
This book, published in 2007, has already gained wide recognition and praise coming from such luminaries of American literary criticism as Harold Bloom and Stephen Greenblatt. It is the result of the editor's, that is Scott L. Newstok's, work consisting in bringing together and editing Kenneth Burke's numerous and important contributions to Shakespeare criticism. Burke wanted apparently to produce a volume of this kind himself, but died without achieving this purpose. Thus the book may be thought of as a fulfillment of Kenneth Burke's intention, and a volume that all students of Burke's thought will have to take into account because Shakespeare criticism is an important part of the legacy he has left behind. Kenneth Duva Burke (1897-1993) (1) was an important American philosopher and critic much influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche, Siegmund Freud, and Karl Marx, but, at the same time, very original.

The book in question contains all of the Shakespeare criticism by Kenneth Burke, both published and previously unpublished, together with even short notes and passing remarks, and provides all this material with carefully formulated and very useful notes, comments, and cross-references. Burke's life and ideas, particularly those relating to Shakespeare, are lucidly exposed in the very handy and informative "Editor's introduction". Altogether, we shall find here many thought-provoking comments, by this slightly neglected American thinker, which concern the following works and topics: Hamlet, Twelfth night, Julius Caesar, Venus and Adonis, Othello, Timon of Athens, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, King Lear, Troilus and Cressida, A midsummer night's dream, Macbeth, The Merchant of Venice, The tempest, the character of Falstaff, the Sonnets, and Shakespeare's imagery.

Kenneth Burke is often classified as belonging to the so called New Criticism, together with such well known American critics and writers as J. C. Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, W. K. Wimsatt, or Robert Penn Warren. At the same time, it is already an established tradition to emphasize the differences between Burke's approach to literature and what might be called the mainstream of New Criticism. (2) This is why we should not be surprised seeing that Newstok (2007: xxiii) talks about Burke as "mistakenly grouped among more solidly formalist New Critics". If anybody associates the New Criticism with a rather dogmatic and blinkered concentration on the "text itself" or the "verbal icon", then he or she should not shy away from reading Kenneth Burke, since he, while appreciating the value of the so called "close reading", never avoids taking into account a broader cultural, social, historical, or biographical context whenever he feels like doing so, or the occasion arises, and this happens often enough. Indeed, in The Norton anthology of theory of criticism, we read about Burke's "Whitmanesque embrace of everything" (Leitch 2001: 1271), which may sound a note of warning for those who do not like very eclectic approaches to literature, and who might appreciate the narrowing of both the subject matter and methods...

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