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What If?

What if for a reckless hour
we smothered our consuming passion
to invade every nook and corner
of the world, weigh, measure, add it up;
what if, for once, we ceased
to arrange and organize and regulate
and turn all to practical account;
what if we gave up our stored up
and sorted-out intelligence,
shut down the computers
that measure the GNP, ended mass
production, forgot about sending men
to the moon, and gave up our grasping,
manipulative spirit, our calculative reason;
if, even for a moment,
we no longer approached the world
as something to be attacked and conquered,
escaped our stupor of knowledge,
but accepted instead
the simple enchantment of say
the windiness of the wind,
the treeness of trees,
acquiesced to what they have to say,
abandoned ourselves and opened ourselves
to mystery--
would the world which now seems to be only
an inert and vast collocation of facts,
a cold vacuity, speechless,
touch us with insight,
enthrall our alienated heart
and sing jubilant alleluias
to the mystery of being
with the simplicity of its sheer presence?

Curriculum Planning or Some Other Ways of Looking at Things

By LAWRENCE OWEN

Chairman, English Department
Gustavus Adolphus College

Approximately 3300 years ago, a poet-prophet-priest named (perhaps) Moses, wrote: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Late in the 18th century the German speculator Herder wrote: "We live in a world we ourselves create." In 1893, Anton Chekov, the physician-story teller-playwright, wrote in a personal letter to a friend: "I'll begin by saying I'm ill. It's a vile, disgusting illness, not syphilis, something worse--hemorrhoids--pain, itching, and nervous tension; I can't sit or walk, and my whole body is so irritated it makes me want to slip a noose around my neck. I feel that no one wants to understand me and that everyone is stupid and unfair." Herbert Dingle, in his last address as president of the Royal Astronomical Society, said: "The universe . . . is a hypothetical entity of which what we observe is an almost negligible part. . . In cosmology we are again, like the philosophers of the Middle Ages, facing a world almost entirely unknown." The keen observer of bees, Karl von Frisch, wrote: "The evolution of living nature has been going on on this earth for millions of years, and there is no reason why it should stop now. Man too, as a member of living nature is bound by its laws. Like the animals, Man has to adapt himself daily to the demanding tasks of life. . . ."

These five assertions could have been taken, with slightly different wordings, from five--or 5000--other sources. Each of them declares a vision, a way of seeing ourselves, others, and our environment. A curriculum is a vision. The curriculum I announce here is an eclectic vision; from each of the five asserted worlds, I take what suits me.

1. From the God created world, where teachers are priests, I take the vision of hell at the bottom of Dante's Inferno, where Satan stands locked in ice, chewing forever on Judas

and Brutus. The curriculum should include instruction in caring, in being loyal to friends, and in refusing to murder.

2. From the human created world, where teachers are creators, I take the model of Albert Schweitzer, going with Bach and Jesus into a human world to heal and sing.

3. From Dingle's hypothetical universe, I take Brecht's Galileo, doing what is necessary to make it possible to continue making hypotheses.

4. From Chekov's painful world, I take the desire to communicate my individual sense of suffering and being misunderstood. I insist on cherishing my hemorrhoids, and asking you to cherish them.

5. From the naturalist's world, I take the process of a Henri Fabre spending decades asking questions of his pine beetles. His vision sent him out to ask, perhaps even to pray, certainly to hope, that his insects would show him their ability to reason. His honesty sent him back to his study, for decades, to record his latest observations that showed that pine beetles cannot reason. Stated thus, I conclude that we should have five departments, and that all students should be required to take experiences (courses?) in all five: Caring; Changing; Hypothesizing; Sharing; and Observing.

The five visions imply ways of being in the world: in the priest's world we obey; in Herder's world we create societies, languages, law, art, etc.; in Chekov's world we make hypotheses about our universe, we think, and, in Von Frisch's world we adapt ourselves to the laws of nature, or else. If it were possible for one person to be all these, that person would be liberally educated. A curriculum that encouraged students to try all these ways of seeing and being would be a liberal curriculum. Here is a definition of an integrated graduate of this liberal curriculum: A dutiful sufferer who, while participating in the continuing creation of society, makes and tests hypotheses about the universe, and studies those natural laws which control the evolution of nature.

The best possible guarantee, and this an imperfect one, that the curriculum will graduate such integrated persons, is to expose the students to integrated professors. No matter what names are used for courses, departments, and divisions, the professed ways of seeing and lived ways of being come from the persons in the courses. The curriculum is an announced way of seeing, and it is also a very successful concealment of persons who see. The English professor who lives with Herder in a world that is continuously

being created by humans, could reasonably be placed in a "department" along with the sociologist and political scientist who are persuaded that humans are busily creating their own world. The historian who sees humans living out patterns according to natural laws might just as well be a member of the psychology or biology department, if those departments are staffed by persons who view the world as did Von Frisch.

I can imagine a sort of Aristotelian curriculum with four departments: Knowing; Making; Acting; and Being. The graduate would be an intelligent artist who acts responsibly toward others while being an independent creature.

I can imagine a curriculum designed to encourage the development of human faculties: memory; imagination; reason; will; and the passions. In fact, it sounds pretty exciting to think of students enrolling in Will 219, or Advanced Memory 345, or The Passionate Person 499.

I advocate the flexible curriculum. I think we should write into the college constitution the inflexible requirement that the curriculum be changed every ten years. Curriculum problems are taxonomy problems. If the professors are required to taxonomize their professional activities, once a decade, they might maintain their ability to remember the problems humans encounter when they start dividing up the world.

Oral Storytelling and the Child's Development

By BRUCE KENT COWGILL
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A central concern among recent critics of children's literature has been the effect of storybook fantasy on the child's psychological and emotional well-being. The major arguments pro and con, especially visible in the storm which broke a few years ago over Maurice Sendak's controversial Where the Wild Things Are, have received detailed consideration in such studies as Anthony Storr's "The Child and the Book," Michael Hornyansky's "The Truth of Fables," Donnarae MacCann's "Wells of Fancy, 1865-1965," and Nat Hentoff's "Among the Wild Things,"¹ to name but a few. Recognizing the considerable value of these efforts to fathom the influence of adult creations on the child's psyche, I personally remain more intrigued by a related question which to date has received much less critical attention: the psychological significance of that fantasy which the child himself creates and expresses orally. As an example of the relevance of this inquiry I want to examine a short story narrated by my own four-year-old son, using analytical criteria similar to those which have proven helpful in the evaluation of the written fantasy of older children.²

II

It had been a tradition in our home to read Eric a nightly bedtime story, and so when I suggested one evening that I instead tell him a story of my own creation I wasn't sure how he would respond. Perhaps because he was accustomed to hearing spontaneous fantasies during long trips by car, he quickly agreed to my suggestion, though with no great show of eagerness. I proceeded to narrate a short, conventional tale, stimulated in part by E. B. White's classic fantasy, Charlotte's Web.³

The Little Pig

"Once upon a time there was a little runt pig in a barnyard. He was so small that he was always being pushed aside by the bigger pigs whenever he wanted to get food or water at the trough. He would go to the trough and try to find a

place, get shoved back by a bigger pig, go to the other end and try to find a place there, only to be shoved aside by the greedy hogs at that end too. This happened to him every day. Finally he became so hungry and sad that he left the trough, went to a corner of the pig lot, and cried. After a while he heard a tiny voice asking him what was wrong. The little pig looked around and didn't see anything, and so he kept on crying. But once again he heard the voice saying "What's wrong?" This time it was a little stronger. The pig looked around and finally saw a mouse, who had come out from behind the barn to where the little pig could see him. The pig told the mouse that he was hungry and sad because the big pigs took all the food and wouldn't let him have any. Suddenly the mouse had an idea. He told the little pig not to worry and then ran away. Soon he returned, carrying in his mouth a nut which he had picked up in the woods. Then he left again, and a little while later he returned with all of the other mice in the barn. Every mouse had a nut in its mouth, and soon a big pile of nuts began to form. It kept getting bigger and bigger until it was huge. By this time the little pig was so happy he didn't know what to do, but he thought he should thank the mice for helping him. Then he began to eat. He ate, and ate, and ate, until he became a big, big pig. Finally he was so big that he went back to the trough. The other pigs looked at him and couldn't believe their eyes. And do you know what they did? They looked at each other, and then slowly moved over and made a place for the pig at the trough. He never had to worry about not getting food again."

Eric's response during the narration was noticeably different from his reaction during earlier spontaneous narratives he had heard. The rather frivolous atmosphere which had typified our story exchanges while traveling was clearly not present here. Instead, he listened to the tale with great seriousness, although it differed little in content from several he had heard on other occasions. That my narration had replaced something which he was long accustomed to take seriously--the bedtime storybook--may well account for this change, investing "The Little Pig" with a legitimacy which it otherwise would not have had.

In any case, no further mention was made of the story after Eric went to bed that night. A few days later, however, I came home excited about some research I had been doing into children's writing and mentioned this to my wife that evening at dinner. My inquiry, which to that point had dealt primarily with written fantasy, was concerned with what the child is able to create once he has attained a

rudimentary awareness of form. I was especially fascinated by the possibility that an emphasis on genre conventions does not serve to stifle the child's imagination, as our unstructured efforts to stimulate "creative writing" within the classroom have often implicitly assumed, but rather in a very real sense to liberate it. Put more succinctly, I was intrigued by the argument that getting a way of saying leads the child to a more profound way of seeing.⁴

As is usually the case at our dinner table whenever his parents are discussing a subject too complex for him to understand, Eric that evening felt ignored and made several efforts to change the subject. I finally asked if he would like to make up a story and tell it to us. He was immediately willing, but unable to think of anything he wanted to tell, and thus after urging him unsuccessfully to "think hard" I suggested a story about an animal in the jungle who has "a big adventure." Agreeing that this was a good idea, he soon decided to tell about a giraffe, which he said was his favorite animal, and quickly moved into the narrative:

Once upon a time there was a baby giraffe. He lived with his mother in the zoo. The baby giraffe couldn't walk, and he kept falling down, and getting up, and falling down. His mother told him he had to practice. Once they were walking along and saw a couple of birds. Then the zoo keeper came and put the food in the trough, but the baby giraffe couldn't reach it, and her mother wouldn't help her. She looked around and saw two birds at the feeder so she got something to eat there. Then she went back to the trough, but she still couldn't reach it. She asked her mother if she would pick her up, but the mother couldn't, so she laid down and took a nap. She had a dream and the dream told her to drink a lot of water and she'd get big. She could reach the water trough so she went over and drank and drank and drank and drank until she was big enough to reach the trough. Then she went and ate out of it. Then she laid down and took a nap. And that's the end.

When he had finished I asked Eric to tell us more about the zoo keeper. He said that he had a moustache, a nose and mouth "like yours," and a little dog. Then I asked how the zoo keeper treated the animals. "Kindly," he said. I also asked what the mother giraffe was like. "A little kind and a little cruel," he answered, adding that she was "a little bit cruel because she wouldn't help him."⁵ My final

question, "What do you want to call the story?", Eric first answered "Giraffe Not Helping," but he soon decided that he would rather call it "Wildlife" and settled on that as the better choice.

III

Even a superficial analysis of the story, I think, not only supports the theory that an awareness of form liberates the child's imagination but suggests additionally that such an awareness can effectively be promoted at a surprisingly early age. "Wildlife," in both length and coherence, far surpasses any story Eric had created up to that time, his own awareness of its relative superiority becoming very apparent in his frequent references during the next few weeks, unprompted by his parents, to "my story." In recalling the details of my own narration, I realized that many of the conventions Eric had used came directly from "The Little Pig," and indirectly from dozens of other bedtime stories which likewise focus on the struggle of a small, comparatively weak protagonist for security in a world of large and often hostile forces (Stories otherwise as disparate as Rudyard Kipling's The Elephant's Child, Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit, Dr. Seuss's The Five Hundred Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins, and even Sendak's Where the Wild Things Are come immediately to mind, though I suspect a complete list would include a sizeable share of the favorite stories which Eric and most other children have heard by the time they enter kindergarten.)

Yet the indebtedness of "Wildlife" to "The Little Pig" extends beyond the noticeable similarity between two small animals who must somehow get big enough to obtain their rightful share of food from the trough. Less obvious than this conceptual resemblance but surely more important to Eric's development as a storyteller is the structural similarity between the two tales, more specifically, the use in both of repetition as the central device by which the materials of the narrative are organized. Thus in "The Little Pig" the runt makes repeated attempts to eat at the trough before retiring; the mouse speaks, is not seen, and so speaks again more loudly; and once recognized, he goes to the wood for a nut, returns, then leads the mouse society to the wood for more nuts, etc. In "Wildlife" the reliance upon repetition is even more pronounced. Eric has structured his narrative around three sets of repeated incidents: 1) the falls of the baby giraffe, which initiate the plot by suggesting the baby's insufficiency; 2) the three trips to

the food trough, the last of which successfully resolves the central dilemma by conclusively establishing that the giraffe is now sufficient; 3) the two naps, the first a troubled dream indicating a way out of the difficulty and the last a satisfied slumber assuring us that the problem has indeed been resolved.

To note the similarities between "The Little Pig" and "Wildlife," however, is but to establish a frame of reference for the very significant differences between the two, differences so pronounced as initially to suggest the child's unself-conscious manipulation of the formal conventions he receives for purposes of aligning his fantasy with what he perceives as everyday reality, and ultimately to suggest that his use of this fantasy is cathartic--a means of dealing concretely with the anxieties of growing up.

It is significant, for example, that Eric has ignored my suggestion to tell about an animal in the jungle, creating instead a domestic environment which may have been stimulated by the feedlot in "The Little Pig." Yet this surface similarity serves emphatically to underline a noticeable departure from the source, for if the runt pig finally prevails entirely through outside assistance the baby giraffe gains a similar independence almost completely on his own. The characters in Eric's story who appear potentially analogous to the helping mice in "The Little Pig"--the two birds--give no direct help and in fact do not even invite the baby giraffe to eat with them. His use of their trough is thus clearly both an independent action and a temporary one, the real solution coming later through the visionary dream.

It is also significant that Eric adds two characters who have no counterparts in "The Little Pig": the zoo keeper who briefly appears as a bringer of food, and the more important mother giraffe whose unwillingness to help the baby is such a dominant motif in the story. I think there can be little question as to why these additions have occurred. The conventions of "The Little Pig" and other similar fanciful tales have been modified, unself-consciously yet by no means haphazardly, to project a four-year-old's perspective of the family unit. In this world view the mother is by necessity a more central figure than the father, who is not present during most of those waking hours which the pre-schooler spends at home and whose most identifiable domestic role is, like the zoo keeper's, to provide. He can thus be seen as "kindly" in a way that the mother cannot, for upon her inevitably devolves the primary responsibility for releasing the child from the womb-like protection of infancy. That she is perceived ambivalently, as partly cruel, is

counterbalanced by Eric's obvious realization and subsequent delight that the baby giraffe is not only able to walk by himself but eventually to achieve complete independence and fulfillment. If the mother seems to become more impotent as the story progresses it is perhaps due to Eric's intuition that while walking can soon be learned through "practice," as the mother advises the baby giraffe, attaining true self-sufficiency will not occur until the child has become "big enough." This no mother--and no helping mouse--is able to provide.

IV

What general conclusions are to be drawn from this personal experience? Certainly not that as parents and teachers we submit every childhood fantasy to intensive psychological and structural analysis, however fruitful this may be on occasion turn out to be. Nor that from one isolated example we can safely make large assumptions about the pre-schooler's perception of reality and the fictional conventions he uses to project it, though my guess is that systematic research would show "Wildlife" to be fairly typical.

More important, it seems to me, is what the experience implies about 1) the potential importance of fantasy to the child's maturation⁶ and 2) the adult's role in stimulating an environment where meaningful fiction can be created by the child whose linguistic skills are still entirely oral. Now it is undoubtedly true that to some extent this environment evolves naturally, with no more effort than it takes to read good fantasy to children as early and as often as they seem to enjoy it. But I think we can go beyond this, primarily by making it clear to the child that we are taking his fiction seriously. And to take it seriously means, as Les Whipp convincingly shows in his analysis of the fantasy of older children, something more than merely listening to it with interest and approval. At the very least it means adult realization that the child uses fantasy in the same way mature fantasists have always used it, to explore reality and order the chaotic elements it presents. That the child does so unself-consciously should not obscure the fact that he is doing it, often to objectify everyday fears and anxieties.

But taking children's fiction seriously goes beyond this responsibility to be a receptive, perceptive listener; it also implies an active role for the adult. It assumes, for example, that we ourselves do willingly that which we are asking our children to do--namely, to create fantasy and narrate it orally. It assumes also that we ask the child

questions about his fantasy similar in design to those we would raise when considering an adult novel or short story we were particularly interested in--questions of plot, detail, character motivation, and thematic meaning--pursued out of genuine curiosity yet in language the child can understand. And it finally assumes, once the child demonstrates sufficient interest, that we raise simple questions designed to illuminate important similarities and differences between tales of the same genre. In such ways can the adult strengthen the child's intuition of those formal features which free the imagination by providing for it a functional idiom, a means of expression.

NOTES

¹The essays are all conveniently reprinted in Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature, ed. Sheila Egoff, G. T. Stubbs, and L. F. Ashley (Toronto and New York, 1969), pp. 91-96; 121-132; 133-49; 323-46.

²See especially two essays by Les Whipp of the University of Nebraska: "Understanding Children's Writing," and "Morning Haze," in Essays and Addresses on Composition, ed. Geoffrey Summerfield (Lincoln, 1968-69), pp. 37-50; 51-65.

³Not anticipating the subsequent developments, I did not record on tape either this story or the one to follow, and thus the versions given here are not verbatim. Both, however, are close paraphrases of the originals, the details of plot and character exactly as they were described. The differences are consequently mostly syntactical, since I have streamlined both narratives a bit by omitting those elements ("And you know what?" etc.) clearly irrelevant to the meaning.

⁴Whipp, pp. 61-65.

⁵The inconsistency of pronoun gender so noticeable in "Wildlife" is not uncommon in children's fiction throughout the pre-school and elementary years. Cf. Whipp, p. 43.

⁶Thus I would emphasize that the significance of the preceding is less the exactness of my interpretation, which admittedly is in part tentative speculation, than the conclusions to which any convincing interpretation of "Wildlife" must surely lead concerning the cathartic value of children's oral fantasy.

Swan Song

It is peaceful here tonight
with these tame wild ducks,
these geese, few people
and this swan.

As graceful in water
as she is awkward on land,
she knifes her bill under the surface
like the stroke of a violin bow.

Quiet, and moving as effortlessly
as a woman stepping out of her bath,
I say she is beautiful
preening and ruffling herself.

As easy as a glance
over a shoulder, she was home
but will glide on my memory
like a swan.

Dale S. Olson
St. Cloud, Minn.

Reading Can Be Fun

By ROBERTA BLOCK

English Department
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When I became convinced that many students in high schools never learn to like reading or to perceive it as a pleasurable way to spend leisure time, I designed an Independent Reading elective in which students would spend their class periods reading. I wanted to offer an alternative to the elective class in which the teacher decides upon the reading list before the students enroll and then assigns the whole class the same book to be read, discussed and written about. There seemed to be a need for a course that would allow students to read at their own pace books that they would individually choose.

When setting up this course, I decided to use a classroom in the back of the library to help provide an atmosphere conducive to reading. The librarian, who was very excited at the prospect of having classes of students meeting regularly in the library, offered her services as a consultant and provided a large cart on which I could place paperbacks and hardbacks that we thought students would like to read or should be exposed to. We included novels, short stories, plays, poetry, essays, autobiographies and biographies that spanned centuries, interests and reading levels. Most of the students initially choose books from the cart, which was kept in the classroom. Eventually, as students felt comfortable in the library, they began to browse through the stacks to find other books.

When designing the requirements and writing activities for this course, I had to be realistic about how much students might accomplish in four 35 minute classes each week for twelve weeks. I decided that they would not become bored by reading every day and that I would assign a minimum of two hours of reading to be completed outside of class each week. In order to encourage the students to think about their reading, share their opinions with classmates, help me establish a dialogue with them and enable me to keep track of their progress, I required that each student buy a standard sized notebook to use as a journal and to write approximately three pages about each book they read.

On the assignment sheet for the journal, I specified a format for recording entries. When students started a book, they were required to list the title, author, number of pages, the date they began, and to leave a space to fill in the date they finished the book. I listed suggestions which included writing about the types of conflicts in the book, changes that took place in the characters, the significance of the title, a comparison to a movie version if they had seen one, any similarities to other books they had read, their feelings about the characters' decisions and lifestyles, and how they might have reacted in a similar situation. I was adamant that they only refer to the plot as a means of proving a point. At first, most of the entries were book reports, but as I encountered some provocative journal writing, I duplicated it for the class. These examples from classmates' journals helped them to understand the difference between summarizing and criticizing and also became a forum for sharing new books and ways of writing about them.

Halfway through the course, I assigned a paper in which they had to examine some of their reading in more depth than they had been doing in their journals. The topics included writing a lengthy letter to an author, writing several pages of a diary that a character might have kept during a crisis, writing a play in which characters from different books might meet, doing an author study, rewriting the ending of a book or writing a series of book reviews for a specific publication. In preparation for those topics which required research, the librarian came to each class to explain the use of the card catalog, the Readers' Guide and various other reference books. Writing a letter to an author proved most popular and memorable because some students actually sent their letters in care of the publishers and received personal responses from the authors.

When I had prepared my course objectives, activities and classroom for the four groups of fifteen students who elected Independent Reading, I quickly realized that I had to define my role in these individualized classes and establish a format for our daily meetings. I decided to begin each class with the whole group gathered in the library classroom for attendance, for sharing interesting journal entries or for introducing a new book that had been added to the cart. The students were then free to take their books and journals to their favorite corners in the library while I circulated among them, holding individual conferences on their reading and journals, suggesting new

books, offering encouragement and criticizing when necessary. The pace was often hectic, but I was usually able to talk with each student at least 3 out of every 4 class meetings. As time passed, I soon established the pattern of spending the first class of each week quickly checking with each student and then dividing the other three classes into more lengthy conferences. It was much more productive to read and orally comment upon a student's journal entry while the student was present than to take it home and write comments. The students seemed to value the immediate feedback and the opportunity to ask questions about what I meant. Frequent individual contact between teacher and students was essential in motivating them to read more and to respond to and analyze their reading.

After the first two weeks of the course, I realized that the journal entries were not sufficient for keeping track of reading progress or lack of it. I then began to use what I referred to as a "conference sheet," a plain piece of paper for each student on which I recorded each date that I had conferred with that student, the page of the book that he or she was on and my comments about completed journal entries.

The following is an excerpt from a student's conference sheet.

Conference Sheet

Name _____
Class _____

Date		
12/17	<u>Anna Karenina</u> ,	p. 315
12/19	" "	p. 330 (Christmas vacation)
1/11	" "	p. 629 (" ")
1/14	" "	p. 695
1/15	" "	p. 710
1/16	" "	p. 737 (absence)
1/22	" "	p. 806 (finished)

Journal--good use of examples and quotations to contrast the characters. Needs to explain more in her own words.

When I periodically examined each conference sheet, I learned much about a student's reading pace, habits and whether he or she was doing the minimum weekly reading outside of class.

From the first day of the course, when students asked if I would be grading them by how many books or pages they read in comparison to their classmates, I was careful to emphasize that this was an individualized course in which they would be graded on their own progress, effort, amount of reading accomplished and the quality of work on their journals and papers. Of course, this answer did not quiet their fear (and mine) of the grading becoming very subjective, for the only grade they were to receive during the course was on the paper. I told them that I would be asking them to grade themselves in an evaluation they would have to write at the end of the course and that they would be asked to determine a grade for themselves by counting the quality and quantity of their reading as 40%, their journal as 25%, their paper as 20% and their general attitude and attendance as 10%. The final process of grading was much easier than I had anticipated because the conference sheet I had kept for each student, the grades on their papers and their astounding honesty in their self-evaluations gave me more than enough information to determine an equitable grade.

As I was planning the course, I realized that it would be very difficult to evaluate its short and long range effects on the students' attitudes about reading and writing. In order to acquaint myself with the students' reading habits and attitudes at the beginning of the course, I designed a questionnaire which asked about the frequency of their reading and their attitudes about doing reading on their own. When the course was over, I gave them a similar questionnaire, but added items which asked how many books and pages they had read, how they felt about the journal, the paper assignment, meeting in the library, and the course itself. They also had to respond to questions which asked what they had learned about reading, what they had learned about themselves by working independently, and what suggestions they would have for improving the course. Twelve weeks after the course was over, I administered a final follow-up questionnaire which asked about their present reading frequency, plans for summer reading, present attitudes about reading and feelings about the course.

An analysis of the students' achievements in this course must take into account the type of student who would elect an Independent Reading class. My first assumption was that only students who already liked to read and whose grades were above passing would choose this course. After examining their records, speaking to their previous English teachers and meeting my students, I found that many of them had low grades and were considered poor readers. Some of

these students told me that they were taking this course because they wanted to improve their reading and were attracted by the opportunity to read what they wanted to and receive credit for it. In my initial conferences with students, a few admitted that they had never really finished a book before because it had been sufficient to just sit back in other classes and listen while other students discussed the book and then to read a plot summary before writing a paper.

I felt particularly pleased when these students did finish books and were so obviously proud of themselves. I knew when a student had actually completed and understood a book because of the conferences we had in which I asked challenging questions and they provided intelligent answers. In contrast to the group of non-readers, many of the students expected to go on to college and said that they were taking this course in order to learn to discipline themselves and structure their own time as they knew they would have to do the next year.

The preliminary analysis of the questionnaires (n=60) indicates that prior to the course students read an average of 3 books on their own every 12 weeks, and read an average of 10 books and an average total of 2500 pages during the course. From students' comments when the course was over, I learned that some of the students had inflated the number of books they said they usually read on their own before the course in order to impress me. In their journals, students wrote an average of 37 pages. When commenting upon the course, many students noted that they were amazed to realize that they had read and written much more for this class, in which quantity hadn't been specified, than they had for courses in which it had.

As I stated earlier, one of my primary objectives was to have students perceive reading as a more pleasurable activity after the course than they had before. Although many students initially reported that they liked to read, 71% indicated on the final follow-up questionnaire that they now read more on their own, after the course was over, than they had before they took the course. Eighty percent reported that they planned to do more reading in the summer of 1974 than they had in previous summers. When questioned about the value of the journal, 47% said that it had helped to improve their writing and 64% said that it had encouraged them to think about their reading. When asked to evaluate the course when it ended, 62% rated it as excellent and 32% as good. On the final follow-up questionnaire, 73% rated it as excellent and 26% as good. None rated it as fair or poor.

Although these statistics indicate a positive change in students' perceptions of their reading and writing, I would also like to offer some quotations from the students' answers to questions about aspects of the course. When asked, "What did you learn about reading?" individual students wrote the following:

I like to read more than I thought I did. It's a good substitute for watching T.V.

After reading a book I feel smarter. My mind feels energetic.

I can read faster than I thought I could. I have a better attitude towards reading because I found something can be learned by it.

Sometimes I used to think that people might put you down or think you're really strange if you were always reading or carrying a book around, but I've found that there are so many books I want to read and who cares about what people think.

I generally didn't read challenging books until I took this class. I didn't want to test my values as much as I do now.

I really valued the class. I do read more and plan to do a lot of reading this summer and the rest of my life. I enjoyed the class. I want everybody to take it.

When asked, "What did you learn about yourself and about working independently as a result of this course?" students said:

I learned that sooner or later I'm not going to have people telling me what to do so I am going to have to get myself to do my work without teachers or parents telling me to.

I thought that working by myself would be tough because I have never before been able to do it. Now I found out that I can.

I learned that I don't work well independently because I need a lot of pressure and more self-discipline.

I think I would like to write a book someday.

When asked to describe their feelings about writing in the journal, some students said:

It helped me to clarify thoughts and discover ideas I didn't know I had.

It helped me to improve my reading comprehension.

I had always thought of doing book reports (which I hated). This class taught me to show how the book related to me.

I felt like I knew my characters better after writing about them.

I wrote a lot of feelings in my journal and I'm not so afraid to write about them anymore.

I will probably continue keeping my journal.

The following responses are representative of those I received to the question, "As a result of your reading and perhaps the paper you did for this course, what did you learn about the school library that you hadn't known before?"

They've got a lot more books than you'd think and magazines plus all the other resources.

I never realized how many different types of books and information that the library has.

I learned how to use the card catalogue, where to find reviews written by professional critics and how to look up information about the lives of authors.

I learned that librarians are friendly.

When asked, "What suggestions do you have for changes that should be made in the course requirements, length, activities, or the teachers role?" many said that the class format was fine but that the course should last for more than the usual twelve week elective time. Other suggestions ranged from having the teacher apply less pressure to having her apply more. Next year I plan to incorporate suggestions that there be more time allotted for the whole class to share reactions to their books and that students be allowed to occasionally substitute oral reports for journal entries.

The above comments would explain why designing and teaching Independent Reading has been one of the highlights of my career. A teacher of Independent Reading should feel comfortable with the management of an individualized class. Although this type of course does not entail daily lesson plans, it does require extensive planning at the initial stages, flexibility to make changes as they are needed, fairly small classes, very efficient use of class time, voluminous journal reading, and the frequent availability of a library. The rewards come from the individuals' progress in reading and writing and from the opportunity to diagnose and work intensively with each student's strengths and weaknesses.

One of the indicators of the success of the course is that so many sophomores and juniors have designated it as their first choice for next year that we will be offering many sections during each trimester so that most students will be able to fit it into their schedule. Because students seem to need a supervised experience in reading for pleasure and seem to thrive in a class which offers a format different from other electives, it is important that English departments offer this opportunity and alternative.

INVITATION FOR MANUSCRIPTS

An invitation is extended to teachers and other educators at elementary, secondary, and college-university levels to share ideas on changes in classroom practices which resulted from "Re-Vision" or reflection or from external pressure. Each article should describe a change in classroom procedures relating to the teaching of reading, writing, speaking, listening, or to student evaluation, communication skills, film and media, emotional demands on students or teachers, or any other concern. Each article, which can range up to 2000 words, should describe the new practice, whether or not it was successful, and what stimulated the change. Two copies should be mailed before April 15 to Allen Berger, Co-editor, Classroom Practices in Teaching English, The University of Alberta Education Centre, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

The Move Toward Reality: A Study of the Poetry and Poetic Philosophies of Charles Olson and Walt Whitman

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Introduction

One hundred years after Walt Whitman's first publication of Leaves of Grass, the late Charles Olson was writing his "Maximus" poetry. The Maximus Poems are an extended sequence dealing with American culture in the small New England town of Gloucester, Massachusetts. Olson was also formulating his new poetic theory--"Projective Verse"--which helped to begin a large scale poetic movement at Black Mountain College in North Carolina and which has since influenced a large group of prominent American poets, including Robert Creeley, Denise Levertov, Robert Duncan, Paul Blackburn, and others. Both Whitman and Olson questioned the nature of the poetry that existed in their centuries, and both disliked what they saw and consequently became determined to redefine the concept of poetry.

The poetry of both men can be most effectively studied by considering their attitudes toward four aspects of existence: the self, reality, society, and the universe. An analysis of the similarities and differences between their approach to each of these categories reveals that there has been a significant change in the focus and character of American poetry since the nineteenth century. It becomes evident that the poetry of this century--epitomized by Olson and his poetic philosophies--often attempts to deal more directly with physical reality as well as with the physical and imaginative processes of artistic creation.

An intrinsic part of the poetics of Whitman and Olson is their concept of the self. Both men chose to present their poetry through the perceptions of a persona--Whitman's "Walt Whitman, a Kosmos,"¹ and Olson's "Maximus of Gloucester."² Although both writer's technique of using an ego-persona is similar, the two individual personas are

radically different.

Whitman's persona attempts the colossal task of encompassing everything around it. Whitman interweaves the urban and the rural, the living and the dead into a relationship with his self:

The city sleeps and the country sleeps,
The living sleep for their time, the dead sleep for
their time,
The old husband sleeps by his wife and the young
husband sleeps by his wife:
And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,
And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,³
And of these one and all I weave the song of myself.³

Later in Leaves of Grass, Whitman displays the expansiveness of his ego by absorbing all of America:

I match my spirit against yours you orbs, growths,
mountains, brutes,
Copious as you are I absorb you all in myself, and
become the master myself,
America isolated yet embodying all, what is it finally
except myself?
These States, what are they except myself?⁴

At times, Whitman's self-oriented conception of all things is not unlike the naively possessive child who discovers and celebrates the world only in terms of "me" and "mine."

Whitman also sets forth personal, deeply felt subjective perceptions throughout his writing. Due to the frequent confessional nature of his poetry, Whitman at times becomes a voluntary sacrificial victim whose own flesh and blood are pouring out through his writing:

Candid from me falling, drip, bleeding drops,
From wounds made to free you whence you were prison'd,
From my face, from my forehead and lips,
From my breast, from within where I was conceal'd
press forth red drops, confession drops,
Stain every page, stain every song I sing, every word
I say, bloody drops.⁵

Related to this feeling is the comradeship, concern and even intimacy which Whitman feels with his readers. In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," for example, he feels this kinship with his future readers:

I am with you, men and women of a generation, or ever
 so many generations hence,
 Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky,
 so I felt,
 Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one
 of a crowd,
 . . . Closer yet I approach you
 . . . I consider'd long and seriously of you before you
 were born.⁶

Whitman also has a desire to intellectually stimulate his
 readers, and at times the poet-reader relationship becomes
 almost physical:

Camerado, this is no book,
 Who touches this touches a man,
 (Is it night? are we here together alone?)
 It is I you hold and who holds you,
 I spring from the pages into your arms . . .⁷

Whitman's persona is also a perceptive individual who
 constantly looks through the objective reality of things to
 apprehend their spiritual significance:

Facts, religions, improvement, politics, trades, are
 as real as before
 But the soul is also real, it too is positive and
 direct.⁸

Thus, Whitman accepts nothing at face value, but has an
 ultimate faith in the spirituality of all things.

Throughout Leaves of Grass, "Walt Whitman, A Kosmos"
 becomes a well-defined personality. Because of Whitman's
 openness and honesty, one becomes well aware of the many
 facets of this man, including such things as his sexual
 drives, his distrust of the intellectual and his faith in
 experience, his egotism as well as humility, his patriotism,
 and his deeply personal love for the working class and
 common man.

Olson's Maximus is also a complex character, although
 less defined than Whitman's "I."

The most noticeable technique in Maximus' communicating
 is his fragmentary conversational style. This style seems
 to suggest that Maximus is sensitive to the complex chaos
 of life, and he reflects this in his statements. It also
 suggests that he is impulsive, and perhaps unable to con-

centrate his attention on any one thing for any length of
 time. But the style also imbues the poetry with a sense
 of breathless excitement and urgency.

Maximus at times instructs the reader about his
 philosophies concerning his poetic theory and his concept
 of 'things.' In the first poem of The Maximus Poems, he
 says:

one loves only form,
 and form only comes
 into existence when
 the thing is born.⁹

But most often, Maximus is concerned with the local
 events and histories of Gloucester, Massachusetts. He often
 relates detailed descriptions of the local residents, such
 as in "John Burke," or in this passage from "Letter 6":

Burke was raising his family
 in a shack out over the marsh;
 and Olsen, they now tell me,
 is carting sish, for Gorton-Pew,
 the lowest job, Gloucester,
 the job we all started with

young Douglas, who never went to sea,
 he's different, is in the front office
 at Gorton-Pew, was so good a ball player
 he got moved up, and fast.¹⁰

And again in "April Today Main Street," he shows a gossip-
 like interest in small-town occurrences:

. . . talked to the cop
 at the head of Duncan, discovered that Joe,

the barber, had inherited the Fredericksons'
 shop, that it was Mrs. Galler, not the Weiners

"winers" the cigar woman and the greeting card
 clerk in Sterling pronounced it

as I said her husband
 they said he died
 in front of her here
 in the store.¹¹

Maximus is also much aware of Gloucester's historical past, and he often utilizes historical chronicles which deal with the first settlements and early life in the area. "The Record" and "14 Men Stage Head Winter 1624/5" are two poems composed almost entirely of historical data, and in "Some Good News," Maximus/ Olson tells of the actual settlement of Gloucester:

a permanent change had come
by 14 men setting down
on Cape Ann, on the westerly side
of the harbor.¹²

. . . Smith
changed everything: He pointed
out Cape Ann.

named her
so it's stuck . . .¹³

But Maximus is not always so objective in presenting Gloucester's past and present. At times he relates intimate personal details about his own life:

This morning of the small snow
I count the blessings, the leak in the faucet
which makes of the sink time, the drop
of the water on water as sweet
as the Seth Thomas
in the old kitchen
my father stood in his drawers to wind (always
he forgot the 30th day, as I don't want to remember
the rent . . .

. . . Or the plumbing,
that it doesn't work, this I like have even used paper
clips
as well as string to hold the ball up and flush it
with my hand . . .

. . . Holes
in my shoes, that's all right, my fly
gaping, me out
at the elbows . . .¹⁴

And sometimes Maximus becomes almost bitter in his observations:

Men are so sure they know very many things,¹⁵
they don't even know night and day are one.

Maximus also relates what he feels to be a basic paradox in his intellectual existence. He realizes that although he is a complex and educated individual ("I have made dialogues, / have discussed ancient texts"¹⁶), nevertheless he has found that simplicity is the primary concern of his life. He contemplates this in "Maximus, to Himself":

I have had to learn the simplest things
last. Which made for difficulties.
Even at sea I was slow, to get the hand out, or to
cross
A wet deck.

The sea was not, finally, my trade.
But even my trade, at it, I stood estranged
from that which was most familiar.

. . . that we are all late
in a slow time,
that we grow up many
and the single
is not easily
known.¹⁷

Unlike Whitman, Olson's relationship with his readers might be described as informative and slightly withdrawn rather than intimate. Much of the poetry seems aimed directly at the reader; for example, the first poem of The Maximus Poems is entitled "I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You." Many poems attempt to convince the reader to adopt a new, non-materialistic simplicity in life, yet the observations are often objective, and hence the poems become less a personal comment from poet to reader than they do an exemplification of a way of seeing.

As a result of their respective philosophies concerning the persona-self, Whitman and Olson do not trust in the same things. Whitman believes that the individual self is most important:

I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand
God not in the least,
Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful
than myself.
. . . And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's
self is . . .¹⁸

But Olson relies little on the self, and instead trusts in things outside the self, as he states in his essay, "Equal That Is, to the Real Itself": "I take care to be inclusive,

to enforce the point made at the start, that matter offers perils wider than man if he doesn't do what still today seems the hardest thing for him to do . . . to believe that things, and present ones, are the absolute conditions."¹⁹

Thus, it is evident that there exist some basic distinctions between Whitman and Olson's conceptions of the persona-self. Whitman envisions the self as the nucleus of the universe; all things are subject to the self, and they minister to it. Olson's self is not center of the universe, but instead it exists with the objective reality of the things and objects which surround it. Maximus does not possess an all-encompassing and possessive ego as Whitman's "I" does, but he instead accepts his place and defines himself as one fragment of the immense collage of things known as the universe. Whitman's ego also recognizes this fragmentation of the universe, but it aggressively attempts to draw all the parts of the universe together into a new and orderly "Kosmos."

The next logical step outward from the poetic ego is into the world of reality. An analysis of each poet's conception of reality cannot, of course, be precise unless a definition of reality is given. For the purposes of this discussion, reality can be defined as the material things to which the poet reacts, in other words, the raw material of poetry, the worldly things which serve as a basis upon which the two men build their poetry.

In both theory and practice, each poet recognizes the extreme importance of "things" in their poetry. Whitman described the place of things in his scheme of the imagination in his essay, "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads," stating that "the true use for the imaginative faculty of modern times is to give ultimate vivification to facts, to science, and to common lives, endowing them with the glows and glories and final illustriousness which belong to every real thing, and to real things only."²⁰

Whitman's poetry displays two basic techniques of perceiving things in the world. First, he most often employs long observations and catalogs which often follow a general organic development. These catalogs might be thought of as linear, that is, moving in one plane of development in a step-by-step progression, as in "Song of Myself," when he talks of

The latest dates, discoveries, inventions, societies,
authors old and new,

My dinner, dress, associates, looks, compliments,
dues . . . 21

Whitman's catalogs often convey the motion, rhythms, and sensory excitement which he experienced in his rapidly growing and many-faceted nineteenth-century America.

Certain other poems show a different perception, "A Paumanok Picture" for example, in that they deal directly with a kind of objective still-life:

Two boats with nets lying off the sea-bench, quite
still,
Ten fishermen waiting--they discover a thick school
of mossbonkers--they drop the join'd seine--ends
in the water,
The boats separate and row off, each on its rounding
course to the beach, enclosing the mossbonkers,
The net is drawn in by a windlass by those who stop
ashore,
Some of the fishermen lounge in their boats, others
stand ankle-deep in the water, pois'd on strong
legs,
The boats partly drawn up, the water slapping against
them,
Strew'd on the sand in heaps and windrows, well out
from the water, the green-back's spotted moss-
bonkers.²²

In this unique photographic perception, Whitman creates not a linear catalog or list which develops an idea, but instead he suggests an entire scene through a series of objective 'pictures.'

In Olson's philosophy, the importance of things is equally evident, and he states in his essay "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself," that "'things' are what writers get inside their work, or the work, poem or story, perishes. Things are the way the force is exchanged. On things communication rests."²³

Olson, like Whitman, utilizes catalogs of objective detail in his poems. Most often, Olson employs historical descriptions and chronicles which become catalogs of early colonial activities; such as this section from "Maximus, to Gloucester, Letter II":

"The quarter Maisters", he declares,
 "hath charge of the hold
 for stowage,
 rummaging, and trimming
 the ship;
 and of their squadrons
 for the Watch. A sayne,
 a Fisgigg, a Harping Iron,
 Fish-Hookes for Pogoes,
 Bonatos or Dorados Etc
 And tayling lines
 for Mackerell."24

Some of Olson's poems are comprised of an objective recording
 of a simple experience. One such poem is from Book V of
Maximus Poems, IV, V, VI, and it concerns Olson's
 experience as a mail carrier:

up the steps, along the porch
 turning the corner
 of the L,

to go in the door
 and face the ladies
 sitting comfortable
 in the

chairs,
 and greet Simp
 with the morning's mail.25

But more often, Olson uses a collage of complex ideas and
 images in his poetry, and he often skips from concept to
 concept with a kind of syntactical gymnastics, such as in
 this segment from "Tyrian Business":

A hollow muscular organ, which, by contracting
 vigorously, keeps up the
 (to have the heart
 (a whorl of green bracts at the
 base
 (ling,
 she is known as
 Weather
 comes generally
 under the
 metaphrast.
 (When M is above G; all's
 well. When below, there's

upset. When M and G are
 coincident, it is not
 very interesting).26

The complexity of Olson's fragmented style is often compound-
 ed by the poem's physical arrangement on the page, as in the
 "1st Letter on Georges":

<p>Tow you out by 10 lb Island, & you'd sail out the harbor from there</p>	<p>So we went out, and were gone a week when the wind shifts SE, and with it snow. We laid out and hauled back, and we threw the lead over, and found we were in 6 fathom of water. So we took the mainsail in, and put her under rid- ing sail, foresail and outer jib.27</p>
--	---

Olson's tendency toward kaleidoscopic simultaneity seems to
 be a result of his experience with the chaotic and
 distractive reality existing around him. It might also be
 attributed in part to his projectivist philosophy that "ONE
 PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER
 PERCEPTION . . . USE USE USE the process at all points, in
 any given poems always, always one perception must must
 MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER!"28 The urgency of Olson's
 statement suggest that there exists a complex world which
 almost demands to be discovered; the poet must utilize all
 his powers of perception and observation in order to absorb
 all that he possibly can.

Although Whitman and Olson have basic similarities
 regarding the importance of the use of things in the poem,
 the two poets are far from being alike in their beliefs
 about the writing process and its relationship to reality.
 Whitman, for example, believes that the process of descrip-
 tion through the image has dynamic and creative properties.
 In "Democratic Vistas," he states "This is . . . the image-
 making faculty, coping with material creation, and rivaling,
 almost triumphing over it. This alone, when all the other
 parts of a specimen of literature or art are ready and wait-
 ing, can breathe into the breath of life, and endow it
 with identity."29 In Whitman's concept, the imaginative
 faculty of the poet grapples with reality and eventually,
 through the poetic images, gives it a lifelike quality.

Olson, on the other hand, does not see the image-making
 faculty as an active enhancer of reality. From Olson's
 point of view, "All that comparison ever does is set up a

series of reference points: to compare is to take one thing and try to understand it by marking its similarities to or differences from another thing . . . such an analysis only accomplishes a description, does not come to grips with what really matters: that a thing, any thing, impinges on us by a more important fact, its self-existence, without reference to other things."³⁰ Thus, Olson sees the reality imposing its existence upon the poet, rather than vice-versa. This sense that reality possesses a self-assertive existence is demonstrated in "Letter 9" of *The Maximus Poems*:

I, dazzled
as one is, until one discovers
there is no other issue than
the moment of
the pleasure of
this plum,

these things
which don't carry their end any further than
their reality in
themselves.³¹

Olson's concept of reality is not unlike the Zen Buddhist philosophies, which state that "reality itself has no meaning since it is not a sign, pointing to something beyond itself. To arrive at reality . . . is the very life of the universe, which is complete at every moment and does not need to justify itself by aiming at something beyond."³² Thus, for Olson, the use of reality and things in poetry is not a means to an end. Instead, he sees the poet as an object existing within the realm of "things," and hence, ideally, reality becomes an objective condition.

Whitman's reality is usually an intensely personal and subjective thing; it is experienced in terms of the self, as stated in "Song of Myself":

I have instant conductors all over me whether I pass or
stop,
They seize every object and lead it harmlessly through
me.³³

And this process of perception and absorption is twofold; Whitman sees an inherent duality in the reality which surrounds him, and he uses things both as an end in themselves, and as a passageway to gain spiritual knowledge about them.

Whitman and Olson's concept of America is another integral part of their poetry which might be analyzed.

Throughout *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman concerned himself with both the whole of America as well as many of its individual facets. He regarded it as a huge, potentially great country, and it was his desire to consolidate and unify it into a national identity. In his preface to the 1872 edition, he said that "*Leaves of Grass*, already published, is, in its intentions, the song of a great composite Democratic Individual, male or female . . . I suppose I have in my mind to run through the chants of the Volume . . . the thread-voice, more or less audible, of an aggregated, inseparable, unprecedented, vast, composite, electric Democratic nationality."³⁴ Because of this attitude Whitman also looked ahead to the future, and hoped that the country would grow into this "great composite" that he had envisioned. He states in "Democratic Vistas" that while "Assuming Democracy to be at present in its embryo condition, and that the only large and satisfactory justification of it resides in the future . . . I must do the best I can, leaving it to those who come after me to do much better."³⁵ This idealism developed in Whitman to the extent that he felt little reason for criticisms of the country, and many reasons for being arrogant. For example, in "Starting from Paumanok," he proclaimed America to be:

Expanding and swift, henceforth
Elements, breeds, adjustments, turbulent, quick and
audacious,
A world primal again, vistas of glory incessant and
branching,
A new race dominating previous ones and grander far,
with new contests,
New politics, new literatures and religions, new
inventions and arts.³⁶

While Whitman looks to the future with unending optimism, Olson often looks with disillusionment at the development of twentieth century-America and the egotism of his fellow countrymen. He sees man as a gluttonous creature who hoards and misuses his natural resources:

follow us who
from the hustings ("trash"),
industrial fish
are called which Gloucester
now catches

. . . anything
nature puts in the sea
comes up
. . . from a ship's hold

to the truck
which takes it to the De-Hy
to be turned into catfood
and fertilizer.³⁷

In another poem, Olson states that some New England fishermen want "to start to make any ocean / a Yankee lake."³⁸ Olson is also disgusted at man's pollution of natural resources:

Part of the Flower of Gloucester

from the sunsets
to the rubbish on the Harbor bottom
fermenting so bubbles
of the gas formed from the putrefaction
keep coming up and you watch them break
on the surface and imagine the odor
which is true
at low-tide that you can't stand the smell
if you live with Harbor Cove or the Inner
Harbor to your side.³⁹

Another major problem in twentieth-century America as Olson sees it is the large scale control and outside ownership of industry. In "Letter 3," he declares:

Let those who use words cheap, who use us cheap
take themselves out of the way
Let them not talk of what is good for the city

Let them free the way for me, for the men of the fort
who are not hired, who buy the white houses

Let them cease putting out words in the public print
so that any of us have to leave, so that my

Portugese leave,
leave the Lady they gave us, sell their schooners
with the greyhounds aft, the long Diesels
they put their money in, leave Gloucester
in the present shame of,
the wondership stolen by,
ownership.⁴⁰

As a result of this loss of economic control for the individuals of Gloucester, Olson recognizes that the concept of a democracy is no longer fair. The common man is even alienated from the country's actions of war and destruction by the cheap and deceptive words of manipulation:

we do it all
by quantity and
machine.

. . . they put Smith down
as, and hire a Standish
to do corporative
murder: keep things clean,
by campaigns

drop bombs. One cries Mongols
instead.⁴¹

Thus, Olson sees Whitman's dream of a free and ideal democracy as having expanded out of control and become a materialistic monster which turns its back on the individual man in America. Commercialism and large industry are destroying the livelihood of the Gloucester fishermen, and in the opening poem of The Maximus Poems, Olson attempts to mobilize these local people:

(O Gloucester-man,
weave
your birds and fingers
new, your roof-tops,
clean shit upon racks
sunned on
American

braid
with others like you, such
extricable surface
as faun and oral . . .
o kill kill kill kill kill
those
who advertise you
out).⁴²

When his poetry is viewed from a broad perspective, it appears that Olson is unwilling or perhaps unable to cope with the enormous complexities of twentieth-century American society. His poetry celebrates not a composite society, but instead, with some echoes of W. C. William's Paterson, he concentrates upon the local life in one small town.

Whereas Whitman celebrates the prospects of a coming democracy, Olson laments the loss of true democracy in a country where too few men greedily hoard the wealth and where too few individuals have control over their own destinies. Whitman dealt with the broad expansive whole of America; but for Olson, the city of Gloucester is enough. Gloucester becomes the symbol of a community which manages to retain its local identity in spite of the constant threat from the surrounding manipulation and materialism of America.

In "Letter3," Olson portrays Gloucester as a last island of hope:

The word does intimidate. The pay-check does.
But to use either, as cheap men

o tansy city, root city
let them not make you
as the nation is

I speak to any of you . . .⁴³

It seems that Olson's conception of America is unquestionably more realistic than was Whitman's. Olson recognizes that waste, destruction, and greed accompany or follow much of the progress in this country, and Whitman only idealized about the progress and development in a blindly optimistic manner.

A final area of comparison between the two poets concerns their strivings to comprehend the universe--that is, the order of all things--through their poetics.

Basic to the poetic of Whitman is the assumption that each physical thing has its spiritual counterpart. He recognizes a spirituality in man's body:

I have said that the soul is not more than the body
And I have said that the body is no more than the
soul.⁴⁴

Furthermore, there exists a spirituality within all things in the universe. To find this is Whitman's goal as an artist; he says that the "culmination and fruit of literary artistic expression, and its final fields of pleasure . . . are in metaphysics, including the mysteries of the spiritual world, the soul itself."⁴⁵ This philosophy is exemplified in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry":

Thrive, cities--bring your freight, bring your shows,
ample and sufficient rivers,
Expand, being than which none else is perhaps more
spiritual,
. . . You furnish your parts toward eternity,
Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the
soul.⁴⁶

Because he perceives a dualism of reality, Whitman often strives through his poetry to span from the physical realms of things to the spiritual realms of oneness in the universe.

Olson's view of the universe, on the other hand, is an extremely concrete one; he does not look beyond things for any spiritual significance. He seems to espouse W. C. Williams' philosophy that "for the poet there are no ideas but in things."⁴⁷ Olson sees that a meaning is inherent in things, as he states "that which exists through itself is meaning."⁴⁸ In his poetry, Olson often sets forth this doctrine by emphasizing concrete reality:

the body
does bring us
down
The images
have to be
contradicted
The metamorphoses
are to be
undone
The stick,
and the ear
are to be no more than
they are.⁴⁹

In other words, there is to be no Whitmanesque movement from reality to spirituality in Olson's poems. For things simply are, and that is enough; the universe is a precise thing:

all motion
is a crab.⁵⁰

The concepts of sound and line length are also an integral part of Olson's oneness with the universe. He states that "PROJECTIVE VERSE teaches . . . this lesson, that that verse will only do in which a poet manages to

register both the acquisitions of his ear and the pressures of his breath."⁵¹ He then proceeds to define these two elements and to formulate a conclusion about them:

I say the syllable, king, and that it is spontaneous, this way: the ear, the ear which has collected, which has listened . . .

. . . And the line comes . . . from the breathing of the man who writes, at the moment that he writes . . .

. . . And together, these two, the syllable and the line, they make a poem, they make that thing, the--what shall we call it, the Boss of it all, the Single Intelligence.⁵²

Thus, the significance of this theory is Olson's attempt to equate the act of writing with man's own physiological condition. Whitman's intimate confessionalism was an attempt to achieve this also, but at the same time, his poetry went far beyond his self. He desired a unity of literature with the masses of American people so that they would realize their spiritual and national potential. Olson defines a literature which recognizes only the individual poet and his physical idiosyncrasies as a human being.

It seems that, for Olson, the ideal condition for the poet would be a state of pre-language and pre-consciousness, for then, and only then was man a unified creature. Stanley Burnshaw analyzed this pre-conscious condition of man in his book The Seamless Web. Burnshaw tells of the birth of the ego, stating that "At a certain time . . . ancestral man entered his own head. All that our kind has become goes back to this crucial moment . . ."⁵³ Later in the book, Burnshaw, using a quote from Trigant Burrow's Preconscious Foundations of Human Experience, explains what happened after this crucial development in man's head:

As a result of its ever-increasing emphasis and dependence on word-sign-symbol, human behavior began to lose contact with the medium of actuality, "the good earth." In this physiological transition from action to symbols of action, says Burrow, "the human species, unaware of what was happening, gradually lost touch with the organic source of its own behavior . . . our feeling-medium of contact with the environment and with one another was

transferred to a segment of the organism--the symbolic segment, or forebrain . . . What had been the organism's whole feeling was transformed into the symbol of feeling."⁵⁴

In this pre-ego period, there was no alienation of art from life and there was no need for myth, for reality was reality without intellectual interference. Myth apparently evolved as a result of man's consciousness of the self and hence his desire to explain himself and things in relation to him. Thus, Olson's poetry is, in a sense, an attempt to destroy all myth and all that interferes with reality. Its ultimate goal is to make man's consciousness at one with his universe again. Whitman, on the other hand, was attempting to fabricate new myths about the individual and America in order that they be united into a physical and spiritual union.

Whitman and Olson also differed concerning their concept of the function of poetry.

Whitman has often been characterized as a dual personality, as in Literary History of the United States, where it is said that "In his vatic moods Walt clearly regarded himself as two persons, one of them under the influence of inspiration."⁵⁵ This seems to be related to the fact that throughout Leaves of Grass, Whitman utilizes poetry as a unifying medium to bring about both a personal unity with his spiritual essence, and his country's spiritual and physical unity. The nineteenth-century conception of a basic duality in the universe is placed in a broader perspective by J. Hillis Miller in his introduction to Poets of Reality when he says "Much romantic literature presupposes a double bifurcation. Existence is divided into two realms, heaven and earth, supernatural and natural, the 'real' world and the derived world. It is also divided into subjective and objective realms. Man as subjective ego opposes himself to everything else."⁵⁶ And Miller goes on to say that the "dialectic of movement through stages to attain a goal"⁵⁷ is also a nineteenth-century romantic characteristic. Whitman clearly felt this romantic desire to span distances and attain goals, as shown in such poems as "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and "Passage to India," as well as in one early notebook jotting, where he wrote "When I walked at night by the sea shore and looked up at the countless stars, I asked of my soul whether it would be filled and satisfied when it should become god enfolding all these, and open to the life and delight and knowledge of everything in them or of them; and the answer was plain to me as the breaking water on the sands at my feet; and the answer was,

No, when I reach there, I shall want to go further still."⁵⁸ In The Solitary Singer, G. W. Allen recognizes Whitman's feelings and states that Whitman had a "longing for identity, this insatiable desire for even more larger existence."⁵⁹ And, in American Renaissance, Whitman's desire for 'becoming' is exemplified as F. O. Matthiessen relates that Whitman read a line of John Sterling's, and "Whitman added this gloss to it: 'The word is become flesh.'"⁶⁰

In one of his essays, Olson indicates that he sees a change from the romantic dual vision of the universe in nineteenth-century writings. He states that "man, in the midst of it, knowing well how he was folded in, as well as how suddenly and strikingly he could extend himself, spring or, without even moving, go, too far, the farthest-- he was suddenly possessed or repossessed of a character of being, a thing among things, which I shall call his physicality."⁶¹ Thus, according to Olson, the modern poet should no longer allow himself to grope for things beyond his physical self. In one of his lectures, Olson says "let's knock that subjective thing out, too, right now--that that is all that is, the language that you have by having been alive. And I mean literally your own self, I don't mean some division of individuality, or even identifying or identity."⁶² Such beliefs lead Olson to exclaim in his poetry:

I have this sense,
that I am one
with my skin.⁶³

Olson's poetry is an attempt to condense all the realms of time, place, reality and the personality into one singular plane of existence which can be explored and mapped. And the attitude of objectivity is important, as Olson explains in his essay, "Projective Verse":

subjectivism . . . has excellently done itself to death . . . What seems to me a more valid formulation for present use is "objectivism." . . . Objectivism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the "subject" and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature . . . and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects.⁶⁴

Thus, poetry should no longer be dominated by the personality as interpreter, but instead it should attempt a pure description of things without subjective interference.

In Poets of Reality, Miller defends Olson's type of "new poetry"⁶⁵ claiming that it achieves a unity of all things as opposed to the dualistic poetry of romanticism:

The effacement of the ego before reality means abandoning the will to power over things. This is the most difficult of acts for a modern man to perform. It goes counter to all the penchants of our culture. To abandon its project of dominion the will must will not to will. Only through an abnegation of the will can objects begin to manifest themselves as they are, in the integrity of their presence. When man is willing to let things be then they appear in a space which is no longer that of an objective world opposed to the mind. In this new space the mind is dispersed everywhere in things and forms one with them.⁶⁶

This theory poses several problems. First, the act of 'willing not to will' is illogical; it is an impossible concept which can only be accomplished by using the will. Furthermore, for all poets, poetic material must be willed into a poem, or there would be no creation.

And this same discrepancy exists at the basis of Olson's theories. Olson states that "'things' are what writers get inside their work, or their work, poem or story, perishes. Things are the way force is exchanged. On things communication rests. And the writer, though he is the control (or art is nothing), is, still, no more than-- but just as much as--another 'thing'".⁶⁷ Thus, the artist is just another 'thing' within the poem, yet paradoxically, he must also be the controller of the poem. It is evident that Olson cannot be a complete equal to things in a poem; instead, a part of his existence must dominate by observing and ordering the reality or there would be no artistic creation. This duality is expressed by Olson in one of his poems:

The landscape (the landscape!) again: Gloucester, the shore one of me is (duplicates), and from which (from offshore, I, Maximus) am removed, observe.⁶⁸

And Olson as an artist-controller appears repeatedly throughout The Maximus Poems in the form of a subjective commentator:

I measure my song,
measure the sources of my song,
measure me, measure
my forces

(And I buzz,
as the bee does,
who's missed
the plum tree,
and gone and got himself caught
in my window.⁶⁹

This morning of the small snow
I count the blessings, the leak in the faucet
which makes of the sink time, the drop
of the water on water as sweet
as the Seth Thomas
in the old kitchen
my father stood in his drawers to wind (always
he forgot the 30th day, as I don't want to remember
the rent
a house these days
so much somebody else's . . .⁷⁰

These passages portray an emotional self-analysis and self-pity, and they undoubtedly have their basis in the inherent subjectivity or interposing ego of the poet. In a discussion of this last passage and others, M. L. Rosenthal has noted that "Olson's way of letting go, tuning in on himself without inhibition, serves to give a special kind of subjective body to his work."⁷¹

So it is evident that there does exist a basic duality in Olson's poetry, and though it is not a romantic Whitmanesque duality of spiritual becoming, it is nevertheless a separation of the inevitably subjective controlling artist and the world of things that surround him.

Though there are discrepancies that exist between his theory and his practice, it is still evident that Olson's theories have displayed a radically different attitude toward poetics and art. This attitude indicates a change in the nature of American poetry since Whitman's time, because now poetry is less concerned with spiritual things and is more concerned with moving toward a unity with objective reality.

Whitman had begun his struggle by casting off the fetters of the conventional verse of his time, a verse which described life and emotion through a veil of literary prettiness. He was able to achieve a new direction by producing an emotionally honest poetry which used the things of objective reality to express his inner reality. His writing was an attempt to bring poetry closer to the subjective emotional reality of living, to make it an utterance of the whole spiritual being and thus to unify the poet's emotions with his act of expression.

But Charles Olson's theory moved poetics several dynamic steps further. He attempted to gain an even closer unity of poetry with man by making poetry an integral part of man's physiological self. Olson's goal was not an emotional outpouring, but instead an identification of poetry with the physical realities of life and perception. The acts of living--breathing, hearing, and so on--as well as the physical processes of perception play a central role in the expression of a physiologically honest poetry which was akin to the essence of the poet's physical life. The describer himself becomes another 'thing' within the process of the poem; thus, in a sense, the poem approaches a oneness with physical reality.

Although Olson's goal of poetry's oneness with the physical may be an impossible one to achieve, it is nevertheless an admirable attempt, and it has definitely become a twentieth-century trend in American poetry which moves toward the unity of the poet with the poem, and ultimately, a fusion of art with life itself.

Footnotes

¹Walt Whitman, Complete Poetry and Selected Prose, ed. James E. Miller, Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959), p. 41.

²Charles Olson, The Maximus Poems (New York: Jargon/Cornith Books, 1960), p. 1.

³Whitman, Complete Poetry, p. 36.

⁴Ibid., p. 251.

⁵Ibid., p. 92.

⁶Ibid., pp. 116 & 119.

- ⁷ Ibid., p. 349.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 164.
- ⁹ Olson, The Maximus Poems, p. 3.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 27.
- ¹¹ Ibid., p. 155.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 120.
- ¹³ Ibid., p. 124.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 14.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 154.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 52.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 52.
- ¹⁸ Whitman, Complete Poetry, p. 66.
- ¹⁹ Charles Olson, Human Universe, ed. Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967), p. 122.
- ²⁰ Whitman, Complete Poetry, p. 445.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 27.
- ²² Ibid., p. 321.
- ²³ Olson, Human Universe, p. 128.
- ²⁴ Olson, The Maximus Poems, p. 51.
- ²⁵ Charles Olson, Maximus Poems IV, V, VI (London: Cape Goliard Press, 1968), n. pag.
- ²⁶ Olson, The Maximus Poems, p. 36.
- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 139.
- ²⁸ Olson, Human Universe, pp. 52 & 53.
- ²⁹ Whitman, Complete Poetry, p. 497.

- ³⁰ Olson, Human Universe, pp. 5 & 6.
- ³¹ Olson, The Maximus Poems, p. 42.
- ³² Alan W. Watts, The Way of Zen (New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1957), p. 144.
- ³³ Whitman, Complete Poetry, p. 45.
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 432.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 477.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 23.
- ³⁷ Olson, The Maximus Poems, p. 127.
- ³⁸ Ibid., p. 15.
- ³⁹ Olson, Maximus Poems IV, V, VI, n. pag.
- ⁴⁰ Olson, The Maximus Poems, p. 9.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 125.
- ⁴² Ibid., pp. 3 & 4.
- ⁴³ Ibid., p. 11.
- ⁴⁴ Whitman, Complete Poetry, p. 66.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 495.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 120.
- ⁴⁷ William Carlos Williams, The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 390.
- ⁴⁸ Charles Olson, Causal Mythology (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1969), p. 2.
- ⁴⁹ Charles Olson, The Distances (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 69.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 33.
- ⁵¹ Olson, Human Universe, p. 53.
- ⁵² Ibid., p. 54.

Small Philosophies: A Short Story

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Colors Coffen stepped along the road at a pace that his ancient, bluetick, Cletus, was hard put to keep up with, except love of his master and the rhythmic harmonica strains set the timing. Why even a dog should find Colors necessary is difficult to say. The facts of his shabby gray work outfit and his battered fedora propped on a bony frame that jutted through at the elbows of his shirt would lead one to believe that it wasn't a full belly or comfort which made him trudge ever after this worn man. Perhaps constant affection over the years and knowing he got exactly half of whatever the old man called his own made Cletus faithful to the wanderer.

How I had, on this low, hanging day in fall, happened to stand on the top of a knoll, Winchester rifle clapped to my side, and discovered them on the road must have been coincidence and more. Six of us had started out that misty morning, partners until our paths diverged in the search for game. As has happened with a man reaching his prime, the woods, the particular odor of things and the feel of the gun's weight and smooth wood on my arm below my rolled-up shirtsleeve brought me gently back into my adolescence, unaware as the sensory experiences gave way to hallucinations of the past. Thus, the sight of Colors Coffen and the dog, Cletus, seemed more than coincidence. It was like a vision my reason struggled with to decide them flesh and blood of ghosts or another dead memory.

I hadn't seen him for years, living as he did, in the woods and removed from the rest of a society he despised. Still, I could not forget the many hours I spent with Colors, learning and listening on walks through these same woods. We spied on everything nature worked to conceal and took what supplies skill and fate would give us: rabbits, fox, otter, squirrel, deer and grouse. During the sun-honeyed summers and the crackly snowshoe winters I gave him all my child's questions as he became the father of my thoughts. One day between summer and the onslaught of fall, I asked why the sky's colors changed and he replied, with twinkling eyes, that God was a temperamental artist: changing the

⁵³ Stanley Burnshaw, The Seamless Web (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1970), p. 165.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 168.

⁵⁵ Robert E. Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas H. Johnson, Henry Seidel Canby, eds., Literary History of the United States (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), Vol. I, p. 482.

⁵⁶ J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 1.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

⁵⁸ Walt Whitman, Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman (New York: 1932), p. 66.

⁵⁹ G. W. Allen, The Solitary Singer (New York: New York University Press, 1967).

⁶⁰ F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 524.

⁶¹ Olson, Human Universe, p. 118.

⁶² Charles Olson, Poetry and Truth, ed. George F. Butterick (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1971), p. 46.

⁶³ Olson, Maximus Poems IV, V, VI, n. pag.

⁶⁴ Olson, Human Universe, pp. 59-60.

⁶⁵ Miller, Poets of Reality, p. 9.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

⁶⁷ Olson, Human Universe, p. 128.

⁶⁸ Olson, The Distances, p. 90.

⁶⁹ Olson, The Maximus Poems, p. 44.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

⁷¹ M. L. Rosenthal, "Olson / His Poetry," Massachusetts Review. Vol. XII, No. 1, p. 54.

seasons and giving them new colors as He did the animals. God, Coffen felt, was always inventing changes as was the prerogative of a Creator of His dimension.

However, while Colors accepted the changes God made, he would not defend those initiated by men. City smokestacks grasping for the heavens, highways and buildings growing like striplings without roots seemed to borrow a little of Higher territory. The old man viewed Man as mad scientists who invented machinery to control the earth and laughed in the security of this god-like but false power. Lucifer had confronted Him and lost. So would Man lose his arrogance.

Colors believed he knew this firsthand, having been financially ruined in the great crash of 1929. He had been a man of education, wealth and ambition beforehand, and looked upon his fall as part of that oncoming final battle between God and His highest creation. So, Colors had retreated to the woods back of Millersville, the small town where he'd been born, leaving glory to others while he lived a life without ambitions or anger. I stumbled across his cabin while hunting one fall and although he aged he did not change his mind about the workings of society in all the time I knew him.

Long ago, just a small boy and quite innocent of the turbulence that had driven him out of the towns, away from his people, he accepted me. I played no part, as yet, in the eternal war which he had side-stepped to observe.

How I ached to step down from that hillside, twenty years past straggling after him and call out, voice rising against the wind and the wailing notes of the harmonica. I could not. My shout froze my throat together in silence. For, as a man, I had crossed the border into the arena of battle and could only watch him disappear, Cletus panting behind, my tears snuffed on the wind, blurred with another vision.

I returned to my law offices on Monday, for the first time saddened by success.