

Americanism in the Poetry of Charles Olson

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INTRODUCTION

Poems of Charles Olson are series of vision that Olson has presented in his poetic work. The events that are presented in the collected poems of Charles Olson revealed about society in American cult and this all shows Americanism. Olson has presented many poems in his poetic career, Which shows his psychology as well as his way of thinking and his style. Charles Olson, who snapped his sentences open like things as he wrote and whose mind moved outward in a series of interesting ripples pushing against his syntax, sought to mobilizing all that he could of language and local human reality and the most cherished memories of tradition against the new "Pejorocarcy"¹. He was conceivably the unacknowledged leader of these unacknowledged legislators.

Olson's poetry has never been difficult in its imaginative image. Only in its elisions and references. So difficult in these, that he could have been often uncomfortably trying to conceal the ordinariness of his materials by making the form of their presentation unnecessarily obscure. As a poet he is also still the Charles Olson who was a fisherman, a carpenter and postman. In this aspect of Olson is some of "poetry's brilliance, difficulty, insistence, and uniqueness."²

MANY LAYERED CULTURE

The American society was formed and shaped by the religious, moral, political and economic concepts of the individuals. Who were aware of their responsibility in this onerous task. The creative writing after the declaration of independence in 1776 gave clear evidence of "social, political, religious, economic and intellectual forces enjoying the national mind."³ These writings reveal that domestic

ideal and national ambitions were equally important to American mind.

Many layered culture is in the America. America is a secular non-religious culture in practice, a pluralistic one. But that culture houses an impressive number of religious institutions that attract the loyalties of three out of five and are likely to continue to do so indefinitely. Over these is a layer of practiced religion, whose institutions count for less and which may take the form of private support. Some would put the whole complex in a container called 'civil' or 'public' religion the consensus that presumably holds America together. Meanwhile, as we await for a new concenses, traditionalist religion thrives. Through it all, a paradigm that seems ambivalent and equivocal, combining as it does both religious and secular elements, does justice to the viscous aspects of "American cultural life."⁴

In 1940, Olson moved to New York, where he work briefly for the American civil liberties union and for the common council for American Unity. Charles Olson was one of the founders of the post World War II avant-garde that began at Black Mountain College in the 1950. Of all American writers in the century Olson, it would be fear to say, is unique in conducting this investigation of the distant past and is marshalling linguistic, archaeological and geological evidence and source more like a scholarly specialist than the conventionally imaged man of letters. Olson preferred an intellectual form of self abnegation more typical of philosophers, mathematician, and historian. His greatest achievement was that he transformed this apparent handicap into poetic effects that include "new stance toward reality."⁵

American life, scene, customs, traditions, beliefs, people and activities. Often he may say something having a universal appeal and application. He deals with American life, especially, as found in rural and pastoral areas, and sings of the glory of American cultural traditions. The language he uses in his

poems, is usually that the common man and women of American. America is always a country that belongs to its people, capable to preserving the vital link that binds them to nature and to each other. Of filling their lives with high ethical meaning. For this is an active, creative morally pure and healthy life.

According to Donald M. Allen that:

O Gloucester plane,
Weave your birds and fingers
Now, you roof-tops
Clean shat on, racks
Summed on

American, braid⁶

Olson was a genius, an incomparable teacher, I wish he could some how have been content with description, for the descriptive parts of “Maximus”⁷ are the best, they alone sustaining real force of the poem, and who knows how much more the poet might have achieved it. Paradoxically, he had been willing so set limit on his imagination. Olson resolved his dilemma by constructing a history centred on a locality, Gloucester, but he remained sceptical of his choices and aware that the history would be only as good as was wise to depend upon one’s own wisdom is surely the ‘Ego-Position’. But to gather to individuals and events from one city is closer to William’s method.

Olson’s city is above all else a society of people and, like Pound he aspired to his own luminous city, that is my dreams of creating a city which shall shine as such. And this is only what I am is the builder of that dome the most fruitful lesson Olson took from Williams is the idea of a long poem cantered on a single city, localism and politics are happily wedded in Olson’s literalist imagination, when he speaks of political he thinks of the Greek polis the city state. Politics for Olson means the public life of a city and “life”⁸ implies that a city is a vital organism.

No poet could have been more patriotic than Olson. Not in the jingoistic sense, of course, but in the Whitmanian sense. Olson’s aim in “The Maximus Poems” was to present Gloucester, as it is and was, and then to assimilate it into Whitmanian spirit of America as see it and into the entire religious fabric of history from “Egypt and Mesopotamia”⁹ to the present; with excursions into for eastern sources. American culture is a new disintegration that comes hard upon our integration, cooperation between greed

and governments is far too mild a monster for Olson’s vision.

“The Maximus poems” clearly reflects Olson’s grassroots radicalism and humanism, which provide the emotional change for much of the poems. But humanism as a system of thought or ordering of persons in their relations to other thing in the world, is distinctly absent, even the most sympathetic ordering of human effects and intelligence leads to unavoidable assumptions, and the test which is the reality of one’s quite. Maximus becomes more and more merged with the history of Gloucester, dissolving altogether in some poems as the ‘facts’ of history come to the fore. Olson’s focus on the city is past of his desire of alternative discourse appropriate to a “human universe”¹⁰.

Olson was an archaeologist and anthropologist these interests underline much of his writing. In his longer works, the rise and fall of civilization are an implicit intellectual rhythm and often an explicit pattern of allusions. Historical materials secures frequently in quotations and impressions, generating the larger themes, as in ‘a plantation a beginning’ from “The Maximus Poems” :

I sit here on a Sunday
With Gray water, the winter
Staring me in the face
The snow lye’s indeed
About a foot thick
For then weeks John White
Warms any prospective
Planter¹¹

In Olson’s poetry the search in more often for space, orientation, size and a flexible relationship between man and the universal established by fixes only “In Cold Hell, in Thicket”, says that man is ‘in hell or happiness, merely something to be wrought; to be shaped to be carved, for use’ but that nevertheless, by nature:

He shall step, he
Will shape, he
Is already also
Moving off¹²

Charles Olson says about human rights that: human sights are basic. Political and Social conditions- variously defines to which every individual is entitled as a human being originally they were called natural rights or the rights of man, and included the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness cited in the

U.S. declaration of independence. Over the years the concept of human rights has been broadened to include rights to social benefits such as “social security, rest and leisure, and education.”¹³

Charles Olson has an experience of and interest in the American country side, especially the countryside of New England, and he depicting the urban life as well World War II has tremendous impact on the American domestic scene, introducing social and moral changes to a greater extent than any even since the civil war. Olson’s scene is Gloucester, Massachusetts, his home town, and it is his embattled spirit, commenting on the life and history of the place, that gives motion and emotion to the “Maximus Poems”. Many of the poems are called letters, and they are addressed to the citizenry of Gloucester, praising their labour and warning them against the folly of commitment to the more specious values of contemporary “industry and commerce.”¹⁴

American committed by constitutional ideals to political equality, traditional theory have been most influential in the past and seem likely candidates in terms of today’s problems. A society is just when its basic social practices would be consented to by each member, if each adopted the view of rational individual concerned with his or her own long run interest. The just society is the one that secures and maintain respects for persons through social arrangements that are in the common interest but not to greater advantage of some than of others. The preamble to the charter reaffirms faith in “fundamental human rights, and art.”¹⁵

The discovery of poetic space in “The Cold Hell, in Thicket” lay in the transition from ‘thicket’ to ‘field’. In the “Maximus Poems”, space is initially represented by Gloucester geographically bounded. Yet omnipresent in past, present and future. This structural freedom is achieved primarily through the invention of Maximus, who is like a Vonnegut hero on a ‘time warp’. Never limited in time, often absent, yet nevertheless specifically earthbound. In “The K” as a shift from past tense of present:

It is undone business
I speak of, this morning
With the sea
Stretching out
From my feet

Again the sea and Olson’s unique sense of the ecology of poetry transform a stopping point in the sequence into a point of departure.

Charles Olson says about liberalism that, a political philosophy that emphasizes individual freedom. Liberalism stood for limited government with a separation powers among different branches such as the legislative, executive, and judicial and for free enterprise in the economy. Because of the reaction against the excesses of the French revolution, however “liberalism shed some of its relevance on rationalism and began to base itself on utilitarianism.”¹⁶ A link was thus forged between early revolutionary individualism and a new idealistic concern for the interest of society about liberalism.

“The Maximus poems”, Olson’s persona, Maximus named after an itinerant, Phoenician mystic of the fourth century. Survey’s contemporary Gloucester and finds its citizenry in disarray and the local culture ugly and alien. This judgement prompts a systematic inquiry into the origins of Gloucester and of America, which take up the remainder of the volume, Maximus IV, V, VI, the speaker widens his interests to include mythological lore, the history of human migration religious literature, and the finer details of Gloucester’s past, which seem to Maximus to re-enact certain of the myths and fables of the ancient world. The final volume, more sombre in mood and subject. Continues Maximus’s intense survey of Gloucester and himself “A Vision of new cosmos”¹⁷ is summoned in these poems in the hope of redeeming and possible reconstituting the communal ethos of Gloucester’s past. But that hope gives way to remorse and disparagements of the reckless present and its deadening commercial enterprises.

Olson threw light on the subject of America that the glory of its possibilities is beautiful confronting America, as it radiates out of Gloucester and envision, his poetry often breaks step into a kind of whitmanesque prose, a paradox of immense bulk and grace that fits the subject exactly. The tempo is right, the sense of space. Olson has whitmanian sweep to his imagination that connects one shiner of brightness with the first spark, the first spring. His ability to link one detail with another is starting and often gives the feeling your eye has erred until then. “Olson is unique, and probably the most difficult or recent American poets”¹⁸ no other poet requires such an effort, equivalent to learning a new language, or

rather to adjusting the sense we have of the old one, so that we hear the precision of his, and learn to experience a world through it.

There are passages where Olson succeeds very well in evoking and satirising the realities of urban living. He focuses on Gloucester and to quote Duncan's summary of the central conceit. "Homo maximus wrests his life from the underworld as the Gloucester fisherman wrests his from sea."¹⁹ Gobbets of local history are lovingly dredged up and patiently reassembled. Modern wit sometimes flashes brightly through the historical material but the poem as a whole is maddeningly uneven. His method prevents him from providing linkages. The material must be allowed to speak for itself without any explanation of its relevance, and he incorporates long stretches of verbatim quotation from documents which have a bearing on local history, assuming that his placing of them inside his structure will suffice to make them meaningful. It doesn't at its best, though, his writing has a vitality in common with Duncan's. He is often very successful in making the movement of the verse imitate the movement he is describing.

Charles Olson, the man who started writing about Gloucester when he was in North Carolina, to some extent objectifying it, and who told me, when he moved back to Gloucester, he was nervous about the move, uncertain he could get at Gloucester when he was that close to her, from such a man, the progression is to the Maximus of volume three, who is utterly identified with and fused into Gloucester a man who becomes the last of the great nineteenth century romantics. "The Maximus Poems" were not therefore a back drop for himself as quondam hero. He then read "Maximus of Gloucester" the date for which he notes as 'Friday November 5th 1965' :

Only my written word
I have sacrificed every thing including sex and woman or
Lost them to his attempt to acquire complete Concentration
It is not I
Even if the life appeared
Biographical, the only interesting thing
Is if one can be
An image
Of man. "The nobleness and the arts"
(Later: My self like my father, in the picture, a shadow)

On the rock.²⁰

CONCLUSION

American literary culture appears to have no way of handling a poet like Olson. Olson's poems and his understanding of the nature of poem are hardly separable. Olson was a genius. Charles Olson's poetry reflects and represents various forces and trends of the American people. It's Olson's intent in his poetry to define both the nature of that attention the values, and the method which most proves its use, because he feels it absolutely required that one move beyond any humanistic evaluation of data 'because the local and sentimental is how humanism comes home to roots in America.'

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