

CHAPTER 1

Black Mountain: A Literary and Historical Perspective

Black Mountain College, the centre of academic and artistic vibrancy during the 1950s retained its high status during the course of its tenure throughout. Numerous avant-garde artists and writers got fascinated towards it on account of its totally innovative experimental outlook. The College's eventful history begins from the very day it got inaugurated in 1933 and its glory remains till date even though it got closed down in 1956. The poets associated with this group gained their identity with their association with this eponymous mount and their literary achievements are inseparable from the College's exciting history. This chapter and will unveil the events that led to the formation of the College and how the poets included in this study got captivated with it. Thus it will affirm the College's position in America's literary history.

Mary Emma Harris in her article "Black Mountain College: Experience and Experiment in American Education" (2005) gives a brief description of the time when the College came into existence.

The year 1933 was an inauspicious time to create a new experimental college. The world was in the grips of a crippling depression and, for most, necessities were a luxury.

In Germany, Adolph Hitler had been appointed Chancellor, and the seeds for a conflict that was to engulf the entire world were germinating. (9)

It was the time when Franklin Roosevelt became president of an America that was devastated by the 1929 market crash. Life turned out to be so miserable that bread lines were a common sight and displaced families wandered the roads searching for food and shelter. A seemingly insignificant conflict raged at Rollins College, Florida, but it was a crisis that served as a catalyst for the establishment of one of the most fascinating and influential experiments in Education in the US in the 20th century – The Black Mountain College.

The crisis chiefly focused on the teaching of doctrines and the idiosyncrasy of Classics professor John Andrew Rice which was instrumental in the firing of several faculty, the voluntary resignations of others and the leaving of many students. The issue being serious, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) sent an investigative team. Those faculties who have either resigned or were terminated had little chance of regaining their status until the publication of AAUP Commission's report.

For Rice and his well-wishers, the concept of an ideal college had long been the topic of conversation on hot evenings in Winter Park, and they finally arrived at the conclusion that it was the ideal time to put their

ideas into practice. Rice describes the fight at Rollins as “a liberal college in an illiberal town, with the inevitable conflict when the college has to decide not to be liberal so as not to offend potential wealthy donors to the college” (Wicker 2). Rice and his associates were willing to undertake the adventure and chore of founding an innovative educational institution in the most horrible years of ‘depression’. Rice, in 1933, explained to one of his friends, what he was trying to explore of an untried concept: “Between the teacher and the student sit as a minimum requirement of all academic logs, a president, a dean of the college, a dean of men and women, and a registrar, all of whom are more or less subject to a board of trustees or regents” (Wicker 2). Their mission was to eliminate the hindrances that commonly stood between the teachers and the learning community.

It must have taken a great deal of courage on the part of the small group of teachers, being outraged at the firing of a colleague, to dismantle even their families to form a new educational experiment. On September 25, 1933, the Black Mountain College was opened 15 miles from Asheville, North Carolina in the Blue Ridge Mountains at a site used by the YWCA during the summer, but unused during the rest of the year. Robert Martin, who taught English at Black Mountain College, wrote of the opening ceremony: “The formal opening of the college was rather like that of a pickup game of football.... There was nothing pompous....no formal programme and no chapel-orations....Like many similar occasions; it was

happily terminated by lunch” (qtd. in Harris, “Experience and Experiment” 10). Four faculties of the Rollins College remained: John Andrew Rice, Theodore Drier – mathematics professor, Frederic Georgia – the chemistry professor, and a lawyer named Ralph Reed Lounsbury. The founders of the college already had pre-planned ideas to bring into practice, but they were lacking in a codified theory of education that they wanted to establish. The college was totally experimental and open and was capable of accepting any kind of innovations and changes. Rice later wrote:

From communists, ‘From each, etc.’, from the Quakers, consensus; from Oxford, teachers, not taskmasters, outside examiners; from New England, the town meeting, everybody having his say; from Greece, Socratic following of the argument; from the Webb School, another chance; from Harvard, hospitality in ideas, however strange; from the south, its inheritance; from New College, ‘manners Maketh the Man.’ (Rice, *Memoirs* 24)

Education at Black Mountain College aimed at the whole person. It believed in the democratic values. Learning was more practical and a student was not supposed to learn just the information, but how to deal with the information. Values were to be tested as rigorously as ideas. Community life itself was part of the curriculum. There wasn’t any formal academic book keeping and grades were recorded for transfer purposes

only. The students unanimously involved in the work programmes and there wasn't any kind of distinction or discrimination between the rich and the poor. It was believed that the students would learn not only discipline through the practice of arts but also responsibility and creative approach to problem solving. Rice found arts inseparable from college education and thus he was determined that Black Mountain should hire an outstanding artist to lead its arts faculty. He never wanted Black Mountain to be an arts school, but he felt that arts should be at the center, not at the periphery of students' learning. Martin Duberman's book, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (1972) is an assessment of the College's educational and communal achievements. The College had shifting relations with art and education. "In the early years of the College, the visual arts were emphasized; in its last years, the literary arts were more important" (Smith 1). The College's central conviction was that arts was central to the education of citizens in a free society.

The College functioned based on the principle that students could be educated for freedom only by the teachers who themselves were virtually free; otherwise liberal education would not carry any meaning. In order to ensure this freedom, the authorities reverted to a form of government, government by the faculty or self-government. The legal responsibility for the running of the college rested in the faculty and the principal students' officer. The pre-requisite for admission to this college was the ability to

live in and to profit from such a community. In the words of Rice,

In general, the effort of the College is to produce individuals rather than individualists, in the belief that the individualist is bound to be a misfit in modern life, while, at the other extreme, the subordination of men and women to a uniform and consistent pattern of action will inevitably prevent the creation of a better society than we now have. (“Histories and Descriptions” 2)

The beginning of this process was to make the student aware of himself and his capabilities, that was to know what was inherent in him.

The group of teachers and students who were behind the formation of the College were quite convinced by painful personal experience that the prevailing traditional methods of collegiate education were insufficient in the moulding of future generation who has to face the insecurity and turmoil during the impending period of transformation. They were convinced that the present crisis was not at all a temporary one after which everything would become normal. John Rice writes: “Now everybody sees that we are living in the beginning of a new period of history; a change probably not less decisive than that of the middle ages to modern times” (“Histories and Descriptions” 1). Then onwards, the western civilization was to be dominated by the actual existence and spirit of the masses. The main task of the present day education was to identify and establish the

relationship of the individual to community in a new method. Such a kind of relation is more practical and it is impossible to construct it on paper. It needs the genuine efforts of both generations and depending on the deepened understanding of human affairs and values, special skills and knowledge are to be supplemented. Finally, Black Mountain College attained its structure from the urge to translate these ideas into pedagogical methods.

Since the College was under an autonomous body, it guaranteed adaptability and flexibility. Any kind of external interference was totally discouraged and it subordinated administration to education. The general issues were discussed and resolved by the community as a whole. The students had the opportunity to solve the problems affecting the community as a whole and thus they learned the basic tenets of democracy. Students often found it confusing and in many cases, they had to undergo different detours before distinguishing between arbitrary choice and wise decision. The total numbers of fixed rules were kept at minimum since it was not unusual for a living community to violate obligations and laws at times. “Black Mountain College is a democracy in the new understanding of this word: not an aggregate of opinions, and addition of votes, but an organic whole in which there is reciprocal dependence between the individual and the general order” (Rice, “Histories and Descriptions” 1-2). In general, the College both recognized and avoided, if required, the impersonal university

and over-individualism and at times sentimentality of progressive education.

The total involvement of the teachers and students in this new community was not very easy, but this limitation never tarnished its value. Not only that, new relationships could be formed and much could be learned by the original experiences of small groups. These groups could present themselves as models for the indispensable transformation that was about to occur in American education. Mark Hopkins, the 19th century American educator, described the ideal college as “a student on one end of a log and a teacher on the other” (Wicker 5). Only a few of the experimental colleges that include Mark Hopkins College in Brattleboro, Vermont, and Black Mountain College in North Carolina tried this approach. Black Mountain’s was an attempt to put into living terms the philosophy of Mark Hopkins and J. A. Rice. The College was seeking to avoid mass education, and primary stress was at the individual’s overall development.

Rice’s ideas incited an open rebellion in the prevailing educational system, especially “against the raccoon coat American colleges and universities in the Coca-Cola era of the 20s and 30s” (Wicker 1). Contemporary American Higher Education was focused on the German University ideal stuffing the head full of facts without possessing any self knowledge. The European tradition stressed only on the intellect, and the

emotional development was totally neglected. Even the business of assisting students to gain insights into how to survive and adjust with their environment was also sidelined.

Rice and other founding fathers of Black Mountain were seeking a right balance between emotion and intellect. What Rice meant by “seeking balance” was to maintain “a subtle balance between the intellect and emotions” (Wicker 1). Rice was closely linked to John Dewey, an eminent American educator and innovator and his intention was to establish a college that would embrace the search for intelligence and the Mark Hopkins principle of “what constituted a good and thorough educational balance” (Wicker 1). William C. Rice, the founder’s grandson later commented:

Rice thought that traditional educators were generally a lifeless lot, authoritarian and unconcerned with the students, and he objected equally to the progressives for ‘their lack of liberal learning’ and their ‘scientific posing’. In general, he criticized higher education for centering on ‘social or intellectual development’ at the expense of the ‘whole person’. (qtd in Foster, *Understanding* 3)

In the matter of self-reliance, Black Mountain was more like an Emersonian project. Rice wanted individuals to grow according to their potentialities and abilities, and not by the dictates of any branches of

learning. He placed personal ego above all principles of social institutions. It was natural that such a person would always be in conflict with others and this was one of the reasons for his resignation from Rollins College.

Philip Johnson, a major architect of Black Mountain College, recommended Joseph Albers, one of the fathers of abstract expressionism in American art and a member of the faculty at Bauhaus which Hitler closed later alleging as 'degenerate', and he was brought as arts teacher along with his wife Anni. This proved to be a firm basis in the history of the college – for to the progressive ideals of the founders, they have brought the spirit of modernism which was defined by Joseph Albers as “a significant contemporaneousness” (Duberman 56). The college was closely associated with the avant-garde in the beginning itself, for Joseph Albers was noted for his painting and prints, and Anni for her textiles as well as their essays on art and textile design. Rice and his associates were very particular that art would be at the center of the College's attention, because they felt that art was a reflective process. It was mandatory for a student to be aware of his strategies and then to reflect on what he has achieved.

It's quite unsuitable to address the Black Mountain College as an art school. “It was a liberal arts college with classes in languages, the sciences, mathematics and philosophy,” (Bostic 6) a representative college of mid twentieth century America. Rice was a noted classic scholar, but his ideas went beyond the prevailing systems of education in the contemporary

academic world. The views of both Rice and his colleagues had international implications. Rice believed that it was improper on the part of a student just to listen to some symphony in order to learn music; instead he should learn to play an instrument. In the same way, to learn the history of art he made paintings and to appreciate stage performance, he acted in a play. This later led to inter disciplinary experiences, which strengthened the academic lives of the students by making them aware of the innate potential which was a pre requisite for a thorough understanding and a purposeful life of great human exploration and self discovery. “Art instruction at Black Mountain, working jointly with the other elements of the college set up and processes is, in actuality, indirect sociology – sociology grounded in artistic values, which are positive and eternally active in their objection to incongruity” (Wicker 5).

John Andrew Rice is credited with the establishment of this experimental college. He was fired from Rollins College due to his indifferent approach towards the pre-established customs especially in the matter of syllabus. Even though an independent review exonerated him, he had gathered a group of educators and idealists by that time that chafed at the methods that were prevailing in the contemporary educational institutions. These faculties and students were quite determined to form their own school. They had an array of pedagogic safeguards; the most important of them was that there wouldn't be any governing board. The

school as an institution would be run solely by teachers with genuine inputs from the learners who were totally at their will to frame patterns of study. The school had two divisions – Junior and Senior. Teaching as such was done only in small junior classes whereas senior classes were largely on tutorial basis. The new school gained impetus – a bipartite division and tutorial – from the Oxford University System. There was neither any credit nor accreditation for the programmes. Whenever a student felt ready to have graduation, he was supposed to forward a formal request to take an examination being conducted by an external examiner. The community life of the college was essential to Rice's vision. "But the individual to be complete must be aware of his relation to others. Here the whole community becomes his teacher" (Rice, "Histories and Descriptions" 3).

At Black Mountain, there was a strong sense of revolutionizing the traditional viewpoint throughout the 1930s and it deviated greatly from the contemporary institutions and lacked the formal perception of a college and a spirit of camaraderie existed between the faculty and students. They were isolated from all kinds of contemporary cultural centers and this added to their community life. Black Mountain combined music and art programmes in the summer of 1948. The college took chances and permitted faculty to frame their own curriculum. Buckminster Fuller and Willem de Kooning were brought as substitutes for those who refused to accept the appointment. After their visit to the college, John Cage and

Merce Cunningham were also invited. But by the end of autumn, the college was under crisis with less number of students and limited source of income. By the autumn of 1949, the administration turned to former students to substitute many of the vacant positions.

The year 1948-49 happened to be a turning point in the future history of the College. The great poet and historian Charles Olson who was living in Washington and then in Yucatan traveled from Washington to teach one weekend in the Fall of 1948 but remained strong presence though he was far off. Ann Charters, who was Olson's colleague at the University of Connecticut, comments: "Olson was there in the Summer and Fall, 1949, and lectured during an evening in May, 1950. His most extended teaching began in the Summer, 1951, continuing with short leaves of absence until Black Mountain closed in the fall, 1956" (Introduction 1). He was the last rector of the College and could generate a dominant impression there both 'physically' (because of his massive figure) and intellectually. 'Rector' means an elected administrative head of the college. One who holds this post will primarily be the administrative head of the college functioning like the present day academic dean. The rector's vote was no more significant than that of any other faculty member at the time of actual decision making.

Olson found Black Mountain's high regard for avant-garde movements which was quite congenial to his aspirations and he returned

there to handle classes in theatre arts. In the summer of 1951, he became a full time faculty. “By the time the poet and essayist Charles Olson became its [Black Mountain’s] rector in 1950, it had become a Mecca for a larger artistic and intellectual avant-garde” (Kimmelman 51). It was not a mere School, but a platform for many artists, poets and even intellectuals to get involved in an artistic revolution. Contrary to the tradition that Albers had established, Olson placed great emphasis on literature, a major shift from arts. Mary Emma Harris wrote: “... his control was so great and his personality so dominant that the college ... (became) identified with his personality and ideas” (*The Arts* 178). Olson was highly prejudiced and he had strong dislike and aversion towards such writers like T. S. Eliot and they were rarely taught.

In order to build a political career with Roosevelt, Olson remained in Washington in the 1940s. During this time, he started a correspondence with young poet Robert Creeley, who was living in New Hampshire which happened to be a milestone in the literary history of the college. Even though they did not meet each other till 1945, this correspondence continued on a regular basis. With the establishment of the *Black Mountain Review* in 1954, Charles Olson could have more fruitful series of collaborations through correspondence. It was the principal voice of many of today’s best known poets. The Review, edited by Robert Creeley while he was in Majorca, could have only seven issues to its credit, and was

unfolded in 1957. It had become the platform for Olson and Creeley to develop the theories they had derived during their correspondence. The first issue was noted for its attacks against Theodore Roethke who had a substantial number of academicians and followers and Dylan Thomas, the most popular poet during that period. The magazine had a democratic outlook in the sense that it never failed to focus the internal criticism. In his “Against Wisdom as Such”, Olson attacked Robert Duncan and Duncan responded to this attack for several years. “This impact – the review is the reason why ‘Black Mountain poetry’ is still regarded as a movement comparable to the imagists or the beats – has much to do with the sense of liberation and new creative possibilities that Olson, as much by exhortation as by example, provided” (Benfey 33). The new possibilities of this genre included a fresh poetic approach to poetic form as laid out in Olson’s poetic manifesto “Projective Verse”, approving of the verse letter as a literary form and an open ended healthy interaction with myths and historical facts. This movement was more practical for Olson, and his circle offered outlets for publication, and a clearing house for ideas, at a time when American poetry appeared to be under a lot of restrictions imposed by academic and journalistic traditions and conventions.

In addition to Olson, prominent among the experimentalists – Creeley in Majorca, Robert Duncan in San Francisco, Denise Levertov in Paris and New York, distributed letters widely, and letters were their sole

means of communication. Geographically, these poets were wide apart and it had some advantages of its own. Their correspondence was chiefly through letters and this abundant epistolary record of their ethics, principles, theories and beliefs reveal the literary history of the period. The letters clearly expose the varied interests of the major poets until the death of Charles Olson in 1970: "...the full account of Black Mountain Poetry must include not just what drew them together, butwhat made for their individual paths of development in the 1970s and after" (Wicker 5).

Olson's first encounter with the young poet Robert Duncan was in 1947, while he was traveling through California. Duncan also was under the influence of Ezra Pound like Olson, and the range of his subject matter – myth, history, the visual arts, erotic love – has many an analogy with Olson's omnivorous muse. Duncan had a much more sophisticated understanding of the visual arts than Olson due to his long term partnership with the painter and collagist Jess Collins. Duncan's "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar" has its roots in one of the lectures of Joseph Albers delivered at Black Mountain on Goya's ways of depicting eyes in his painting. Duncan published his "Letters for Denise Levertov: An Amusement" in the third issue of the *Black Mountain Review* (autumn 1954) as a critique to some of Levertov's works published in the Review. "One can see why Levertov took a passage such as 'You cld have / knocked me over with a feather weight / of words' as a mockery of her work" (Benfey 33).

Levertov being under the magic spell of William Carlos Williams's short descriptive lyrics would not have treasured that mention of the 'feather weight of words'. This resulted in some misunderstanding between her and Duncan which initiated a correspondence that flourished well in the 1960s. The correspondence of Duncan and Levertov has been published in the year 2004 under the title *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov* by Stanford University Press. "What attracted Levertov to Black Mountain was the stress on distinctly American ways of writing. Descended from a Welsh mystic on one side of her family and Hassidic rabbi on the other, Levertov had throughout her career a belief in poetry as epiphany" (Benfey 34). Robert Creeley, "the poet of chars and parables, riddles and runes" was more in tune with the refined and cleansed rhetoric of Levertov's best poems than with the capacious ambition of Robert Duncan or Charles Olson.

The letter correspondence between Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov is considered as a very important exchange between two leading poets in the later half of the twentieth century. The letters are complete in themselves, their numbers exceeding four hundred and fifty pages written between 1953 and 1985. These letters are the vital documents in their poetic lives and they opened new avenues for creative expression. They emerged quite energetically that at times the ideas transformed into verse. "What gives the correspondence historic as well as personal importance is

the fact that its consistent and even obsessive concerns help to map the contested terrain of American poetry since mid-century” (Duncan, *Letters of RD and DL* 9). Duncan visited Black Mountain for the first time in 1939 and he left it the very next day. His ideologies were severely uncompromising; they were hard even for the most radical of schools. He met Olson again eight years later and this time his impression of Olson was that he was more an academician or a scholar than a poet. Even Olson’s first book of poems *X & Y* (1948) couldn’t impress Duncan. He came under Olson’s influence once “Projective Verse” was published. This essay reshaped Duncan’s concept of what a poet and poem should be and he came closer towards Olson like Creeley. Duncan came again to Black Mountain in 1955 and in 1956, he returned to teach during spring and fall quarters. Duncan’s allegiance to Olson is evident in his poems published in *Letters* and *The Opening of the Fields*.

Donald Allen, in his anthology *The New American Poetry 1945-1960* has allocated a major share of the pages to the poems and poetic theories of four major figures – Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov – and also to Paul Blackburn, Larry Eigner, Jonathan Williams and Edward Dorn. Most of the writers included in this volume were experimenting with open-verse forms in the 1950s and they vehemently opposed the dominating influence of ‘close-verse’ forms and New Criticism. Their “Statement of Poetics” defined the unifying factors

and differences. The contemporary poetic movements like The New Poets comprising of John Ashbery and Frank O' Hara moved towards the experimentation of the abstract expressionist painters and the Beat Poets like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg showed their allegiance to transcendentalist idealism and popular culture. The Black Mountain Poets initiated to extend the modernist experimentation of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams to post war American poetry through imagist programmes and objectivism of the early 1900s.

Olson's tenure at Black Mountain found him trying to encompass everything in a mind-boggling manner which was appealing at times, but quite disappointing on other occasions. He was looking forward to a grand cultural theory which incorporated anthropology, archeology, psychology, Heisenberg's indeterminacy principle, theater, performance, the act of the word at the time of literary creation ... etc. Olson believed that eminent and dignified academicians blocked his way to administration and power, so this theory was effective to dominate over them. It was his strong internal urge to write an epic poem so that he could establish the grandeur of his creative and intellectual stature in arts. He succeeded to a certain extent. "Against the prevailing winds, Olson – rightly most critics would say today – elevated Herodotus's approach to history over Thucydides: that is an approach based on philosophy more than chronology; history as ideas, not facts" (Katz 186). Olson's interest in the study of Mayan Glyphs in

Lerma, in the Yucatan, led him to formulate a theory of a people in touch with primal forces, totally untainted by American and European alien cultures and business passions. For him, Glyph served as a symbol capable of acting in itself and it also had significance beyond literal meaning which was the fundamental element of his guiding principles.

Olson and Creeley along with some of their associates, decided to mount an attack on the prevailing academic poetry in the early 1950s. Their intention was not to infiltrate into the other area, they would forge entirely different ways and means of living quite unfamiliar to those whose primary motto was comfort and luxury. They wanted to have their own avenues of publication. They started publishing critical works and poems in periodicals especially in their own publication, the *Black Mountain Review* and thus startlingly beautiful books gradually came into existence. The printing press at Black Mountain had its own role in producing poetry broadsides and other small-run editions related to art. Olson put out the broadside *Letter to Melville and Apollonius of Tyana*, “A Dance, with Some Words, for Two Actors”. Following these, in 1952, Olson published *This*, a broadside poem. “The Song of the Boarder Guard”, a poem by Robert Duncan was printed in the year 1952.

Robert Creeley in Majorca and Jonathan Williams in North Carolina were publishing high quality books in the mid 1950s and they later became the key elements in the literary movement that would be known as the

Black Mountain School of writers. Creeley's Divers Press released both his own short stories, poems...etc. and the books of Paul Blackburn, Duncan and Larry Eigner. Joel Oppenheimer, then a student, printed on the college press, *The Dancer* in Williams' *The Jargon*. Other *Jargon* publications were Olson's *The Maximus Poems 1-10*, *The Immoral Proposition* by Robert Creeley, drawings by Rene Laubies, *The Dutiful Son* by Joel Oppenheimer and a lot more.

Fielding Dawson, a student at Black Mountain, who later became a prolific writer and artist considered Charles Olson and Franz Kline as father figures and wrote about both of them extensively. Olson, 'the master' put students through trial by fire resulting in the formation of some writers, but at the same time he was careless with the students also. Tom Field was another figure during that era. He was a writer and had his publications in the *Black Mountain Review* and at the same time, he was also a painter. Field later became a legendary figure among poets and many collected his works.

During the initial stages, Black Mountain had a liberal attitude towards co-education, but this attitude vanished completely during Olson's time. It was quite contradictory to Rice's vision. Rice was of the opinion that men and women had to learn "that their relationship to one another ... is to be, in the main, not one of opposites, but of those who live upon the common ground of humanity" (Harris, *The Arts* 7). But a severe type of

macho attitude existed later and it is alleged that Black Mountain poetry was composed exclusively by males. Olson's approach to women was much authoritarian and patriarchal. A pretty good number of celebrated writers and artists who worked there were men even though some women served as instructors.

Olson was strongly authoritative and Duberman says that he focused on the supremacy of individual human being and his works, "the 'natural' authority of some men over others (and almost all men over almost all women), and ... the necessity of leading hot lives and asserting (usually through indifference) the supremacy of man over nature" (Duberman 407). Each individual person was a separate entity and Olson strongly defended man as the center of importance because national culture reduced individuals as "mere pawns in market economy" (Foster, *Understanding* 8). Olson's lecture series "The Special View of History" is an attempt to defend individual with all the conviction and energy that had marked Emerson's "Self-Reliance" and Thoreau's *Walden*.

The 1950s was a critical period in the history of the college with financial crisis and gradual deterioration of the physical facility. But it proved to be an intense creative period. The literary activity during this time was instrumental in the revival of the printing press movement in the States. Both Olson and Creeley were worried because of the 'piecemeal' publication of their works in some literary journals and magazines. Then,

they turned their attention into Cid Corman's *Origin* series and Jonathan William's "Jargon" publications. In 1954, as mentioned earlier, Olson and Creeley started to write in their own publication, the *Black Mountain Review* which proved to be a great influence in the later years. Students printed their own writings and that of others. Other printing presses included Joel Oppenheimer's Sad Devil Press, Nick Cernovich's Black Mountain Graphics Workshop and Stan Vanderbeek's One Thumb Press.

The College sponsored special summer programs during this period.

Faculty included

in the visual arts Ben Shahn, Robert Motherwell, Franz Cline, Jack Tworkov, Theodoros Stamos, Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind in Ceramics, Peter Voulkos, Daniel Rhodes and Warren Mackenzie; in dance, Merce Cunningham and Katherine Litz; in Music, John Cage and David Tudor; and in literature Paul Goodman. (Harris, "Experience and Experiment" 18)

The first seminal event in American theatre "Happening" was staged by John Cage in 1952 and the activities of Merce Cunningham and his group of dancers in the summer of 1953 led to the formation of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. Olson wanted himself to be more practical and in 1952 he proposed a plan that was the root cause of eliminating the last remnants of traditional progressive education. He suggested that the

curriculum should be centered on a series of institutes which examine the advanced ideas in all phases of contemporary life. As such, they organized a 'Pottery Seminar' in 1952 and a summer programme based on ceramics in 1953.

The crisis continued and the fate of the college was almost decided. Year by year it became smaller despite the genuine efforts to revive it with positive intentions and sporadic efforts to raise finance and to attract talented students. The enrolment was too minimal in 1953 that the college moved up the hill into the faculty colleges by abandoning the lower campus. Finally, in the autumn of 1956, Charles Olson and Wesley Huss reached an agreement for the closing down of the college. Olson stayed back to oversee continuing education programmes. "His vision was for a dispersed university, sponsoring satellite programmes all over the world" (Harris, "Experience and Experiment" 20). Robert Duncan and his students still continued with the theatre workshop that was being conducted in Black Mountain. Olson moved to San Francisco to deliver his Special View of History lectures. After a month, a court order to discontinue all educational programmes until all the debts were paid was issued. The last and final issue of *Black Mountain Review* was published in the autumn of 1957. At last, on 9 January, 1962 the college books were closed with all debts paid with a remaining balance of zero (Wicker 8).

John Osborne finds Olson as a representative of modernism and he

says, “If anyone deserves particular praise for reviving and extending modernist aesthetics in mid-century America, then that person is the poet Charles Olson” (168). Initially he was acclaimed as an authorized expert in the works of the nineteenth century American poet and novelist Herman Melville. He was well equipped to pioneer a resuscitation of the Black Mountain College. This movement provided Olson with an ideal site so that he could refashion the modernist concept of avant-garde community. Most of the staff who worked along with him were prominent practicing artists. Even the student community was seriously occupied with creative activity. As mentioned earlier, the staff who worked there at various times include the painters Joseph Albers, Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning, the sculptor Richard Lippold, the dancer Merce Cunningham, the composers John cage and Stephan Wolpe, the architect Buck Minster Fuller, and the poets Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan and Olson himself. The renowned students include: the prose writers Fielding Dawson and Michael Rumaker, the sculptor John Chamberlain, the painters Kenneth Noland and Robert Rauschenberg, the film maker Stan Vanderbeek and the poets Ed Dorn, Joel Oppenheimer John Wieners and Jonathan Williams.

The poets in the above category later became identified as ‘The Black Mountain School’. But this title is rather confusing for these poets were a part of wider flowering of early 1950’s verse writers like Denise Levertov, Paul Blackburn, Cid Corman, LeRoi Jones, Larry Eigner and

Gilbard Sorrentiono. It's noteworthy that they were never present at this innovative venture and what united them was their publications in small magazines like Robert Creeley's *Black Mountain Review* and Cid Corman's *Origin* book publication through Robert Creeley's Divers Press and Jonathan Williams' Jargon Books. Jargon was replica of twentieth century poetics which gave prime importance to Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, D. H. Lawrence, E. E. Cummings, Moore and an approach to prosody that was a clear theoretical expression of Olson's celebrated master piece – "Projective Verse" (Osborne 169). *The Black Mountain Review*, *Origin* and to a certain extent *The San Francisco Review* acted as dwellings for the writers whose writings were unacceptable to the 'main-stream' periodicals those days. Some of the poets were never directly indebted to Olson. Denise Levertov and Gary Snyder, the younger poet, who had great resemblance to this group worked out many of the shared ideals for themselves. Still all of them confirm Olson's role as a catalyst in the extra ordinary florescence in their testimonials like Ed Dorn's *What I See in the Maximus Poems* and Robert Duncan's *Notes on Poetics regarding Olson's Maximus*. Gilbert Sorrentino acknowledges Olson as their Ezra Pound.

Black Mountain College represented some sort of abstract expressionism to American generation same as that of what the Bauhaus school had represented in the Europe of international rationalism several

years earlier. The diverse participants of this tremendous American adventure, that is both the faculty and the students, were artists central to modern culture in America and around the world. While looking at the varied talents that at one time or another composed this institution, a prominent factor that is apparent is their desire to look at things in an innovative way, free from any kind of restrictions or limitations. During the course of its twenty three years' of existence from 1933-1956, Black Mountain College was a magnet for artists establishing their identities. It was only "experimentalism" that was encouraged and engaged at Black Mountain both by the faculty and the student community. Instead of studying and repeating the past, the students were absolutely free to undertake activities geared towards new ways of doing. Most of the creative artists who were the inmates of this institution derived visible strength and vigor from their artistic voyages. Once they left Black Mountain, they could transform their personal power into worldly power in their career. Personal relations were forged or empowered with fruitful repercussions.

It is rather ambiguous to define a clear Black Mountain style, but it is possible to use the label to indicate a rough area of pre-occupation in post war American poetry. America lacks a traditional literary center like London or Paris and at least two poetic movements have originated from the South. Black Mountain may owe something of its persistent ruralism

because of its location in Georgia, but it was not at all a religious movement. On the other hand, it had international appeal – avant-garde – from the time of its origin in 1932 to its dissolution under Charles Olson in 1955. “What Black Mountain stood for, as far as poetry was concerned, was the perpetualization – almost, we might argue, the institutionalization – of the poetics of imagism” (Thurley 126). The phenomenalist modernism found a home in Black Mountain College and the noted critic Geoffrey Thurley says that it became academic. Black Mountain was quite progressive and modernist and to a certain extent, it became a retarding force in the development of poetry before the college was closed down. “It encouraged an elitist exclusiveness, concerned all too often with the display of learning rather than with its spirit, and with erudition rather than with learning” (Thurley 126). The kind of poetry Black Mountain fostered was refined rather than energetic, but more esoteric than refined. While considering as an outpost of modernist prosody in the neo-metaphysical 1930s and 1940s, Black mountain was positive, but at the same time negative, as a bastion of ideas just after the First World War.

The Black Mountain Poets found their source of inspiration in the writings of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams. Williams owed some sort of charisma that he could cast a spell on his contemporaries and the ones who followed him. He was revered by Robert Lowell and Allen Ginsberg regarded himself as a disciple of Williams. “Charles Olson

believed himself to have received from the master the divine fire and perhaps the apostolic succession” (Schmidt 649). He stood as a role model for Adrienne Rich enabling in her ambiguous decisive transition. Most of his writings are directly linked to the contingent world. His skills were inborn and he was a master of terse lineation, free verse and the sense of clear image.

Williams was a close associate of Pound. He stayed with Pound while at London and also had the opportunity to meet Yeats. He remained closer to the original Imagist practice and vehemently opposed abstraction and romantic subjectivity with a firm objectivist approach: ‘no ideas but things’. He was never satisfied with short Imagist poems, and from time to time attempted larger ones. He disregarded T. S. Eliot and considered him as “that renegade American who had thrown in his lot with the old culture” (Schmidt 648). He assessed *The Waste Land* as total catastrophe due to its stylistic choices and the negative attitude towards contemporary life. Frost was only a ‘stage American’ to him. His hostility towards Eliot prompted him to advocate and create an American poetry and idiom that was less in harmony with the traditional mainstream literature. He disagreed with any kind of poetic form and broke the conventional iamb so that his successors could replace them properly. He even combined prose and verse.

Pound’s seminal critical works *Guide to Kulcher* and *ABC of Reading* were the major influences on the Black Mountain Poets and

Williams's prose work *In the American Grain* had only a secondary effect. This book appeared to be a classic of proud provincialism like Mark Twain's fiction and Sandburg's verse. Black Mountain's supreme contention was that the puritan forefathers served America in a disappointing manner for they failed to identify the new continent as 'place', but they had an ethical approach and what followed was only due to their fault. All civilizations and cultures like the Roman Catholic, Protestant Church, Buddhism, Vedic, Aztec ... etc. were founded with clear vision. Only the contemporary time is stripped of it. Williams's book disavows all myths and it stands revealed as a Romantic mythopoeia. This sort of dreaming has been hailed as an American strength, but it is often a hurdle for Americans in accepting what they really are. They never like to be identified as the privileged descendents of pioneering Boones or open-hearted Whitmans, but as a vital hard-working European nation descended from 17th century English men with very strong notions of conduct and the necessity of political independence. It would have been impossible for them to establish a society, if they had wandered through the land as Williams imagined. Williams puts all the blame on the puritans, but in effect this attitude itself is puritanical. The problem with a puritan is that he refuses to accept himself as he really is. "We can see this spirit at work in the American intellectual's migrations to Paris in the 1920s, we see it at work today in his violent denunciation of America as she really is – a

strange mixture of idealism and cynicism, ruthlessness and generosity, power and weakness, perspicacity and myopia” (Hoffman 43).

Similar type of distraught Puritanism makes its presence felt in Black Mountain poetry and poetics especially in the works of Charles Olson. Olson takes the notion of ‘place’ from Williams. For the Imagists, “a particular openness of the sensibility, an active awareness, a vigorous patience with phenomena, was an important part of the poetic enterprise” (Thurley 127). Williams lacked this awareness due to his tendency to bring forth ‘place’ into a concept resulting in the sacrificing of the actual vigilance of the sensibility to a blurred chauvinistic cult of America. This cult has been dramatized by Williams in *Paterson*, his long poem. When we take Pound’s *Cantos* in conjunction with *Paterson*, we can observe that, it has ‘slackened’ the American writing in the post war period. The poem is devoid of any particular objective and the poet diffuses himself in images. To a certain extent, this slackness is disguised by Olson in the quasi dynamic theory of projective: “get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs the acts, the split second acts, the whole business, keep it moving as fast as you can citizen” (Spender 228).

Robert Creeley often quotes Whitehead’s words that explain the human as “ego object in field of objects.” Though the Black Mountain poets had some affinity to Pound and Williams, it is hard to classify them

as their linear descendants. Olson's firm belief, "the first fact of our survival in this world is space, not time" sets him in a different field from that of Pound. This distancing is visible in their major works. "...despite Pound's enormous scope, or what Pound conflates in the present poem (*Cantos*) is drawn from a hundred histories, and points to moments within those histories" (Schmidt 662). Olson also depends on numerous sources for his poetic materials, but not the same as that of Pound's. Pound's voice along with the interplay of other voices depends on the fixity of their location while Olson brings material from varied sources and enters the poem from all sides.

One major allegation against Olson is that he wanted all history and human thought to be at his disposal like Pound. He was not very consistent and often careless leaving many projects and even thoughts (during conversation) unfinished. In addition to Williams, he is indebted to D. H. Lawrence who instigated him to find a logical order for the material world which was addicted to chaos and confusion and was raging and set apart. He defined "what the human in humanism might be, rather than what it was" (Byrd 37) with the assistance of Alfred North Whitehead.

Open Field theory of Charles Olson has some affinity to the Beats, the New York Poets, Theodore Roethke's plunge in the "pre-conscious", the dream work of John Berryman's poems, the muted psychology of Randall Jarrell's monologues and with the whole confessional movement

(McClatchy xxi). Olson's attack on the "interference of lyric as ego" was one of the major reasons for the decentering of poetic self in the anti-confessionalist experimental poetry of the 1950s and 1960s. For example, confessionalists like Plath and Sexton worked from a Post-Romantic or Yeatsian model of the mythologized unified lyrical self as the pivot of poetic discourse and mocks at Olson's poetics and detracts from any endeavor to formulate a meaningful counter poetics in the post New Critical era.

Black Mountain gave adequate attention to literature and eminent figures had been both teachers and visitors there. Thornton Wilder, Aldous Huxley, Henry Miller, Irwin Panofsky, and Anais Nin paid visits at different occasions. Prominent among the faculty include Eric Bentley, Paul Goodman, and Alfred Kazin during the 1940s. M. C. Richards taught creative writing and Hilda Morley taught 17th to 19th century literature. It was Edward Dahlerg who taught at Black Mountain for a short period during 1948 proposed to hire Olson for he thought Olson would be an ideal person to fill a gap and to deliver lectures on different topics.

A key point that is prominent while discussing on the Black Mountain is the concept of experiment and it is treated in a generically positive appellation whether in the context of education, community or art and literature. It is noteworthy that experiment dumps diverse practices under a single category that appears appropriately to represent both artistic

avant-gardism and political progressiveness. Even then the concept of experiment was varied to different Black mountain personnel. The major reason for this contradiction is due to the compound meaning of the term experiment and its shifting relations to the principles of innovation, culture and tradition.

PERHAPS, ULTIMATELY, it was about more seeing than about an idea. When one looks at the work of the diverse talents, that at one time or another composed BMC, an underlying factor seems to have been the desire to see in a new way, free from previous restrictions. Looked at distinct from the rhetoric that bound and binds so much artistic endeavor, the art is free to be seen afresh. When there is a use of abstraction, as there so often was in those days, may be now it can be seen less as an idea than a way of seeing.

(Harris, "Experience and Experiment" 5)

The word 'Experiment' has its roots in the Latin *experiri* which means 'to try or put to test'. 'Experience' and 'experiment' were interchangeable in the English language until the eighteenth century. Later 'experience' came to indicate something that has been previously tested, that is a past accumulation of knowledge or skill, to quote Raymond Williams: "lessons against innovation or experiments" (126). Experience continues to carry an alternate meaning, such as a total and active awareness or consciousness,

or an experiment with, testing of or trying to something.

The complexity in the definition of experience as either the past (tradition), or that which is freshly experienced (innovation), had the effect of splitting the meaning of experiment to include both 'testing under controlled circumstances', and 'innovative acts or procedures' more generally. (Diaz 40)

Experiment is a scientific term which is sometimes associated with systematic procedures like scientific methods which stand for previously defined hypothesis under test, and also in trials of new or alien experience in which results are not forecast in advance.

Twentieth century is noted for writing and discussion of poetry and both have been closely interrelated. Many poets have either created some terms to define their works or linked them to the theories of the age or movement in which they belonged to. It was a period in which poetry was self-conscious and at the same time self-reflexive. The poets of the English speaking world achieved their lead from the writers and the visual artists of the European continent whereas Black Mountain College was an interdisciplinary organization in which people of diverse talents had their rare chances of experimentation. T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound were major luminaries whose influence is highly disproportionate to the number of books that belong to their credit. This tendency progressed when the

century persisted and the groups themselves became entirely distinct. “Some groups such as Black Mountain and Language Poets, formed conscious alliances and shared principles” (Roberts 2). Poets of other movements like ‘Confessionalism’ also gained from the label of their origin and their utterances had more to do as members of the group than taken separately as individuals.

The people who constituted Black Mountain College were creative writers or artists as well as academicians. The relation of poetry to academy was not at all comfortable during the 20th century. William Carlos Williams accused T. S. Eliot for transferring poetry to academics and there were many, who were poets and at the same time faculty in some university, abused the English Departments from time to time even though they were being paid from there. American universities have classes in ‘creative writing’ - especially poetry and professional poet here means someone teaching ‘writing’.

The innovative ‘Experimental Verse’ functioned as the impetus in the origin of many literary movements of the 20th Century. The young American poet John Gould Fletcher left Harvard for Europe in September 1908 and he explains his motives of this pilgrimage in his autobiography, *Life is My Song*: “I had come abroad to try to acquire an education, to learn something concerning the aesthetic, moral, and spiritual values by which man was made worthy of the world he lived in, and which had created

man's highest civilizations" (34). His mission was to find out values that were existing and functioning anywhere in the world to enable him to make more of himself for he found life in America a complete failure to the adjustment of standards. Fletcher felt that idealistic poets of his generation were eager on 'self-exile' due to "a profound alienation from contemporary America, an uncertain sense of identity, a yearning for permanent aesthetic and spiritual values in the great centers of European civilization" (Witemeyer 7). He could find a congenial company of like minded people in Europe. He joined the Guild Socialist Movement in 1910, and he was engaged in the poetic revolution – Imagism in 1914. This can be considered as an example of the interaction of the European and American energies that was instrumental in the emerging of the modernist poetry during the earlier part of the 20th Century. Scholars often term the revolution in the arts of the period as "International Modernism" (Kenner 3-4) with the transatlantic connections in mind.

Similarly, three Black Mountain professors – Joseph Albers, John Cage and Buckminster Fuller – were noted for their rival methodologies of experimental art. All of them claimed to practice experimental production focusing on innovations, avoiding all means of personal expression. There wasn't any scope for competing conceptions and their experimental procedure was interrelated to art and life and thus imbued art with crucial relevance. Albers found experiment embracing "all means of opposing

disorder and accident” (Gromringer 171). It is a means of testing established social and historical understanding in arts against deceptive optical illusions. According to John Cage, “the word experimental is apt, provided, it is understood not as descriptive of an act to be later judged in terms of success or failure, but simply as an act the outcome of which is unknown” (13). The third among them, Fuller feels that “experimental procedures are those by which the ‘valid data’ of what is really going on in nature can be formulated conceptually by artists (also known as ‘comprehensive designers’) thereby exposing the conventionalized knowledge claims (myths) of an overly specialized society” (Zung 107). The above mentioned experimental models symbolize the ways of post war art practice and their elements were sampled and a few adopted by Black Mountain students, faculty and its practitioners. All the three Black Mountain teachers attempted to establish experimentation in opposition to subjectivity, self-expression and direct immediacy. Charles Olson was a promoter of this ideology.

Expressionism embodied in visual art practices like those of Kooning, Franz Kline and Robert Motherwell and in literature it paralleled inexpressive literary modes such as those of Charles Olson and Robert Creeley. It also “counter posed the experimental models represented by Albers’s work with contingency in design, Fuller’s scientific tests in coordinating structure to effects and Cage’s indeterminacy” (Wicker 41).

Charles Olson formulated an idealistic form of collaboration for the sake of immediacy, spontaneous production and self expression. Olson's student and the poet Jonathan Williams quotes him: "You've got to take hunches, you've got to jump and then see what – you've got to operate as though you knew it. Take chances, jump in there and see what happens" (Duberman 406). The confused nature and the consequences of experiment at Black Mountain are to be viewed in themselves with other counter tendencies towards expression.

Olson collaborated with dancer/choreographer Katherine Litz, artist Ben Shahn and composer Lou Harrison and staged a 'glyph' exchange that focused on spontaneity and interdisciplinary collaboration in 1951. Olson, like his mentor Ezra Pound, was fascinated by hieroglyphs and ideograms, distinguished between the customary associations of arbitrary phonetic systems and the diverse meanings associated to ideogrammatic images. A 'glyph' is a kind of carved ideogram whereas a 'pictogram' is derived from literal pictures, and combinations of pictograms create ideograms. In an arbitrary phonetic system, a linguistic sign has no relation to its referent, that is, a system in which words have no relation to the objects that they describe (Diaz 61).

Louis Adamic visited Black Mountain for three months in 1935 and in the fall of 1937. He was impressed by the ideas and visions of its founder J. A. Rice. He became interested in certain facts of its educational

and communal character and life. His essay “Black Mountain: An Experiment in Education” presents a glimpse of Rice’s educational vision focusing on the fundamental ideas that remained viable and goal oriented throughout the academic career of the College. “Black Mountain College is one of the smallest colleges in existence”, wrote Adamic,

at first inevitably, now deliberately so. It is not only a place where one can take most of the courses available in other colleges, but where one is obliged to live as an integral part of a close knit social unit; so close knit indeed that it has characteristic of a huge family and this latter fact is as important in the scheme as is class work. (“Education” 520)

He strongly believed that Black Mountain would serve as a vehicle for social change, an antidote to the individualism that he saw striking contemporary society. His notion of an ideal educational institution found its fulfillment in Black Mountain College. His belief was that:

The job of a college is to bring young people to intellectual and emotional maturity... the college should take account of the whole being and be a sort of second womb from which young people are born to all-round human maturity. (“Black Mountain” 17)

He discusses the significance of the term ‘to get education’. This highlights the fallacy of the prevailing educational system for education is something

to be 'experienced' and one can 'get' only information and facts. Most of the university institutions were filling the students with information and facts and this knowledge was only related to the past. It won't prepare a student to face the future effectively. He is of the opinion that there are some 'stubborn' facts in Physical Science and Mathematics which ought to be comprehended thoroughly, and when one passes this stage, he is in a realm of imagination. It is quite common with the scientists that though they are well versed in the factual world, they fail miserably in the world of imagination. The goal of humanities should be truth and education and not mere 'head-stuffing'.

The kind of education offered in most of the colleges, especially in the undergraduate level never makes a person competent enough to face real life. Adamic cites examples from different branches of learning to prove how they fail in achieving objectives. The professors of queen of learning, Philosophy, do not profess philosophy, they only quote what others have said. One can find only 'reporters' not philosophers in the university departments. The study of literature is concerned with biographies and antiquities. If someone goes for ideas, he will be stuffed with "stale criticism". "There is no life in it; it is like turning over empty cans and poking about in the rubbish" (Adamic, "Black Mountain" 56). Similarly, the primary concern of the professors in the departments of fine arts, music and dramatics is not living truth or ideas. They are occupied

with ‘foolish hope and painful duty’ that obstructs them from any kind of effective teaching. “They hope someday to turnout a professional dauber, designer, fiddler, or actor who will become ‘famous’ and they will be able to bask in his glory; meanwhile they are obliged to teach students to appreciate” (Adamic, “Black Mountain” 56).

Now the pertinent question arises – whether it is possible to train imagination. Adamic asserts that Black Mountain is at the threshold of an answer. The initiative of Black Mountain is to teach method against content and it stresses on process. Priority is not on facts, but how to handle facts. Facts can be transitory while the way of handling them remains the same. The world is in need of stability and order and the same can be achieved by placing proper emphasis on the way of handling facts, methods and the process of life. To achieve this goal, he is eagerly looking forward to the artists, who are not merely painters, sculptors, writers or musicians, but the ones who have ‘artistic’ approach or attitude to life as a whole. Their values should be more qualitative and modern by what they do or what they are engaged with.

Black Mountain appeared to be out of pace during the Eisenhower years even though it could make its own impact in the field of American Literature and American education. Intellectuals in pursuit of experiment were underestimated as ‘egg heads’ and literature was totally in the hold of New Critics during that period. New Critics strived to reinforce formal

patterns and traditions to comprehend the postmodernist sensibility of Olson and his associates.

Even during the final years of the College's closing in 1956, though lacking in formal organization with few conventional standards, the faculty and students cherished high expectations. Duberman says that "there was a firm hierarchy based on talent, toughness, intelligence and honesty" (Duberman 407). The atmosphere was conducive to creative writing and Olson was working on *The Maximus Poems* and Duncan, *The Opening of the Field*. Olson's interest was to continue the College in 'ideas and spirits' even after its closing down. One more issue of the *Black Mountain Review* was published and San Francisco Theatre Project 'A Black Mountain Satellite' outlived for a few months. Even though the contributions after 1956 are not noteworthy, it still survives with the vast and continuing influence of Black Mountain aesthetics on American art, particularly poetry. Olson was little known when he joined Black Mountain College, but when it folded he was at the zenith of an ever growing community of associates and students. His supremacy remained for a long time even if he had to face adverse criticism from avant-garde innovators and poets. During the forthcoming years, he was challenged by different language poets and Barret Watten, one of the leading proponents of the 'Language School', singled him out for attack.

Language poets, as the name suggests, concentrates their attention

on the language itself, not on the agent, which is the poet. Their central question was whether the Black Mountain poets in any way were being influenced by the Romantics. Watten attacked what he concluded as Olson's "ability to incorporate, almost physically, masses of 'evidence' and still come up with the essential scenarios of romantic subjectivity" (Watten 10). Olson was severely criticized in the 1980s, especially by those who shared similar ideas like that of Watten. Olson could come up by virtue of his fame and Watten says "One keeps saying this is Literature and eventually it becomes Literature. We read Olson, because Olson is read" (1).

Watten distinguishes between Olson's *The Maximus Poems* and Steve Benson's *The Busses*. In Olson's poem, the personal pronoun 'I' is dominant and it is perceptible as the person behind the words whereas in *The Busses*, "a formal argument intervenes to render ambiguous the real location of the speaker" (Watten 123). Herein lies the fundamental question, "whether poetry should begin with the poet or the poet's material" (Foster, *Understanding* 12). Looking from a political perspective, sometimes it will be mandatory for the poet to suppress his personal ego for the sake of more politically informed views – the view that 'the self is a bourgeois fiction'. Watten is more rational in his argument rather than intuitive while Olson considers 'personal response' as the only source of reliable judgment. Watten's position is in the very same place where Olson

denied and he asserts that “all his poetry is a response, projecting in its place a poetry that does not ultimately depend on procedures of apparent objectivity, analysis, and categorization” (Foster, *Understanding* 13).

Olson’s opinion is that these notions are being inherited from Greece and have fully corrupted the power of imagination. What remains with Watten is his ‘claim for technique’ as a dynamic approach to writing, that each poem expresses a particular technique, not a person whereas Olson reminds the readers the presence of “a person behind the words” (Watten 123).

Watten’s final impression is that *The Kingfishers* is an exemplary poem “in which an argument between discrete materials and different voices determines the voice of the poem” (Foster, *Understanding* 13). He found the poem “fundamentally as collage – a modernist experiment in dissonance, disjunction, and the search for new order as in T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*”. Watten failed to get hold of Olson’s ambitions. Olson could surpass Eliot’s convictions, and his poetry went beyond the concept of the ‘cerebral construction, that a language poet like Watten had comprehended.

For quite a long time, there wasn’t any sort of apparent break between the language poets and the Black Mountain poets. *This*, the magazine that earmarked the era of language poetry paid adequate attention to the significance of Black Mountain poets especially on their concept of the nature of words. They rejected Olson quite early for they wanted poetry to be ‘language oriented’, but Creeley was of great importance to them.

Ron Silliman, renouncing speech wrote, "... together with 'consciously raising the issue of reference, forced the poet to look ... at what a poem is actually made of ... language itself'" (xvi). Thus, there occurred a fundamental split in the two American avant-garde poetic movements. The language poets explained the poem as a construction, and the world there could be moved in the very same way as a carpenter moves 'lumber and nails'. But Duncan had a totally different view. He argued, "in no way believe that there is such a thing as 'just language' any more than that there is 'just foot prints'. Rather, it is human life that prints itself everywhere in it and that's what we read when we're reading" (Sloan 127). The major allegation of the Language Poets against the Black Mountain poetics or 'the voice poem' was that it badly depends on a model of communication and it ought to be challenged: "the notion that the poet (a self-present object) transmits a particular message ('experience', 'emotion') to a reader (another self-present subject) through a language which is neutral, transparent, natural" (Hartley 12). The Language poets affirm the prominence of the language over the subject and their message to the reader is that what they hear or read has its source in the language, not on the person who has composed it.

Black Mountain poetry is also concerned with language, the language that is expressive and not constitutive. Olson considered poetry in terms of "push, "projective" and "projectile". His poems are both "energy

construct” and “energy release”, that is his poems transfer energy from the poet all the way to the reader. Robert Creeley, cites a statement in the context of an essay that Alfred North Whitehead made in *Process and Reality*: “There is nothing in the real world which is merely an inert fact. Every reality is there for feeling: it promotes feeling; and it is felt” (*The Collected Essays* 145). Whitehead puts “the perceiving, feeling individual at the center of the universe” (Foster, *Understanding* 17). Feeling emerges within the self, not from the world that is from the language. A peculiar characteristic of Black Mountain poetics is that it explicitly rejects romantic conceptions of the self as an ego fighting in the world or as a passage to divine transcendence (Olson, *Human Universe* 59). Creeley’s belief was that words depended on the presence of the individual for their existence and the poem had its source within the individual. In order to attain life, poetry depended on rhythm, music and poetic diction.

Black Mountain did not appear to be an accidental place for the non-conformist freedom loving Charles Olson. It had the physical situation and history that he was looking forward to. It seemed to be a tiny island of unconventional thoughts and behaviour, moral and intellectual tolerance and the chief distinction was its isolation. It was far off from the contemporary American mainstream philosophy and it had a rural socio-cultural setting with conservative and mostly fundamentalist inhabitants. Olson possessed some previous knowledge of Black Mountain’s history,

that is, he had read *Harper's* article on Black Mountain by Louis Adamic. This report was a source of inspiration to an idealistic and discontented young academic of Olson's generation. It "had focused on Black Mountain's downplaying of traditional educational 'solidities' (like buildings, credits, grades) in favor of intangible spiritual and intellectual values – especially new ideas, no matter how advanced, tenuous or imponderable" (Clark, *Charles Olson* 142). It was the intention of Rice to upgrade the role of creative inquiry by abandoning all traditional, fragmentary structures in education. Black Mountain School represented an educational experiment in all aspects – without requiring past's prevailing rules and regulations, but absolute dedication and commitment to the uncertain future.

Olson's ability to involve with his ideas personally, experimental intensity to shape thoughts, the quality of challenge and adventure in the conjectural gamble he proposed, enabled him to realize the thoughts of his listeners with considerable 'suspension of disbelief'. From the very beginning itself, "Olson threw his energies forward to pierce it to the root" (Clark, *Charles Olson* 142). The underlying message of his thought was to "stick to where your passions take you" (Clark, *Charles Olson* 142). In his 'willingly attentive' students, Olson found his audience. Not only that, he possessed personal charisma to block any type of argument because of his political back ground. "I came with no ideas; Black Mountain did it all,"

(Bollobas 12) he said once to stress the existing spirit of the place.

Olson was a very persuasive teacher and wanted to reorganize the vision of his students. Duncan says that Olson considered education as a “kind of spiritual attack ... He wanted things to happen in them spiritually” (qtd. in Charters, Introduction 11) Supporting this view, John Cech wrote: “He had one object: he was out to convert your soul, at least to compel the awareness that you had one and that it sang and cried” (qtd. in Aiken, 26). Classes were held according to the inner rhythm of the teachers during the course of Olson’s administration. Olson’s free spirit automatically created an ideal working condition and academic atmosphere conducive to both students and teachers. Robert Creeley was asked to deliver his first class on the very same day of his arrival after several days of travel. The students were insistent on learning and Creeley recalls that this attitude physically took him to class. The students used to say “we’re here to be taught” (qtd. in Charters, Introduction 2).

As Albers had insisted, the College virtually turned into an ‘arts center’ with Olson as its rector, but the emphasis shifted from visual to verbal arts.

It was now a distinctive place attracting people who had formulated their visions and philosophy of action around ideas of process and energy, field, personal voice, randomness, spontaneity, playfulness, primitive or preliterate

traditions. (Bollobas 14)

Ed Dorn finds it as an ideal place for poets, a camp of ‘alive people’. Black Mountain provided a creative context for teacher and poet alike, a typical learning atmosphere where one would belong to. GERAL VAN DE WIEK, one of Black Mountain’s students, remembers with gratitude, “I don’t believe I ever in my life felt that I belonged to any place as much as I felt I belonged at that school” (qtd in Duberman 407). It was a ‘beloved community’ that pre-figured the sixties’ counterculture in many respects. In Olson’s words, “it was a live community: it gave that condition of liveliness when you feel you’re not asleep” (Bollobas 13). He considered it as a ‘polis’, a true communal city. At its peak of excellence, Black Mountain was a spiritual unit that permitted the liberty of walking in or out as well as magnetized members into coherence, providing them a sense of belongingness. This close intimacy stayed until the college was closed down. Referring to Duncan, Creeley and Dorn, Olson once said, “I got about five people who have given me any evidence that they know what the fuck I said” (Bollobas 14). Many of the ideas shared by the group had been formulated by Olson. William Aiken suggests that “Black Mountain might be regarded as a kind of Corinth for the early Olson community ... after a certain time, Olson in the figure of Maximus, like Paul of Tarsus, begins to communicate in letters, sent out to growing projective communities” (Aiken 33-4). Olson possessed genuine concern for the artistic salvation of others, and he owed

the spiritual capacity and inner radiance that provided him such a grant leading role.

The poets associated with Black mountain school of poetry assert the pre-dominance of the poet's self as the poem's cadence, music and structural integrity. Probably, the poem may not reveal what the poet is looking for, but it will specify the poet's sensibility on what it expresses. Emerson's contribution to American Poetry lies in his belief that "matter and spirit are perpetually changing; change is the fundamental law of universe" (Foster, *Understanding* 20). He identified poetry as a substitute to moral laws and in this poetry, every relation is a new word. This concept gave the poet enough freedom to pursue poetry on his independent will and the consequence was a vast sphere of chances, and Black Mountain poetry is one of its major branches. "Black Mountain Poetry is located in time; in the occasion of its composition; and, above all, in the physiological and psychological identity of the poet" (Foster, *Understanding* 18). These qualities of poetry define the American avant-garde literary movement.

When viewed superficially, Black Mountain poetry comprises different styles and forms, but "there are some common characteristics to be noticed in this poetry: the use of precise language, direct statement, often plain (even blunt) diction, metonymy rather than metaphor or simile" (Kimmelman 51). Black Mountain style was a reaction to the earlier poetry that possessed meter and rhyme, poetic diction and monumental subject

matter. It is continuation of the revolution begun by the Imagists and Objectivists. Imagism was not an American movement as a whole, but it had dramatic effect on Black Mountain Poetry. The Black Mountain poets are not subjective in the sense that they hardly give any personal colour to their poems, and there is a deliberate effort to avoid “adjectives and adverbs”. While describing the poetry of H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), Pound said, “poetry should be ‘laconic speech’, ‘objective’ without ‘slither-direct’ and containing ‘Not metaphors’ that won’t permit examination. It’s straight talk” (11). Black Mountain descended from its embracing of individualism from 19th century New England writers like Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Foster says, “Emerson’s essay ‘Self-Reliance’ gave the Black Mountain poets, despite their radical differences in personality, sensibility and general ambitions, a common apprehension about what a poem might achieve” (*Understanding* 13). These poets considered their poems as an extended self of themselves who are widely apart from the past that is orthodox in its very outlook.

Philosophically speaking, Black Mountain adheres to reality that involves the physical world and the whole humanity related to it. These poets derived this ideology from the latest scientific theories and movements that contradicted the concept of a ‘stable’ universe predicted by thinkers like Isaac Newton and Immanuel Kant. Olson adheres to scientific theories and his philosophy is more rational. Most of the poets of this

movement were greatly influenced by the modern ideas of Albert Einstein, his 'theory of relativity' in particular and Werner Heisenberg's "theory of uncertainty of relations" (Kimmelman 52). Physical reality was related to time according to Einstein and it was simply indeterminate and incomplete according to Heisenberg. Creeley's argument is relevant in this respect:

The world cannot be known entirely. ... In all disciplines of human attention and act, the possibilities inherent in the previous conception of a Newtonian universe – with its containment and thus the possibility of being known – have been yielded. We do not know the world in that way, nor will we. Reality is continuous, not separable, and cannot be objectified. (*A Sense of Measure* 115-16)

Black Mountain College proved to be an ideal place for experimental poetry, music and arts in America. The ideals were grounded firmly on Pound and Williams. The poets developed great sympathy towards the 'objectivist' poetry of Louis Zukofsky and others. The successors of Olson carried a tradition of exact perception, an avoidance of metaphor and celebration of the individual' and its repercussions can be felt in the "Beat Poetry" (Kimmelman 54). Black Mountain is not at all a remobilized version of the older movements, it was totally original and instrumental in establishing an innovative tradition in modern American poetry.

The movements of Olson's and Duncan's poems are constantly redirected so as to establish a field of 'disparate' elements. M. L. Rosenthal is of the opinion that Olson, Duncan and Creeley offer useful clues towards the kind of poetry that is possible in English Language. "Mr. Duncan's special gift is for a rather romantic lyricism, Olson's for a hard, concrete, yet melodic poetry sometimes like Hart Crane's and Mr. Creeley's for a high classical restraint and grace of the sort that Yvor Winters valued so highly" (302). Often they make deliberate efforts to control their poems to grow in an organic, natural simple way. It is not easy to conclude what Creeley's themes stand for, they are like fragments of Greek culture in some British museum and can be interpreted as the heel of Laocoon, a petrified piece of the sculptor's own heel or hand or shoulder (Rosenthal 302). At times, the objective self-observation will fail and the inner shifting of the mind does occur as it encounters its own elusive rhythms. Duncan puts it in "Strains of Sight":

the process above some moving obscurity
ripples out in the disturbed pool,
shadows and showings where we would read ...

what the question is.

where the heart reflects. (*Selected Poems* 32)

Creeley's reductionist methods, the proliferating open structures of Olson

and Duncan are not really new according to Rosenthal. The techniques employed are similar to the ones in *Mauberly*, *The Cantos*, *The Bridge*, *The Waste Land* or *Paterson*. “The real change lies in their focusing on the inwardness of the caught moment of consciousness as it flickers across the surface of deep awareness” (Rosenthal 302). This type of focusing is of prior importance to innovative thinking about form, for the proposition is that form is inherently ‘open’, a continuous process though the idea of completion is an illusion.

In spite of its short life, Black Mountain has assumed a prominent place in the genealogies of widely disparate fields human thought and imagination.

It has been heralded as one of the influential points of contact for the Europeans emigrating from Nazi Germany, as a seminal site of American post war art practices, as a standard bearer of the legacy of international communities such as Brook Farm, and as an important testing ground for proponents of progressive education. (Diaz 39)

The college had a wide reputation due to the breadth of famous participants, but it received an uneven historical treatment. Black Mountain appeared to be radical in some ways, but to a certain amount of people, it was a paradise due to its seclusion from changes occurring throughout the world of knowledge. It was a representative of early libertarian politics.

Poetry, that had little acknowledgement outside found recognition and sustenance under the patronage of Black Mountain. The general assumption of Olson, along with the writers that he had brought together, was that the poem always center on individual rather than tradition, creed or community and Robert Duncan said “Maximus called us to dance the Man” (*The Opening* 9).