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William Carlos Williams: Selected Poems (review)

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Andalou and *Seashell and the Clergyman*, Williams's poetry dwells upon "loss of fantasized bodily omnipotence" (111), creating "a bodily poetic of thwarted desire" (117). Williams uses surrealist techniques to "deflect wish fulfillment and disarray the male bodily ego in its *mise-en-scène* of desire" (123).

The chapter builds to some fresh readings of poems from *Spring and All* (123–32) in terms of surrealist cinematic themes and techniques. Some of these points—e.g., the use of fragmentation, juxtaposition, and multiple perspectives—are familiar from critical discussion of Williams and modern painting. Unfortunately, McCabe ignores most previous criticism on Williams and surrealism, including the special issue of the *WCWR* on this topic (Spring 1996). But she makes a convincing case that Williams's dual emphasis on movement and on the body has significant parallels with surrealist film.

One difficulty of this book is that some readers (this reviewer included) may not have seen some of the more experimental films discussed, such as G. W. Pabst's *Joyless Street* and *Pandora's Box*, and Man Ray's *Emak Bakia*. Although McCabe does her best to describe the film passages under discussion, the more experimental a film is, the more it tends to resist such verbal paraphrase. Another difficulty is the book's style. I admired McCabe's first book, *Elizabeth Bishop and the Poetics of Loss* (1994), partly because of the way she was able to use specialized critical terms precisely and sparingly to illuminate Bishop's poetry. This new book is dense with the terminology of queer/gender/women's/racial studies. *Cinematic Modernism* outlines a fresh and important approach to modernist poetry. Its argument would sometimes benefit from clearer expression and a fuller recognition of previous scholarship on its subject.

***William Carlos Williams: Selected Poems*. Ed. Robert Pinsky.**

American Poets Project. New York: The Library of America, 2004.
189 pp. \$20.00 (cloth).

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That Robert Pinsky has for a long time admired the poetry of fellow New Jerseyite William Carlos Williams is demonstrated by the considerable space devoted to Williams's work in Pinsky's *The Situation of Poetry: Contemporary Poetry and Its Traditions* (1976). Examining the relationship between the work of the modernists and the verse that was still considered "contemporary" when he wrote that book, Pinsky focused on Williams's "coolness," on the way he treats

the interaction between a perceiving consciousness and inanimate objects, and on his ability to master the liberty afforded by prose. In the introduction to this new collection of Williams's poetry, the former poet laureate again emphasizes the magnitude of Williams's legacy, averring that "(g)enerations of poets have dug into" his "works," admiring their "enduring freshness."

Williams has continued to influence young poets, Pinsky proposes, because his poetry challenges the reader to "try to listen and see freshly and leave expectations and clichés (sic) behind." Exploring "the infinite richness of what is apparent," Williams's poems insist that we provide "something a little more like alertness than explanation." "Even the poet's name keeps the reader off balance," its hybridity "implying an immigrant story" that leads Pinsky to place Williams in "the European tradition of the scientist as progressive." His Williams combined "intellectual attention" with "painterly alertness," possessed a kind of sensitivity to the new that led him, for example, to compose what may be the first poem describing the world as it looks when viewed from an automobile.

Pinsky's Williams edition was the thirteenth volume released under the American Poets Project imprint. Several of the other volumes also have been edited by distinguished poets, including Thom Gunn, Edward Hirsch, J. D. McClatchy, Adrienne Rich, and Richard Wilbur. The stated purpose of the series is to produce, "for the first time in our history, a compact national library of American poetry." Although the American Poets Project in general is thus committed to conservation and dissemination, this particular addition seems intended also to prompt reexamination and reconsideration, for Pinsky's Williams is rather different from Charles Tomlinson's.

More than half of the poems in Tomlinson's *New Directions* edition do not appear in this one; more than half of those collected in the newer edition are absent from Tomlinson's. Pinsky's Williams is a lyric poet rather than a lyric poet with epic ambitions. Unlike Tomlinson's edition, this one contains neither "The Wanderer" nor excerpts from *Paterson*, while Pinsky provides a larger sampling of the early lyrics, including, for instance, a dozen poems from *Al Que Quiere!* and fifteen from *Sour Grapes*. He has also added a few of the more widely anthologized pieces ("Danse Russe," "The Young Housewife") as well as the posthumously published "Greeting for Old Age" and "Stormy."

This new *Selected Poems* is not the product of textual editing; the texts of all of the poems it contains are taken from the two volumes of the *New Directions Collected Poems*. The textual apparatus is lean. In addition to Pinsky's fairly brief but effective introduction, the book offers a short biographical note, a note on the texts, and a few pages of explanatory notes on the poems themselves. By present-

ing a distinctly different selection of Williams's work, however, Pinsky may succeed in compelling at least some readers to view the poet's oeuvre with a fresh eye.

***Emancipating Pragmatism: Emerson, Jazz, and Experimental Writing.* Michael Magee.** Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2004. 247 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), \$27.50 (paper).

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Emancipating Pragmatism is both an exciting and frustrating book. Since Michael Magee's prose is sometimes strategically evasive, it is sometimes hard to decipher. Moreover, the book is thesis-ridden (which is strange considering its literary ancestor) and repetitious—the same quotations keep reappearing. Yet the spiritual and cultural ancestor of this book, nineteenth-century thinker Ralph Waldo Emerson, is equally as exciting and frustrating, at least Magee's version of him. It is a serious book, boldly showing the influence of Emerson on at first seemingly unlikely places—from jazz to William Carlos Williams, to African American culture, to the New American Poetry of the late 1950s and 1960s, to contemporary experimental writing. And this book, perhaps, makes this reviewer a little less literal-minded. Following the pragmatist John Dewey, Magee sees literary criticism as "a form of desire, of effort as action" (1) instead of seeing it more traditionally as a tool for more or less straightforward investigation into history and text.

Magee, who teaches at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, starts with an inspiring re-envisioning of Emerson, an Emerson who comes from recent work of such scholars as Len Gougeon and Joel Myerson, which is primarily based on the 1964 rediscovery in the Library of Congress of Emerson's lost antislavery "WO Liberty" notebook. This notebook counters the standard and persistent image of Emerson as someone who was reluctantly pushed into abolitionist activity (54), by showing him as a fiery abolitionist (2). In fact, Magee argues that Emerson became a pragmatist, a man who believes in a philosophy of action, through his commitment to abolition (89).

In great detail Magee presents Emerson's fascinating and influential theory of language since it is the theoretical bedrock of the book. This study demonstrates that Emerson's ideas about language will be employed by a variety of American writers from Gertrude Stein and William Carlos Williams to contemporary experi-