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Literary Theory and Writing: Reader Response Draft One

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So Much Depends Upon The Reader: A Response to William Carlos Williams

- A. The meaning of Williams' poetry is entirely dependent on the reader in the ways it can be interpreted. Williams' writing style seems to encourage the reader to analyze and suggest different readings and theories to be made about his writing.
- B. Wolfgang Iser's idea of reader response: the poem is not complete without the reader's interpretation
- C. Louise Rosenblatt
- D. "The role of the reader is essential to the meaning of a literary text" (Pennington and Cordell)

Williams' poems, when read firsthand, tend to have very mundane, or even cryptic, meanings. Claiming that "so much depends upon a red wheelbarrow" (Williams) seems to prod the reader to ask the question, "why?" Why does so much depend upon the wheelbarrow? How is meaning made out of this statement by Williams? The answers lie in the reader. Williams' writing style allows his readers the opportunity to fill gaps in the poem's meaning, to hypothesize, and to dig deep into analysis.

- a. "So much depends upon"... really? Does the reader believe these words?
 - i. Reader finds significance in different words
 - ii. prodding readers to make meaning and decide whether or not this is true
- b. Different views that can be taken on words like "red" and "white"
 - i. Simplicity of rural life

- ii. Importance of the average worker, both to work giving them life and their work helping the economy
 - c. Analyses of different people's interpretations
 - d. "The text is the product created by the author; the work is the realization of the text by the reader" (Resseguie 308)
- E. This Is Just to Say
- a. Self-explanatory, yet the reader derives a lot of meaning depending on what they are getting out of it
 - i. Is it really 'just to say'?
 - ii. Different angles have been taken: rape, anger, disloyalty, what profoundness can this have? What makes it poetic?

Works Cited

Resseguie, James L. "Reader-Response Criticism and the Synoptic Gospels." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 52, no. 2, 1984, pp. 307–324. *JSTOR*.