

Conclusion

Among avant-garde writers and artists working in the 1950s, Black Mountain College was a well known site for progressive learning, intellectual freedom and innovative art practices. There Olson learned and further developed an extremely integrated, holistic approach to his art and theory. Rather than the intellectual alone, Black Mountain sought to shape what it considered to be the entire person. The College encouraged a communal form of life style, where cultural responsibilities should be explored alongside academic ones without overt reference to political positions or religious faiths. In this framework, the key to re-capturing a stronger, more vital cultural practice depended upon an immanent sense of identity rather than an ideological one.

As discussed earlier, Charles Olson's manifesto "Projective Verse" set out the key elements of this poetic, taking it back to Pound and Williams and it broke the dominance of the pentameter in English poetry which he addresses as "closed forms". "Open verse" is "composition by field" to him where one perception should give way to another perception and the poem enacts through the breathing of the man who writes it. Other than Olson's, Pound's and Williams's innovations have been carried over as a major strand of the tradition that descended from Whitman to most of

the Black Mountain poets like Creeley, Levertov, Duncan, Dorn and to several others. The typewriter, according to Olson, because of “its rigidity and its space precisions” assists a poet, “indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of syllables, the juxtapositions even of parts of phrases, which he intends” (*Selected Writings* 22). Olson’s manifesto is written in an obsessive prose and it represents a poetics of the emancipation of the self that he was aspiring for. Nearly all the Black Mountain Poets use this sort of their obsession with the process in their poems and such works will be the revelation of the unfolding of self.

Olson was privileged to have a poetic language capable of expressing his universe without any restriction. Gaining impetus from his projective stance, he developed this language and used it profusely in his writings as his warning to the controlled grip of metric writing. His language was not referential, mimetic and interpretive of reality, but a part of reality and his words possessed the toughness of objects. A poet must approach language in a very humble manner instead of trying to be its master. He experimented with the rich possibilities of violating the basic rules of grammar such that he gained entry into the inner circles and immanent order of language. Another favourite item of Olson’s experiment was parenthesis. He normally used it as an ‘insert’ in the main text or to represent some words in apposition. In his earlier poems like “In Cold Hell, in Thicket,” he used double brackets. Very often he used open parenthesis

or no parenthesis at all, still the insertions appeared as separate entities from the main text. 'Projectivism' demands laws of speech instead of discourse and the resulting poem will be conversational. Language was a process, an event and a happening to him. The barrier between space and language was so narrow in his concept. Through his fragmentary verse, he managed to convey a whole idea, and his greatest achievement was the creation of a language that provided space for such a whole.

Olson's *The Maximus Poems* is one of the most thematically ordered and coherent of modern epics. In spite of its apparent bewildering diversity, the poem possess organic unity with innumerable fragments coming into being as one unified whole and nothing will appear to be inappropriate. It reveals the immense use of open field techniques in a successful way and the poem acquires meaning once read along with projective theories. Despite its indebtedness to *Paterson* and *Cantos*, *Maximus* continues the push beyond the "half success" (Olson, *Selected Writings* 76) of the other two poems. The Maximus collection is innovative and its success lies at the fact that Olson makes his "historical material ... free for forms" (*Selected Writings* 76). The poem blows as a lance in the heart of the readers making everyone open to their own lives.

Olson's shorter poems are clear evidences of his emerging as a major poet in American literary history. His "Kingfishers" reveal how a careful blending of projective techniques add beauty and meaning to a

poem. Once the poem progresses through its ‘breath’ and ‘syntax’ the poet’s intended meaning gets disclosed. The purpose of poetry is quite different to Olson – it is “energy construct” and energy release. Through this poem, he proves that a poem should not read as a series of symbols and images, but as a verbal action or kinetic event. Every word has its own charm and a poet should be obliged to render such a charm all the way to the reader. Olson’s message in this poem is clear – “I hunt among stones”. In the midst of all chaos and confusion engulfing this world, there is still room for hope and redemption for mankind. His collected poems in *Y & X*, *Distances* and *Archaeologist of Morning* are also revelations of his projective stance.

Most of the poets associated with Black Mountain College seriously followed Olson’s insistence on the importance of breath. Robert Creeley is a prominent figure among them even though he often complained that “Black Mountain” was used in a general fashion. Olson was more instrumental than anyone else in encouraging him in finding his own position in the literary world. His letters to Creeley were full of provocative comments about aesthetic theory and clear suggestions for refining specific poems. Most of his early poems resemble the work of a “projectivist” poet as they contain varied devices associated with Olson. But it will be a mistake if Olson’s influence on Creeley is over estimated. Olson described the poet’s job with regards to spontaneity and his method

of conveying the feeling of proximity is determined by the artist's ability to make quick decisions about his medium and his eagerness to defend his revised product. On the other hand, Creeley valued clever, deliberate self inquiry for the sake of its genuine charm and for the promise of life controlling wisdoms, such way of thinking implies.

Denise Levertov also discussed the function of spacing along with William Carlos Williams and is more specific in her opinion compared to Williams. She considers the line-end pauses the same as that of a half comma and the pauses that occur between the stanzas, "harder to evaluate". In general, she says, "I believe every space and comma is a living part of the poem and has its function" (Sutton 173). Even the way the lines are broken is a functional part mandatory for the poem to her. In "The Tulips", she discusses in detail her vision of the pauses occurring within a poem and of the line spacing. She feels that many of the contemporary young poets consider the "breath idea" to mean the rhythm of the outer voice. They take it along with Williams's doggedness upon the American idiom and the resulting poems appear to be mere documentaries. Her idea is that the rhythm of a poem is determined by the inner voice of the poet who creates it and it reflects the flow of his consciousness.

Robert Duncan's poems are often preoccupied with spatial patterns which are collocation of images and allusions which may have some emotional appeal but with less spatial patterns. He never wanted to be

identified as a social poet and he considered himself as a technician whose interest was in the poetics and the aesthetic effects of his measures. Gaining energy from Olson's "composition by field," he experimented with the art of collage in painting. He is regarded a derivative poet who could combine different poetries and traditions into a new poetics termed as a "grand collage" which of course was a gathering of manifold thoughts. It is believed that Pound's ideogrammatic method should have served him the model, as it had been for Olson. His early poems "The Dance" and "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar" are noted for their achievement of lightness and a grace of movement and thus they can be compared to Pound's best poems. But his poems fail to achieve the vigour that Pound's verses possess. His delicacy of manner is found to be more effective in his dealing with distanced subjects than in his treatment of personal emotions. His publications in *Black Mountain Review* and *Origin* reveal his mature style and he derived a poetics based on the generation of poetic forms from within the poem with special focus to the idea that form was an extension of content.

The poets Paul Blackburn, Paul Carroll, William Bronk, John Wieners, Jonathan Williams, Larry Eigner, Theodore Enslin, Ebbe Borregard, Russell Edson, M.C. Richards and Michael Rumaker are also associated with the Black Mountain group of poets along with the poets discussed above. A few of them never attended the College, but are

identified with this group due to their poetic styles or their representation in Black Mountain's literary magazines like the *Black Mountain Review*, *Origin*, and to a lesser extent, the *San Francisco Review*. The Black Mountain spirit actually merges within the issues of these magazines. Black Mountain College was a platform for almost all experimental poetry in America and much of its later fine arts forms and music.

The later Black Mountain poets found the poetry of Pound and Williams as their major inspiration, and in addition to that, they manifested great sympathy towards the objectivist poetry of writers like Louis Zukofsky and others. These writers sustained a tradition of precise perception with deliberate attempts to get rid of figures of speech especially metaphors, and a commemoration of the individual that can be perceived in the following Beat Poetry. They influenced the course of later American poetry through their usefulness for the poets later identified with the Language School. They played a key role in the development of innovative British poetry since the 1960s as demonstrated by such writers like Tom Raworth and Jeremy Halvard Prynne. The earlier poetry of Raworth has glimpses of the Black Mountain and the New York School of poets, especially Robert Creeley and John Ashbury. J. H. Prynne is a British poet closely associated with the British Poetry Revival and his earlier influences include the poets of the Black Mountain and the New York School, particularly Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, John Ashbury

and Donald Davie. Today, poets like Charles Potts follow the projectivist way of writing poems. Charles Potts' writings are of high mental energy and they are kinetic "open field" compositions like that of Olson. Hugh B. Fox defines Potts' poetry as:

dense with fast talk images and insights, streaming through planes of time – political awareness – environmental commitments – relationships – mental interiors – like the waters running through this book ultimately causing him to rename himself 'Charlie Kiot' and finally 'Laffing Water'".

Black Mountain lost its strength as a current literary movement, but a few more contemporary admirers of Black Mountain such as Susan Howe, Nathaniel Mackey, Alice Notley, Clark Coolidge and Gustaf Sobin are closely observed and admired now.

Black Mountain College's emphasis on community, free inquiry, creativity, and the experimental spirit attracted radical thinkers and fearless doers. It began at a time when America was undergoing the economic melt down of the 1900s and thus the course of its running was not smooth. It had to struggle with great difficulties that range from both financial crisis and lack of intellectual support. Still, people with dedication, sincerity and innovative spirit got involved with it and it supplemented them an environment that could bring into fruition their innovative ideals which often seemed odd in a conservative society. The communal way of living

that existed in The Black Mountain College can be considered as a modified version of the “Guru Kula System” that prevailed in India in the ancient times. This is a type of ancient way of education that was residential in nature with the ‘shishyas’ or students and the guru or teacher living in proximity, many a time within the same house. The ‘Gurukulam’ was the place where the students resided together as equals, irrespective of their social standing. Black Mountain was a liberal arts college where both the students and faculty were entrusted with freedom and it served as a nourishing ground for their innate potentialities.

There is wide scope for research with the rich literature available with these poets and a great deal of their writings is yet to come to lime light. Unpublished type scripts and manuscripts are still set aside at the North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh which attract Black Mountain enthusiasts throughout the world. The Charles Olson Research Collection at The Archives & Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut, features a wide range of materials which include Olson's prose and poetry, correspondence with more than 1500 individuals, documents from Olson's personal life, family papers, photographs, newspapers, atlases, books, journals and records from Black Mountain College. The bulk of the collection dates from Olson’s lifetime, 1910-1970 and some items collected as donations from friends, acquaintances and family members after Olson's death have been added

after to it later. The Literature Collection also contains papers of Fielding Dawson, Edward Dorn, Joel Oppenheimer and Michael Rumaker.

Various organizations are involved with the task of preserving the contributions of this innovative educational experiment. Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center at Asheville, North Carolina was founded in 1993 by Mary Holden to honour and pay tribute to the spirit and history of Black Mountain College and to acknowledge the College's role as a forerunner in progressive, interdisciplinary education with a focus on art. This organization is committed to spreading awareness of Black Mountain College's rich legacy, through its exhibitions, publications, lectures, films, seminars and oral history interviews. The mission of 'Black Mountain College Project' by Mary Emma Harris is to ensure that this unique experimental institution is of lasting interest and its heritage will be carried over to the generations to come.

The Black Mountain's contribution to American poetry is not at all a revised version of the prevailing literary movements, but rather something original and vital in modern American literary history. As an educational institution, Black Mountain lacked the infrastructure that the traditional schools possessed, but no college in US at that time was able to attract such a distinguished resourceful faculty. The College simultaneously succeeded and failed on a daily basis to realize its ideals. Its greatest contribution is the vitality it offered to the learning environment

and its greatest failure is that it was often unsuccessful in resolving the ideological differences and personality conflicts among the faculty. It couldn't attain a perfect form any time during the course of its running even though it was an idealistic but modest adventure in American education. The total number of its enrolment in the whole twenty four years was nearly one thousand two hundred but its impact is still inestimable and is continuing to reverberate in the fields of arts and education.