clemen), 2) the play as theatrical artifice (Harley Granville-Barker and Muriel C. Bradbrook), and 3) the history of Elizabethan and Jacobean England (Hardin Craig, Theodore Spencer and E. M. W. Tillyard).

Chapter 2 is divided into five main sections, each analysing a specific critical approach to Shakespeare in the second half of the twentieth century. The first subchapter, “Structuralism”, describes the principles of a school of thought that analysed reality through language, interpreted as a complex system of signs. The following section focuses on two of the most influential critical approaches of the last century: “Post-structuralism and Deconstruction.” The notion that language is an endless chain of signifiers with a variable structure derived in the conception of the literary text as a unit with no fixed meaning. Special attention is devoted to Roland Barthes and his revolutionary essay “The Death of the Author.” Derrida’s deconstruction of binary oppositions led to the search for contradictions in language and to the constant reinterpretation of texts. The third section “New Historicism and Cultural Materialism” compares two analogous post-structuralist approaches to Shakespeare centred on ideological discourses. The main difference between American New Historicism (founded by Stephen Greenblatt) and its British counterpart, Cultural Materialism, is that the latter is considerably more radical and political. Whereas new historicists affirmed that Renaissance texts allowed for insubordination (though eventually contained), cultural materialists defended that these same texts reinforced but also challenged state power.

The fourth subchapter, “Gender Studies”, analyses critical approaches to Shakespeare derived from Feminism, Psychoanalysis and Gay Studies. Perhaps, Gay Studies ought to have

been labelled Queer Studies, and included in a separate category: Sexuality –rather than Gender– Studies. This large subchapter begins with a general introduction of the feminist movement before moving onto a discussion of the main ideas defended by feminist Shakespeareans from Juliet Dusinberre and her pioneering work *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1975) to *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare* (2000), edited by Dymphna Callaghan. The section then discusses feminist psychoanalysis and its opposition to the patriarchal view of women inherent in classic Freudianism. This new approach focuses on the pre-oedipal stage owing to the predominant maternal role assigned to women. Feminist psychoanalysis has been mostly applied to *Titus Andronicus* and *King Lear*. The subchapter ends with a discussion of Gay Studies and its contribution to the analysis of homosexual desire in early modern England; hence, shifting attention to key concepts in contemporary Shakespearean criticism such as homoeroticism, sodomy or cross-dressing. The fifth subchapter, “Post-colonialism,” is devoted to a critical approach that emerged as a response and reaction to colonialism and human exploitation. Post-colonialism focuses on hybridity, paying special attention to questions of race, colonialism and cultural differences in the Shakespearean text.

Chapter 3, “*Hamlet*”, opens with a subchapter dedicated to possible allusions to historical facts and political events in the play that help to set the date of composition c. 1601. This historical contextualization is followed by a description of the possible sources of the tragedy: Saxo’s (1514) and Belleforest’s (1570) narratives, and *Ur-Hamlet* (a lost play). The following subchapter presents a variety of critical approaches to *Hamlet*, from Samuel Johnson and his idea of Hamlet’s apparent pretended madness as a source of merriment to Elaine Showalter’s feminist defence of Ophelia, whose madness is interpreted as a source of resistance to patriarchal ideology. The chapter ends with a section devoted to a close examination of key features of the play: its metatheatricity, the importance of the Ghost, the enigmatic relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia and Hamlet’s inner and external world.

Chapter 4, “*Macbeth*”, mirrors the structure of chapter 3 and, thus, is subdivided into three main sections. It also begins with a historical and literary contextualization of the tragedy, setting its date of composition c. 1606 and Holinshed’s *Chronicles* (1577; 1587) as its main source text. The next section is also devoted to a detailed examination of different critical approaches to *Macbeth*, from Samuel Johnson’s praise of Shakespeare’s knowledge of human nature to Alan Sinfield’s analysis of the tragedy through the lens of Cultural Materialism. The final section provides an enriching close reading of the play focusing on central imagery such as clothing and babies, metaphors for deceit and royal lineage, respectively. It also analyses the Three Witches (the personification of equivocation) together with the several ways in which evil permeates the dark atmosphere portrayed in *Macbeth*.

All in all, *Critical Approaches to Shakespeare (1623-2000)*. *Shakespeare for All Time* constitutes a fundamental piece of scholarly research, which one ought to highly recommend.

Cerezo Moreno writes in a style that is clear, instructive and, above all, engaging. Her monograph will be particularly useful for Shakespearean scholars interested in gaining further insight and a better understanding of the various and –at times– complex theoretical approaches that have shaped throughout history Shakespeare criticism.

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