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REFERENCES

Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2010. Pp. 169. ISBN 978-1-57113-481-3.

- 1 Ian D. Copestake's monograph on William Carlos Williams's poetry offers a well-informed and well-documented insight into the connection between Williams's writing with Unitarianism and Emersonian thinking. In this very well-written and accessible book, the reader gets introduced to a number of poems in addition to excerpts from Williams's essays, letters and autobiography which facilitate the understanding and appreciation of the poet's attempt to promote "independent thought and action" (5). Unitarianism's "avoidance of dogma" and "distinct conception of selfhood" (6) delineates Williams's ethics, which draw upon an openness of mind and expression as well as an acknowledgement of what is everyday and familiar.
- 2 Williams's poetics continue having an impact on current writers and academics, as testified by the ongoing publication of scholarly monographs and comparative studies. Copestake's book constitutes a good example as it offers readers a fresh perspective to Williams's Unitarian beliefs without letting it be overburdened by theory. What it gradually brings to the fore is the formulation of Williams's own way of thinking by differentiating himself from his parents' strict interpretation of the Unitarian creed. The development of a diversified system of belief led Williams towards the combination of Unitarianism's values of "authenticity and self-realization" (19) with Emersonian tradition. This is exactly where Copestake positions Williams's take towards poetry: in viewing it as an "act of self-definition" (19), as Charles Doyle, one of the critics Copestake

cites in his study, declares. Williams's avoidance of adhering to a specific goal and his concentration, as Copestake claims, on "the process of pursuing knowledge" (23) reveals the vigorous character of his art, since it is through writing that he discovers himself and it is through himself that he gets close to "nature's active part" (241), as Williams writes in his *Autobiography*.

- 3 Copestake's argumentation takes an interesting and enlightening turn when he sets to explore the interconnection between Williams's use in his poems of natural motifs of roots, branches and flowers, and the English Pre-Raphaelite painters' ethos of "truth to nature" (32). By resorting to a wealth of examples from Williams's poems and other secondary sources, Copestake very convincingly passes from the link between Pre-Raphaelites and Unitarian art work (as featured in the church stained glasses) to the transmission of the Unitarian openness through Williams's natural imagery. Without playing a decorative role, these images transform into vehicles of sincere expression with regard to the process of creation and the role the artist is expected to play in society. What these images promote is poetic inventiveness rather than verbose poetic writing. With references to other poets Williams was in touch with or influenced by, such as Ezra Pound, H.D. and Marianne Moore, Copestake manages to map out Williams's development into a creative poet whose writing is not merely after meaning but after the promotion of perception and thinking.
- 4 This becomes evident in the following argument Copestake attempts to develop in relation to the relevance between Ralph Waldo Emerson's and Williams's writings. From what has been written so far, one comes to appreciate Williams's ability to reformulate and modernize tradition by making it more present-specific, developing at the same time a writing style that corresponds not only to his personal beliefs and perspective but also to social and cultural needs. However, this may affect the stance one keeps towards the past, which may be either forthcoming or constructed. Copestake comments on the 1920s tendency to sweep away any "revered cultural icon" (71) that bore links to what the intelligentsia of the time considered as non-American in the effort to promote a progressive, all-American art. This attitude, as Copestake effectively supports, brings to the forefront the polarization that took effect at the time between Emerson's and Walt Whitman's writings, which led to the popularization of the latter at the expense of the former, since Emerson was viewed "as a receptacle for European and Far Eastern traditions of thought" (64). Caught up between this kind of cultural "crossfire," Williams seems to be embracing Whitman's work while "rejecting" Emerson's even though, as Copestake manages to prove, it is Emerson's thoughts in relation to history and language that underlie his poetic conviction. Actually, it is their questioning of the blind allegiance to the past and the way this is communicated to the present that brings them together. For them truth is not located in the fixed meaning of words but in the constant questioning of what is passed on to us.
- 5 This case is much more thoroughly explored in Copestake's detailed discussion of Williams's *Paterson* poem (book 1) where the redeeming quality of language is at the center of attention. Starting off the analysis with the juxtaposition between Pound's "precision" and Williams's "clarity," Copestake gradually reveals Williams's artistic morality, which derives from the poet's own struggle to stay away from any didactic or dogmatic tendencies, as this emerges from his own interpretation of the Unitarian ideals. By studying the reactions between both poets, Copestake sheds light on the multiple roles language plays in Williams's poetic writing as it is pushed beyond its prescribed role, that

of being a mere conveyor of meaning or impressions of reality. The *Paterson* poem raises the readers' "metapoetic awareness" (97), as Copestake argues, in the ability language has to construct reality through the illusions it builds about it. Focusing on the correlation between Williams's *Paterson* with Albert Einstein's relativity theory, Copestake illuminates the kinaesthetic and transformative character of Williams's writing, as also evidenced in the poem's layout and line breaks, which is where the redeeming character of his language can be found.

- 6 Copestake continues his commentary by turning now to the other *Paterson* books in his effort to ferment the quality of Williams's writing as this results from his "maintenance of faith" (141) in the abilities of the self. Copestake embellishes his argumentation with reactions and comments coming from other writers and reviewers, such as Robert Lowell, Randall Jarrell, Hugh Kenner and William James, in an attempt to emphasize "Williams's concern for contact with the world around him, while moving to the center of his fears for the efficacy of his quest" (124). For the readers of the *Paterson* poems this observation translates into a language struggle in their search for meaning. This could be interpreted as a form of a struggle which does not only characterize the poetic text itself but also the poet himself, since *Paterson* constitutes the reinstatement of Williams's commitment to "a life of work with words" (123), as Copestake states. Struggle in this case takes a wider meaning than what the word merely suggests so as to refer to the knowledge gained when one has faith in the risks the self takes, which is what Williams's poetic mission is about.
- 7 At the end of this study, one comes to appreciate the sense of commitment and creativity that characterizes Williams's work, making him both a man and a poet of his time. His writing, although at times appears to be following the literary trends formulated in the 1920s and 30s, is actually driven by something much deeper than the mere acceptance of the creeds and traditions he had grown up with. Instead of remaining stuck to or trying to escape from reality, Williams recommends a creative approach to it by opening up poetic practice to inventive thinking and independent thought, proving in this manner the power of the self to respond imaginatively to what appears to be firm and fixed. Copestake with this book not only shares with his readers a great amount of knowledge coming both from primary and secondary sources with regard to Williams's writing methodology, but opens up Unitarian ideals to a multi-dimensional reading which makes visible their inspiring potential. It is on this creative way of using thinking and the imagination that Williams's connection to Emerson is also based which Copestake traces throughout the book. This is a study that will appeal to scholars, students and the general public due to the informative and accessible way of its writing style as well as synthesizing approach that it proposes.