AN ORAL INTERPRETATION SCRIPT ILLUSTRATING THE INFLUENCE
ON CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY OF THE THREE
BLACK MOUNTAIN POETS: CHARLES OLSON,
ROBERT CREELEY, ROBERT DUNCAN

THESIS

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By

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This oral interpretation thesis analyzes the impact that
three poets from Black Mountain College had on contemporary
American poetry. The study concentrates on the lives, works,
poetic theories of Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert
Duncan and culminates in a lecture recital compiled from
historical data relating to Black Mountain College and to
the three prominent poets.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

History of Black Mountain College

During the twenty-three year existence (1933-1956), Black Mountain College provided a mecca for the period's great contemporary artists. This experimental institution, which placed the arts at its core, attracted such noted artists as John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Buckminster Fuller, William de Kooning, Franz Kline, Josef Albers, Paul Goodman, Robert Rauschenberg, and the writers, Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan. The artists came to Black Mountain College to explore innovations in visual art, dance, theatre, poetry, and some came to teach their concepts of art.

Historically, Black Mountain College was the conception of John Andrew Rice. With the aid of Frederick Georgia, Ralph Lounsbury, and Theodore Dreier, Rice canvassed financial contributors to support his college. The college was housed in the Blue Ridge Assembly's retreat in the North Carolina foothills overlooking the town of Black Mountain, North Carolina.

From its conception, Black Mountain College was to have the arts placed at the core of its curriculum, for as Rice
stated, "... music, art, and drama should no longer have a precarious existence on the fringes of the curriculum, but should be at the very center of things."\textsuperscript{5} Black Mountain College was to be an institution emphasizing not only classical scholarship, but allowing the individual to expand in all artistic pursuits as well. Noted German artist and Black Mountain educator, Josef Albers, furthered this belief as he commented on the goal of teaching, "Make the result of teaching a feeling of growing."\textsuperscript{6} To achieve this dictum, noted artists were hired to instruct art classes; publishing writers were employed to instruct courses in writing.

Just as John Rice had sought out financial donors for the college, Charles Olson recruited creative talents for the school. Historian Martin Duberman cites Joel Oppenheimer's recollections of Olson, "... there was a point when he was bringing people together ... he was a central clearing house for poetic information."\textsuperscript{7} Olson's influence at Black Mountain as well as the continuing influence of the college is reflected upon by Miller Williams in \textit{Contemporary Poetry in America}. Williams states, "Olson is looked upon by many as one of the guiding spirits behind the experimental movement that began at almost the same time in San Francisco and at Black Mountain, gained attention as the Beat phenomenon of the early and middle fifties, and still survives in the work of individual and individualist poets throughout the country."\textsuperscript{8} Black Mountain has also been acclaimed as the
"forerunner and exemplar of much that is currently considered innovative in art, education and lifestyle."9

Pertinent to Oral Interpretation was the shift in emphasis which occurred in the early 1950's with the advent of Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan. This shift which emphasized the writing and publishing of literature also facilitated publication of Black Mountain Review, a literary magazine published under the auspices of the college and edited by Robert Creeley.10 It was the hope of Charles Olson, then rector at the college, and other faculty members that the publication might attract a greater number of students to Black Mountain.11 Through correspondence Olson contacted the Creeley's, who at the time were living on the island of Majorca, Spain. Since printing costs were low on the island, Creeley and Olson agreed to inaugurate the magazine from there. Even after Creeley's arrival at Black Mountain College, the magazine was published in Majorca.12

From the first issue (Spring, 1954) to the final issue (Autumn, 1957), the Review provided an outlet of publishing opportunities for a generation of writers encased in the McCarthyite years.13 Historian Martin Duberman accredits Creeley's literary contacts and editorial ability with the Review's scope and non-cultist status. The Review included not only poetry, but essays, letters, short stories, reviews, and graphic works by Franz Kline, Jess Collins, Phillip Guston, etc.14 In a 1969 reprint of the Black
Mountain Review, Creeley comments on its design and purpose, "For me, and the other writers who came to be involved, it was a place defined by our own activity and accomplished together by ourselves—a place wherein we might make evident what we, as writers, had found to be significant, both for ourselves and for that world... we hoped our writing might enter."15

Through correspondence and poetic counseling, Charles Olson encouraged Robert Duncan to begin work at Black Mountain College in 1955, the last days of the college's existence. It was Duncan who provided a bridge between the Black Mountain poets and the San Francisco Beat scene—"More so than Creeley, who despite his wide literary contacts there, fit less well in terms of personal life than did the flamboyant, occult-minded Duncan."16 A production of Duncan's play, Medea, performed at Black Mountain during its last days provided a literal bridge to the San Francisco poets, who were later featured in the last issue of the Black Mountain Review.

Donald Allen's Anthology of American Poetry, 1945-1960, labels Olson, Creeley, and Duncan as Black Mountain poets. Although sentiments among the men varied from the acceptance of the label, their openness toward discussing Black Mountain and their admiration for the college were evident in the years following the college's closing in 1956. Each man was influenced to some extent by the creative, communal atmosphere at Black Mountain College—or by direct contact with
Charles Olson. Their continuing popularity indicates the continuing presence and influence of Black Mountain College.

Exposure to the historical background of Black Mountain College and the ensuing Black Mountain literary movement with reference to the poets, Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan, would be beneficial to students and educators in the disciplines of Oral Interpretation and English as well as lay persons interested in the evolution of historical poetic movements. Knowledge in the development of specific literary movements, the literary innovations, and the writers would obviously further a person's understanding of that period's literary history.

The validity of such a study is supported by Beverly Whitaker in "Research Directions in the Performance of Literature." Whitaker contends that since literature is the central foundation of Oral Interpretation, all research into the field should be research in literature. Whitaker continues, "From such a base, or indeed, because of it, the researcher's interest may lead him to the investigation in such adjacent disciplines as psychology, philosophy, aesthetics, anthropology, linguistics, history, rhetoric, or whatever." Whitaker echoes the admonitions of Wallace Bacon, who in 1949, called for a "series of historical studies which make clear the line of development which oral reading has followed." Since Oral Interpretation primarily centers in the performance of literature, its development
and the evolution of literary movements are congruent topics for research.

An oral interpretation concept which provides factual information and a presentation of literature in the format of a lecture recital would perhaps be the most effective mode of presentation since it allows the interpreter not only the vehicle by which factual and historical information may be disseminated, but it also allows the poetry to be vivified through oral performance. The poetry must be carefully analyzed by the reader, but that analysis is for the purpose of internalizing and thoroughly understanding the poetry so that the performer may provide for the audience a reading which reveals all of the aural and tonal qualities of the poetry which can not be as effectively perceived through the eye alone. As described by Carolyn A. Gilbert in Communicative Performance of Literature, a lecture recital is the "programming of several literary selections into a unified presentation." Of the various approaches an interpreter might take concerning the design of a lecture recital, Gilbert describes a program with an "instructional objective for the teaching of literature, creative writing, philosophy, history, particularly those (disciplines) within the arts and humanities." Gilbert continues to define the instructional objective as "obviously illustrative in function." In comparison, Charlotte Lee in Oral Interpretation defines a lecture recital as a program which "has a strong central
unity, uses the critics' opinions and historical data as transitions, and arranges the selections to illustrate whatever technical or thematic development the speaker has chosen. It emphasizes evaluation more than appreciation per se." The decision to formulate a script for lecture recital was made because it was the intention to prepare a unified script which would allow a performer to present to an audience a program that includes the interesting background information regarding the Black Mountain poets and their poetic innovations with a demonstration, through performance, of representative works of those poets.

It was felt that a lecture recital centering on Black Mountain College and the Black Mountain literary movement would provide both pertinent historical information related to the college and to the three prominent poets who taught and published at the school. Transitional material would also include biographical information of Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan, with the primary focus of the lecture recital centering upon their creative influences upon each other and the influences of the innovative Black Mountain College upon them as professional writers. This information concerning the intermeshing of the poet's personalities and talents, the atmosphere of Black Mountain College, and the influence of the Black Mountain movement on American poetry since the 1950's would be integrated into a full-length script designed especially
for a lecture recital. However, the completed script could then easily be adapted into a group interpretation presentation, if so desired.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this thesis has been to create a unified lecture recital compiled of historical data relating to Black Mountain College and to three prominent poets, Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan.

Procedure

The thesis includes appropriate historical data relating to Black Mountain College and biographic information of the three Black Mountain poets. Representative poetry has been selected, analyzed, and arranged with the expository material into a unified interpretation program. The program has been structured in such a way that it may be utilized as a lecture recital or a group interpretation presentation.

The thesis is arranged in four chapters as follows: Chapter I includes historical background information of Black Mountain College as it relates to the appearance of Olson, Creeley, and Duncan, and the Black Mountain Review. Chapter II is comprised of sketches of the poets, a study of their influences on each other as writers and on succeeding poets, and a brief examination of their poetic theories. Chapter III is an interpretative analysis of the poetry which has been selected for inclusion in the lecture recital with
particular attention given to any problems for an oral performer. Chapter IV is the culmination of information contained in the preceding chapters which has been embodied in the form of a lecture recital.
NOTES


2 Duberman, p. 11.

3 Duberman, p. 11.

4 Duberman, p. 19.

5 Duberman, p. 52.

6 Duberman, p. 61.

7 Duberman, p. 378.


9 Duberman, p. 11.

10 Duberman, p. 223.


12 Duberman, p. 309.

13 Duberman, p. 391.

14 Duberman, p. 392.

15 Creeley, p. vii.

16 Duberman, p. 409.


20 Gilbert, p. 78.

21 Gilbert, p. 78.

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Introduction

The three poets identified with Black Mountain College are Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan. Their association with one another and subsequently their involvement with Black Mountain College came about primarily through correspondence initiated by Charles Olson. Due to their close proximity and continuous exchange of ideas, they quite naturally influenced each other with regards to the development of their poetic theories as well as the poetry they produced. Subsequently, they initiated new poetic forms. They not only influenced each other, but their work had a decided impact on many post-World War II poets.

It seems appropriate to consider certain biographical information concerning each man, particularly as that information has bearing on their development as poets.

Charles Olson

Charles Olson was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, to lower, working-class parents on December 27, 1910. While still quite young his parents moved the family to Gloucester, Massachusetts, a coastal town which, in Olson's later life, would dominate much of his poetry.
Prior to attending Wesleyan University, Olson won a trip to Europe in the National Oratorical Contest, at age eighteen. He was graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Wesleyan in 1932 and continued graduate studies there. Having distinguished himself as a diligent student, Olson received an Olin Fellowship to finance additional graduate classes at Yale University. Olson's master's degree was granted in 1933 upon completion of a thesis on Melville entitled "The Growth of Herman Melville, Prose Writer and Poetic Thinker."¹

Olson instructed at Clark University from 1934 to 1936, where he became friends with Edward Dahlberg, a man who in later years would convince Olson to teach at Black Mountain College.

Olson completed course work toward a Ph.D. at Harvard in 1939, but left without writing a dissertation for he had received the first of two Guggenheim Fellowships, the first granted for continued research on Melville.

Approximately two years later in 1941, Olson began a short political career, with a position in the American Civil Liberties Union. Subsequently, Olson accepted positions with the Common Council for American Unity and the Office of War Information. Paul Christensen theorizes on this influential period in Olson's life, "But at some point during this service Olson became disenchanted with politics and quite possibly with the very workings of the federal government itself . . .
thus ending a promising political career barely five years after it had begun."2

Olson resigned his last governmental position May 19, 1944, in a dispute with Office of War Information directors who, as reported to the New York Times, had prevented Olson and his supervisor from discrediting Nazi propaganda aimed at "America's 35,000,000 citizens of foreign ancestry."3 This confrontation possibly furthered Olson's distrust of governmental functions which in comparison with Olson's beliefs were not aimed at social reform.

After his resignation with the OWI, Olson left for Key West, Florida, in the winter of 1944-1945, and while living there refused several upper-echelon governmental positions. Christensen contends that Olson underwent a dramatic change in his "attitude toward American social life, indeed toward the very conditions in which he had advanced."4

Prior to Olson's appearance at Black Mountain College in 1951, he completed a study on Melville, Call Me Ishmael (1947), in which he aired his disgust with government and economic systems.5 Early in 1949, Olson finished one of his most famous poems, "The Kingfishers," and began work on a voluminous poem concerning group identity and the dream of communal life for the people of Gloucester, Massachusetts. These works have become known collectively as the Maximus poems. They consist of several volumes of poems all unified by the same persona identified as Maximus. They concern
the wanderings and wanderings of Maximus as he searches for a personal and societal identity.

In late 1948, Olson began a series of lectures at Black Mountain College and later replaced his friend, Edward Dahlberg, as visiting lecturer.

Before the involvement with Black Mountain College began as a full-time venture, Olson had developed distinct attitudes toward Western governments and societies and, more especially, toward the direction of contemporary poetry. He culminated these poetic theories into the influential manifesto, "Projective Verse," which was published in Poetry New York in 1950. However, the basis for "Projective Verse" lay much deeper than an attempt to establish new literary directions. The essay was initiated from a dichotomy of beliefs between the status quo government and the artists of the era. Olson believed that Western civilization had "cut itself off from direct perception, and consequently, from a compassionate understanding of the phenomena of nature." It was this vacuum that Olson believed poetry could fill and act as teacher.

For Olson this embargo against the senses involved not only man's increasing lack of perception, but also affected the illustrative usage of language. Christensen contends that "the conditions for a new poetry (in "Projective Verse") were stated in scant detail, suggesting that this document was
really a point of departure for the poet, not a conclusive, rigorously argued set of doctrines for verse."\(^7\)

While the essay may be stated in "scant detail," Christensen has devised a graphic design by which one may visually analyze Olson's projective verses based upon the tenets of "Projective Verse" and upon Olson's own subsequent writings concerning the essay. (See Figure 1, p. 17.) Christensen critiques the projective dogmas with the statement that "a word placed anywhere can be seen to have meaning merely by its location on the page."\(^8\) This analysis and adherence to Olson's theories will greatly affect any further analysis or interpretation of Olson's poetry.

Christensen's graphic analysis of the projective verse form is divided into four quadrants by two axes, namely, the vertical axis of event and the horizontal axis of thought. The left side of the page signifies argument or the resolution of a problem. Both axes, as noted by Olson in a 1966 reprint of his selected writings, "should read as though they lay out right and flat to the horizon or Eternity."\(^9\)

Initial readings of Olson's projective verses may leave the reader somewhat confused. However, Christensen's graphic analysis assists the reader when viewed as a transparent overlay to transcribe meaning to the seemingly disjointed collection of lines.

The upper left quadrant sets the poetic stage, much as a Shakespearean prologue does, initiating action or
rumination within the verse. The upper right quadrant concerns the poet's or the poem's persona attempt to interpret and define subject matter.

In this quadrant, the poem is tentative and initial, a lyric of emergent awareness.

The reach toward the nameless and indefinable occurs as the lines sweep toward the right margin.

Axis of Thought

(objectivity)

Axis of Event

(subjectivity)

Here the poem passes through the intervening stages of idea and argument as it progresses toward fulfillment in language. The left-hand side of the page continues to be dominated by sensory experiences.

In this quadrant, the poet may either leap to final synthesis from the revolutions of his aroused subjectivity or halt at some impasse and cease his inquiry. Or, if he has resolved his argument, he may center his final words on the axis of event.

Fig. 1--Christensen's "Projective Verse" analysis
Quadrant three, lower left, is dominated by sensory images and begins the unraveling of the dilemma. The last area, quadrant four, lower right, will be the resolution of the poetic dilemma or will leave the reader with several possible solutions. Should the poet resolve the dilemma, as Christensen states, he may "center his final words on the axis of event."\textsuperscript{11}

In 1951, a year after the publication of "Projective Verse," Olson accepted the rectorship at Black Mountain College and remained there until the college's closing in 1956. Christensen contends that during his rectorship at Black Mountain College, "Olson enjoyed some of his most productive writing years."\textsuperscript{12} Christensen continues to describe facets of the Black Mountain College environment which affected Olson. He says, "(Olson) was nonetheless inspired by the vitality of the college's life . . . Further, Robert Creeley would join him in 1954 and start a journal on the campus. Other poets came to teach or visit including Robert Duncan."\textsuperscript{13}

In a BBC interview (1968), Olson commented on the vitality of Black Mountain College:

\begin{quote}
What really has made it (Black Mountain College) valuable is that she was not only the first breakthrough in curriculum since the middle ages, but she was in some strange way right up-to-date the only, only communal invention that has substituted for the damn Western conception of society.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}
Olson remained at Black Mountain until its financial demise in 1956. A year later he returned to settle the debts and to officially close Black Mountain College. Robert von Hallberg states that the college's name, "already known in graphic arts, passed to a group of poets who have distinguished themselves since World War II." 15

It is this group of poets Olson would come to serve as mentor. While Olson is commonly thought to have been one of the most influential poets during the years following World War II, as von Hallberg contends, Olson's manifestoes and poetic instruction were more influential on succeeding poets than were his verses. 16 While Olson's "Projective Verse" essay had an immediate impact upon poets of the 1950's, that influence is evident even in the works of publishing poets today. Chirstensen states that analysis of those poets who knew Olson directly or read his work carefully, gives a clear indication of Olson's influence on succeeding poets. 17

Of those influenced by Olson, Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan have continued to be the more prolific chroniclers of Olson's verses and dogmatic writings.

Robert Creeley

Robert Creeley began corresponding with Olson in 1949, as Creeley was attempting to attract a nucleus of contributors for a magazine he was initiating. What ensued was a correspondence which served as poetic counseling for Creeley
and critical feedback for Olson. Creeley writes of this influence, "Olson, I believe, was a decisive influence upon me as a writer, because he taught me how to write. Not to write poems as he wrote, but how to write poems that I write."\(^{18}\)

Other forces had either significant or subliminal impact on Robert Creeley as a poet, whether the influence be a war he so detested, the influential collaboration with fellow poets, or the effect of early childhood development.

Creeley was born May 21, 1926 in Arlington, Massachusetts. His father, a doctor, died six years later, leaving Creeley to "define his own personality without the context of a male-oriented world. . . ."\(^{19}\) Of this period, Creeley explains how his mother attempted to preserve his father's possessions. He says, "My mother even took care of them, or kept them, like his bag for example, or his surgical instruments. . . . These things were really 'my father,' whom I never literally could remember otherwise."\(^{20}\)

After Dr. Creeley's death, Creeley's mother moved the family to a farm in West Acton. This New England environment provided Creeley with certain insights or perceptions which would be prevalent in the writings of his mature years. As cited by Arthur Ford, Creeley, growing up in a family of five females, "noted closely those small gestures and innuendoes 'manifest in women's conduct,' signs used later in his own poetry and fiction of human relationships."\(^{21}\)
Aside from familial life, Creeley would later comment on two other factors directly related to the New England environment which had an effect on him. One was the precision with which New Englanders make each word count. Perhaps this observation relates directly to Creeley's economy of words in his highly imagistic poetry. As other writers from this area have witnessed, Creeley discovered solitude and inspiration in the New England woods. He recalls, "I could go out into those woods and feel completely open, I mean, all the kinds of dilemma that I would feel sometimes would be resolved by going out into the woods and equally that immanence, that spill of life all around, like the spring in New England where you get that crazy water, the trickles of water every place, the moisture, the shyness, the particularity of things. . . ."22

Creeley completed all but the senior year at Harvard, crediting his marriage to Ann MacKinnon and the onset of World War II with his departure from college in 1943. Creeley served a year in India with the American Field Service before returning to Harvard in 1945. During this time his first published poem appeared in the Cummings issue of the Harvard Wake, which he helped to edit.

The following years provided Creeley with close collaboration with prominent men-of-letters. After Creeley's unsuccessful attempt to initiate a literary magazine in 1949, he began corresponding the Cid Corman whom, a year later,
would reconstitute Creeley's magazine into *Origin*, the first poetry magazine providing an outlet for the poets of the early 1950's. This same year, 1950, Creeley began correspondence with Charles Olson that ran into "thousands of letters, including portions later published as Olson's seminal essay, 'Projective Verse,' and *Mayan Letters*."23

Another correspondence with Martin Seymour-Smith, a British poet and tutor to Robert Graves' son, brought Creeley and his wife to the island of Majorca, where they would remain until Olson convinced him to move to North Carolina and teach at Black Mountain College in 1954.

Prior to Creeley's appearance on the Black Mountain campus, the *Black Mountain Review* was born. While on Majorca Creeley established his own press, the Divers Press, expanded literary contacts, and with the aid and encouragement of Charles Olson, began the publication of the *Black Mountain Review* and acted as editor. Ford illuminates the importance of this literary venture as he states that the *Review* "gave both a voice and a direction to many young writers of the time."24

The first issue of the *Review* was published in the Spring of 1954 and as Creeley commented on its importance in a 1969 reprint, "What really delights me now is that a magazine having a usual printing of some five-to-seven hundred and fifty copies, about two hundred of which ever got distributed, could have made any dent whatsoever. That should cheer us
Earlier in the reprint, Creeley states that the Review was a "place wherein we (the writers) might make evident what we, as writers had found to be significant, both for ourselves and for that world. . . we hoped our writings might enter."  

Creeley arrived at Black Mountain College in the Spring of 1954 as the first issue of the Review was about to appear. What he found was a "highly volatile and articulate people in a rather extraordinary circumstance of isolation." The educational environment was for Creeley an education in teaching. Following his experience at Black Mountain College, he taught at the University of British Columbia (1962-1963), the University of Mexico (1963-1966, 1968-1969), and the State University of New York (1967- ), but Creeley has stated that since his time at Black Mountain, he has "never learned more, let's say, about teaching as an activity. . . I have never found a more useful context for being a teacher than I did there."  

During Creeley's time at Black Mountain College, Olson aided him in prosody, teaching him to write a line of poetry indicative of the poet's actual speech pattern. Consequently, Creeley's poems are succinct, highly imagistic lyrics. In a 1967 lecture in Berlin, "I'm Given to Write Poems," Creeley acknowledged Olson as giving whatever "freedom" he has as a poet. With reference to Olson's "Projective Verse," Creeley added, "What Olson made clear to me during the late forties
and early fifties was of very great use. . . Olson made evident to me. . . that writing could be an intensely specific revelation of one's own content, and of the world the fact of any life must engage."  

Donald Allen, in *The New American Poetry*, quotes Creeley on the action of a poem as being a manifestation from the poet's reaction to stimuli progressing through the act of writing to a reader experiencing the poem. This statement relates to the Olson-Creeley correspondence which culminated into the "Projective Verse" essay: that form is dependent upon content; that "one perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception."  

Creeley continues to say that a poem should not draw attention to its form, but to center attention into the content—"not in itself a structure of recognition. . . (but) cognition itself."  

Creeley's popularity continues both as poet, as public reader, and as an influence on other writers. Arthur Ford states, 

"Today young poets quote him almost as much as he continues to quote Williams and Olson. His readings are always crowded with students, who respond to the unpretentious, unassuming sight of this man speaking honestly and directly about himself and then reading his own insistent poems, punctuating each line with his voice, even with his body. He strikes the reader and viewer as totally open and totally honest about himself, about his poetry, and about his feelings."
Robert Duncan

The third member of the poetic triumvirate, Robert Duncan, was born in Oakland, California, at Berkley. At an early age, Duncan acted as editor for The Experimental Review (1938-1940), Phoenix, and The Berkley Miscellany (1948-1949).

Unlike Olson and Creeley, Duncan began publishing in college reviews at age eighteen. He recounts the drive to create: "By my eighteenth year, I recognized in poetry my sole and ruling vocation."33 This acknowledgement was coupled with exposure to the philosophies of Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx. On the one hand, exposure to Freudian psychology via friends led Duncan to the awareness that "words not only mean--but then again what we are doing means something else."34 From Marxism he was to note the importance placed on history and the derived meaning of historical occurrences.

Along with the ideologies of psychology and philosophy, Duncan was to be influenced by Charles Olson in the early fifties. It was at this time that Olson's works made an impression on Duncan as well as Olson's criticism of Duncan's poetry. In the Spring, 1954 issue of Origin, Duncan voiced admiration for Olson's works. Creeley records, "In that letter, he (Duncan) also pointed to the area where Olson was to be of greatest influence, his demand that a poet fashion his work from full awareness."35 Duncan later said of Olson that other poets had mastered the ear and eye, but Olson directed the reader to the "inner voice."36
In a 1969 interview, Duncan commented on the pertinence and importance of "Projective Verse." Duncan states, "Charles really meant a fundamental difference in the structure of a poem . . . He used of course this term projective verse with its double play of projecting a voice or projecting a thing when you read aloud and he was deep into Jung, the idea that the imagination is a projection in relation to the world." 37

Prior to teaching at Black Mountain, Duncan had firmly established himself in the San Francisco literary circles, later to bear the label of San Francisco Beat scene of the 1950's. Of the Black Mountain and San Francisco poetics, Duncan has stated that both were searching for a "new" poetry. In the 1969 interview, Duncan commented on the diversity of poetry as opposed to the literary status quo, "It's hard to recapture now, to tell you what it was like in 1950, to have something actually happening in poetry, because nothing, nothing, nothing had been happening in poetry in America, nothing at all. It had been a period dominated by vast and inert mediocrities." 38

Like Creeley, Duncan's interaction with Black Mountain College and with Olson began through correspondence and literary counseling.

Duncan first came to Black Mountain College in the Spring of 1955, left for a while and returned in the Summer of 1956. When Duncan joined the Black Mountain faculty, in the last days of its existence, he brought a "new regional
sensibility to the group, which had up to then been dominated by New Englanders.\textsuperscript{39} Duncan was, in subsequent months, to assume Creeley's teaching responsibilities.

Duncan's talents as director and playwright not only enlivened Black Mountain theatrical work, but his talents also provided a literary bridge between the San Francisco and the Black Mountain poetic movements. Duncan's contact with San Francisco poets later aided Creeley in combining both poetic ideologies and verse in the last \textit{Black Mountain Review}, Autumn, 1957, which included works not only by Black Mountain writers, but by poets of the San Francisco school such as Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Jack Kerouac.

Of Duncan's influence on succeeding poets, Kenneth Rexroth has stated, "From San Francisco and from Black Mountain College, his personal influence on young writers has spread far and wide. Today he ranks with Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley, Charles Olson, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, as one of the leaders of the New Poetry.\textsuperscript{40}"

Rexroth goes on to say that Duncan is "one of the most accomplished, one of the most influential . . . one of the most mature.\textsuperscript{41}

The biographic information regarding these poets is available through various public sources. It was felt that additional insight might be obtained by contacting individuals in Black Mountain, North Carolina who were residents of that
community during the time of the college's existence. Correspondence was initiated with Mrs. John Huskey and Mrs. Emily Read Wood. Copies of the letters which were exchanged are included in the appendix.
NOTES


2 Christensen, p. 14.


4 Christensen, p. 14.

5 Christensen, p. 16.

6 Christensen, p. 7.

7 Christensen, p. 70.

8 Christensen, p. 87.


10 Christensen, p. 85-86.

11 Christensen, p. 86.

12 Christensen, p. 18.

13 Christensen, p. 19.

14 von Hallberg, p. 11.

15 von Hallberg, p. 7.

16 von Hallberg, p. 2.

17 Christensen, p. 161.


20 Ford, p. 15.
21 Ford, p. 16.
22 Ford, p. 16.
23 Ford, p. 19.
24 Ford, p. 20.
26 Creeley, Review, p. viii.
28 Duberman, p. 395.
29 Christensen, p. 173.
30 Creeley, Selected Writings, p. 17.
31 Allen, p. 140.
32 Ford, p. 139.
33 Christensen, p. 183.
34 George Bowering and Robert Hogg, Robert Duncan: An Interview (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1971), n. pag.
35 Christensen, p. 184.
36 Christensen, p. 184.
37 Bowering and Hogg, n. pag.
38 Bowering and Hogg, n. pag.
39 Christensen, p. 183.
41 Rexroth, p. 35.
CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS

This area of the study will focus on an interpretative analysis of poetry indicative of the literary styles of Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan. Poetry selected for inclusion in the lecture recital was chosen by the following criteria: the selected works were either indicative of the literary interactions of the three poets; were produced or published at Black Mountain College; are recognized as major works; or, appear to be highly oral in nature.

The process for analysis was synthesized from K. B. Valentine's Interlocking Pieces: Twenty Questions for Understanding Literature and from Bowen, Aggerit and Rickert's Communicative Reading, 4th edition. These sources were chosen because they provide an analytical approach to literature with specific attention to oral performance. The synthesis of these two sources brought forth questions which would illuminate difficult passages or areas in the selected works, in addition to furthering an overall comprehension of the work as a whole. While not all questions are answered for each literary selection, it is believed that those questions pertinent to the selection will aid the reader's
understanding. For an interpreter, this understanding is of utmost importance. K. B. Valentine supports this concept when she cites the view of Richard E. Palmer:

In order to read, it is necessary to understand in advance what will be said, and yet this understanding must come from the reading. . . . Oral interpretation thus has two sides: it is necessary to understand something to express it, yet understanding itself comes from an interpretative reading--expression.

Drawing upon suggestions for analysis found in Valentine and in Bowen, Aggertt and Rickert, eleven questions were composed to correspond to three areas for the analysis of the selected poetry. While these questions provide a literary analysis of the poetry, the forte of the criteria lies in the emphasis upon analysis for oral performance. To prevent duplication within the thesis, the entirety of the works may be found in the lecture recital. The criteria for analysis are as follows:

**Situation:**

Who is the persona or speaker?
What is the motivation?
Is there an intended audience?
Does biographic information of the poet aid understanding?

**Stimuli:**

What are the predominate sensory images?
What ideas are emphasized or subordinated?
What is the dominant idea or theme?
Structure:

How does the title function?
What is the organizational structure?
What are the key lines?
How do all the elements work together to direct an interpretative performance?

The initial material used in the lecture recital is designed to orient the audience to Black Mountain College. Following that material, three short poems are included which serve as an introduction to the lecture recital and which represent a work by each of the three poets under consideration. Olson's "These Days" correlates the meaning which the words and thoughts of a conversation have with soil remaining on a plant's roots. The persona suggests that the reader should "leave the roots on . . . and the dirt . . . just to make clear/ where they came from." This succinct verse, in essence, typifies Olson's ideology, that meanings and derivations are important. For example, Duncan said that Olson's dogma consisted of placing a subject into historical perspective, in terms of tradition. Duncan continues, " . . . but he doesn't express it as something that goes as a kind of emblem of the entire universe . . . he concentrates on what it means." 4

The second introductory poem, Creeley's "The Conspiracy," relates to the correspondence between Creeley and Olson. The persona reflects upon the exchange of verse and letters
with another. What seems to relate to the Creeley/Olson correspondence is the line, "Things tend to awaken/ even through random communication." This correlates to correspondence between the two poets which was later included, in part, in Olson's "Projective Verse" essay. The title and the line "let us suddenly proclaim spring/ and jeer at the others," sets forth an idea of nefarious activity and with reference to poetry at that time, the "Projective Verse" essay was a conspiracy to alter the status quo, when viewed as the innovative force that it was to later become. Cynthia Edelberg supports this theme as she states that perhaps the "development takes an unexpected turn to expose the angry poet behind his mask."^5

The third verse, Duncan's "Come, Let Me Free Myself," presents a persona divided by his/her own desire for independence and a desire for security. The persona is depicted as a hitch-hiker wanting someone to provide transportation, yet "glad no one has come along." The last stanza begins with an apostrophe, an exclamatory address, and seems to indicate that the persona is not directing these thoughts to a specific audience, but is directing them inwardly. The predominate images are of barrenness, isolation, and searching. In essence, the persona is attempting to free the self from the self, as indicated by the title. Perhaps the persona's primary dilemma is the attempt to sever the individual from the past or from the expectations of others.
There are three definite patterns of thought devising "Come, Let Me Free Myself." The first and last passages reflect a romantic view, while the middle passage assumes a colloquial tone of address. While many lines elucidate the verse's ambiguity, two lines are obviously indicative of the predominate theme: "I am waiting, to be on my way, that it by MY way . . . For I stand in the way, my destination stands in the way." The prime problem for the oral performer will be to present the verse's ambiguity, for it seems to contradict itself, much as a turmoil between evil and good, childhood influences and adult personal desires.

The next portion of the lecture recital includes verses by Duncan and Creeley, each verse dedicated to the other poet. The first, "Thank you for Love," by Duncan and dedicated to Creeley, presents no distinct persona. What can be detected about the persona is sincerity, willingness to reach out, and hopefulness that that honesty will be returned. The action is initiated by disclosure of self to another individual with apparent identification. Another active force within the verse begins as "if it were my loneliness you have given song to." This idea is mirrored in the ending: "The song will be moving." In other words, the loneliness will continue upon departure of the friends, but they "will return." These lines, along with an overall impression, signify the isolation of two individuals attempting identification within a crowd, solitude as they begin the process
of learning about the other, and the realization that few relationships last forever. The predominate idea is the hope that the futility of identification will end with this relationship.

Concerning Creeley's "The Door," Duncan, to whom it is dedicated, has stated that the stimulus for the verse and the dedication relates to Duncan's visit with Creeley on Majorca. In this visit, Duncan exposed Creeley to the poets Coleridge and Zukofsky. As Duncan states in a 1969 interview, "... and because I'm always derivative--I thought Creeley must have read them." Coleridge and Zukofsky question the poetic form as did the Black Mountain poets.

On a surface impression, the persona of "The Door" is a male subjected to an unfeeling female lover. However, clues throughout the verse indicate that it deals not with a man-woman relationship, but with poet and his muse. It is to this muse that the poem is directed. For the persona, the impetus to follow "the lady" represents indecision and loneliness.

Beginning with the first stanza, an antithetical stage is set "where/ the vision which echoes loneliness/ brings a scent of wild flowers in a wood." Other antithetical images reflect "dismemberment" and "renewal." The persona views the path of the muse as a death, leading to creative rebirth. In this light, the title functions as a porthole "cut so small in the wall," that following the muse will never be
an easy task, but a venture of misgivings.

Performance of "The Door" will necessitate emphasizing the rewards of pursuing the muse and subordinating the darker aspects of the antithesis. The interpreter must realize that two divisions of the verse exist: a persona fearful of following a muse and all the while needing her guidance and inspiration.

In comparison to Creeley's verses, Olson's are more complex. For example, "Letter 22" of the Maximus works appears to be a montage of disassociated images. As George Butterick reports, the impetus for the poem originated from dreams "Olson experienced the night prior to his writing 'Letter 22.'" However, this poem takes on more profound meaning when examined in relation to the entire Maximus series. In "Letter 22" Maximus is attempting to justify limiting his attention solely to the township of Gloucester. He states, "All has no honor as quantity." He seems to be saying that by limiting scope he will be providing a more precise depiction of one group of people. Maximus' motivation for the telling of the Gloucester story is also revealed in "Letter 22." In the third division he tells that he writes to "get down, right in the midst of/ the deeds, to tell/ what this one did, how,/ in the fray, he made this play(.)" In a sense, this work serves as a preface to all the poetry in the Maximus line.
Close scrutiny by an oral interpreter is of utmost importance in dealing with this Olson selection. The primary difficulty will be to give the sense of a visual montage and yet maintain continuity within the images.

The next selection, Duncan's "The Dance," employs hyphenated words at lines' end to suggest the turns in a dance movement. The title begins this pattern when read as the first words of the work. This technique involves not only visual images, but oral syncopation when read aloud.

Duncan integrated four voices within "The Dance." Two narrators are present: the initial narrator is philosophical, leaning toward romanticism; the narrator speaking at the poem's conclusion is more practical by nature. There are also two participants of the dance itself. Duncan illustrates a lush meadow for his dancers and then draws allusions to Whitman's "Leaves of Grass." Duncan also refers to Olson's Maximus and philosophizes that Maximus (or Olson) called "us to dance the Man." This statement most likely relates to Olson's "Projective Verse" essay, for the essay was a "call" to leave conventional concepts of poetry.

Predominate images are the lush green meadow, the decadence of the dance, and the apparent shallowness of the entire episode. By incorporating the cool, practical narrator in the end, Duncan suggests that episode is cyclical. The narrator announces, "That was my job that summer. I'd dance until three, up to get the hall swept before nine."
He concludes by saying, "I'll slip away before they're up/ and see the dew shining."

Reading "The Dance" for an audience presents no great barriers for the performer if attention is given to the four voices inherent in the work. The body of the poem consists of scant comments, much as one hears drifting in on several conversations at a party.

The next work included in the lecture recital by Creeley also makes reference to Olson. The initial impression from "The Awakening" seems to allude to Olson's influence upon Creeley as a writer. Indeed, it does allude to that influence. However, further examination of the last stanza infers that "he" also "moves/ to the awakening." If the poem does relate to the Olson-Creeley relationship, then the last stanza is saying that Olson, like Creeley, was "awakened" by another's influence.

Images in "The Awakening" concern a large forest, lush foliage, breezes, and man's apparent insignificance with regards to the environment's stature. This relationship of man's height to the trees' height is the main idea which is emphasized. The correlation between height and awareness is the next progression within the poem. While the tall man is not necessarily the wiser, the persona seems to be drawing this analogy, momentarily equating height with wisdom. In other words, the man referred to by the persona caused the persona to strive, to reach for an awakening.
"Maximus, To Himself," by Charles Olson, continues this idea of wisdom. The persona, as suggested by the title, seems to be assessing his past with regards to knowledge and successes. The persona describes himself as one who was rather unsuccessful at mundane accomplishments, yet could discuss "ancient texts." What unfolds is a persona of great intellectual knowledge that is slow to learn the chores of a work-a-day existence, just as Olson as a writer was slow to get started; he was thirty-five years old before his first poems were published.

The images in "Maximus, To Himself" are dichotomies. One facet of the persona revolves around the images of his considerable lack of expertise at physical labor. Yet this facet is juxtaposed with his ability to further other people's knowledge. This juxtaposition is the repeated emphasis in the work.

In reference to Olson's "Projective Verse" philosophy, if the persona reaches a conclusion, the ending remarks would be centered on the page. However, in this work, the words are not centered, depicting an ongoing process--the persona has not reached an answer to the questions he has posed.

The next two works by Creeley were chosen to illustrate with what precision he utilizes language in writing his poetry. In both poems, as in most of Creeley's work, he creates simple images with a minimal amount of words. In "Words," the line lengths are extremely short which reflects
one of his dogmas: that a poet's work should be indicative of the poet's actual pattern of speech.8

The persona in "Words" directs his thoughts to an intangible audience, into the realm of language itself. The persona draws allusions that without the ability to speak, the words are ever-present. He says, "You are always with me." The persona furthers this thought as he compares the thought of words to the taste of food and water. He is comparing the memory of food to the words existing in his mind and concludes that words are not physical entities, yet are ever-present.

Concerning performance of this work, the overall mood to be aware of is the feeling of infatuation for language and the ensuing frustration with that infatuation. Edelberg states that "Words" is a "braided poem," and that "its central focus has to do with Creeley's deep commitment to his craft."9 Edelberg provides further clues for an interpreter as she states, "The poet wants to possess words, but he discovers that words will not be possessed; like 'ash' they cannot be eaten."10 With these theories as a basis, the interpreter may find that directing this performance of the poem to words, themselves, would produce the desired effect.

Of his work, "Oh No," Creeley states that it is "self-parody, a parody on the situation of feeling I was having. Irony."11 The tone of the poem is glib and at at the same moment depressing. The persona seems to be providing
advice or sorts: to accept one's station in life and enjoy it. Other possibilities for "Oh No" could concern either death or insanity. In any interpretation, the advice remains the same and that is to accept the circumstances.

The nuances of the poem will certainly be highlighted when delivered if the two facets of it are handled effectively. In other words, the interpreter should present the work as matter-of-fact, letting the ominous qualities of the poem surface in the concluding line of "Oh No."

The concluding poem by Olson, "The Kingfishers," is believed to be his masterpiece. Butterick suggests that the work was a "response to the difficult negativism of (T. S.) Eliot's Waste Land . . . Notes on back of an early draft indicate that Olson considered it an 'Anti-Wasteland.'" Since Eliot's Waste Land was indeed negative, leaving no hope or admiration for man, Olson's "The Kingfishers" provides a much brighter illustration of man. He concludes the poem with an indication that he "hunts among stones," and that he will continue to search rather than accept only the dismal discoveries of others. The title itself symbolizes Olson's "anti-wasteland" for Eliot refers to a fisher-king. By reversing these words, Olson has begun the opposing view of man.

The primary images of "Kingfishers" are those of assertiveness, action, determination. In the third movement the persona refers to Mao as saying that, "We must get up and act;" the audience/reader must act rather than accept.
This reference to Mao and others within the work reflect Olson's interest in Eastern ideologies and practices.

For the interpreter two adjectives could describe the approach for performing "The Kingfishers," namely, solidarity and progression. The poem seems to demonstrate a strength or solidarity in comparison with the weakness of accepting the maladies of life. Also inherent in the poem is a sense of progression, of moving toward a goal.
NOTES

1 K. B. Valentine, Interlocking Pieces: Twenty Questions for Understanding Literature.


3 Valentine, p. iii.


6 Bowering and Hogg, n. pag.


8 Edelberg, p. 7.

9 Edelberg, p. 82.

10 Edelberg, p. 83.

11 Edelberg, p. 168.

12 Butterick, pp. xxiv-xxv.
CHAPTER IV

LECTURE RECITAL

The Black Mountain Poets: Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan

Located in the North Carolina foothills overlooking the town of Black Mountain, North Carolina, was a small independent college which for twenty-three years, from 1933 to 1956, provided a mecca for the period's great contemporary artists.¹ This experimental institution which placed the arts at its core attracted such noted artists as John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Buckminster Fuller, William de Kooning, Franz Kline, Josef Albers, Paul Goodman, Robert Rauschenberg, and the writers, Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan.² The artists came to Black Mountain College to explore innovations in visual art, dance, theatre, poetry; and some came to teach their concepts of art.³ In subsequent years, Black Mountain College has been acclaimed as the "forerunner and exemplar of much that is currently considered innovative in art, education, and lifestyle."⁴

Historically, Black Mountain College was the conception of John Andrew Rice. With the aid of Frederick Georgia, Ralph Lounsbury, and Theodore Dreier, Rice canvassed financial contributors to support his college.
From its conception, Black Mountain College was to have the arts placed at the core of its curriculum, for as Rice stated, "... music, art, and drama should no longer have a precarious existence on the fringes of the curriculum, but ... should be at the very center of things."\(^5\) Black Mountain was to be an institution emphasizing not only classical scholarship, but allowing the individual to expand in all artistic pursuits as well. Noted German artist and Black Mountain educator, Josef Albers, furthered this belief as he commented on the goal of teaching, "Make the result of teaching a feeling of growing."\(^6\) To achieve this dictum, noted artists were hired to instruct art classes, and publishing writers were employed to instruct courses in writing.

Pertinent to Oral Interpretation was the shift in emphasis which occurred in the early 1950's with the arrival of Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan. This shift which emphasized the writing and publishing of literature also facilitated the publication of *Black Mountain Review*, a literary magazine published under the auspices of the college and edited by Robert Creeley.\(^7\) From the first issue in the Spring of 1954 to the final issue in Autumn, 1957, the *Review* provided an outlet of publishing opportunities for a generation of writers encased in the McCarthyite years.\(^8\) The *Review* included not only poetry, but essays, letters, short stories, reviews, and graphic works.\(^9\) In a 1969 reprint of the *Black Mountain Review*, Creeley comments on its design
and purpose, "For me, and the other writers who came to be involved, it was a place defined by our own activity and accomplished together by ourselves--a place wherein we might make evident what we, as writers had found significant, both for ourselves and for that world . . . we hoped our writing might enter."¹⁰

Just as the college's founder had sought out financial donors for the college, Charles Olson recruited creative talent for the school. Historian Martin Duberman cites Joel Oppenheimer's recollections of Olson, " . . . there was a point when he was bringing people together . . . he was a central clearing house for poetic information."¹¹ Miller Williams in Contemporary Poetry in America claims that "Olson is looked upon by many as one of the guiding spirits behind the experimental movement that began at almost the same time in San Francisco and at Black Mountain, gained attention as the Beat phenomenon of the early and middle fifties, and still survives in the work of individual and individualist poets throughout the country."¹²

The following works by Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan exemplify their varying poetic styles, are considered to be major works, or are indicative of their experiences at Black Mountain. Let us look at samples of works by three poets which have had a profound impact on the development of contemporary American poetry.
The first work by Charles Olson, "These Days," correlates the meaning the words and thoughts of a conversation have with soil remaining on a plant's roots. This succinct verse typifies Olson's ideology that meanings and derivations are important.

These Days
Charles Olson

whatever you have to say, leave
the roots on, let them
dangle
And the dirt
just to make clear
where they came from

"The Conspiracy" by Robert Creeley relates to the correspondence between Creeley and Olson. The ensuing correspondence served as an impetus for Olson to write an essay entitled "Projective Verse" which had a great impact on American Poetry.

The Conspiracy
Robert Creeley

You send me your poems,
I'll send you mine.
Things tend to awaken
even through random communication.
Let us suddenly proclaim spring. And jeer
at the others,
all the others.
I will send a picture too
if you will send me one of you.\textsuperscript{14}

The third verse, Robert Duncan's "Come, Let Me Free Myself," presents a persona divided by conflicting desires for independence and for security. Notice the predominate images of barrenness, isolation, searching, and the ambiguity of conflicting desires.

\textbf{Come, Let Me Free Myself}

\textit{Robert Duncan}

Come, let me free myself from all that I love.
Let me free what I love from me, let it go free.
For I would obey without bound,
serve only as I serve.
Come, let me be free of this master I set over me
so that I must exact rectitude upon rectitude
right over right. Today
I am on the road, by the road,
hitch-hiking. And how, from one side,
how glad no one has come along.
For I am at a station. I am at home
in the sun. Not waiting, but standing here.
And on the other, I am waiting,
to be on the way, that it by MY way.
I am patient.
O let me be free now of MY way, for all that I
bind to me
--and I bind what I love to me,
    comforting chains and surroundings--
let these loved things go and let me go with them.
For I stand in the way, my destination stands
    in the way.15

Frequently, the three poets mention each other's name
in a poem or allude to one of the other's poetic theories.
Such is the case with the following poems by Robert Duncan
and Robert Creeley, each dedicated to the other poet. "Thank
You For Love" by Robert Duncan and dedicated to Creeley pre-
sents no distinct persona. What can be detected about the
persona is sincerity, willingness to reach out, and hopeful-
ness that the honesty will be returned. The action is
initiated by disclosure of self to another individual with
apparent identification. The overall impression appears to
signify the isolation of two individuals attempting identifi-
cation within a crowd, solitude as they begin the process
of learning about the other, and the realization that few
relationships last forever. The predominate idea is the
hope that the futility of identification will end with this
relationship.

Thank You For Love
for Robert Creeley

Robert Duncan
A friend
's a distant nearness,*
as if it were my loneliness you have
given song to, given a hand
towards parting without faltering,
lingering in the touch.
Is serious grace your part
in this
tenderness regret enhances?
At the dance we were sad.
Turning aside to talk,
we did not talk but said
what we could say under stars
as they were. Confiding
is a pure gesture, of itself
dear. Towards meeting.
We only referred to meeting,
a confidence
stumbling has towards moving on.
The feet are there
with us. Given the fact,
we will be moving on.
The song will be moving.
Words are friends
and from their distance
will return.16

* spelled as in original
Concerning Creeley's "The Door," Duncan has stated that the stimulus for the verse and the dedication relates to Duncan's visit with Creeley on Majorca. In this visit, Duncan exposed Creeley to the poets Coleridge and Zukofsky, who, like the Black Mountain poets, questioned the poetic form.

On a surface impression, the persona of "The Door" is a male subjected to an unfeeling female lover. However, clues throughout the verse indicate that the couple are not lovers, but a poet and his muse. It is to this muse that the poem is directed. For the persona, the impetus to follow "the lady" represents indecision and loneliness. The persona views the path of the muse as a death, leading to creative rebirth. In this light, the title functions as a porthole "cut so small in the wall," that following the muse will never be an easy task, but a venture of misgivings.

The Door
for Robert Duncan
Robert Creeley
It is hard going to the door
cut so small in the wall where
the vision which echoes loneliness
brings a scent of wild flowers in a wood.
What I understood, I understand,
My mind is sometime torment,
sometimes good and filled with livelihood,
and feels the ground.
But I see the door,
and knew the wall, and wanted the wood,
and I would get there if I could
with my feet and hands and mind.
Lady, do not banish me
for degressions. My nature
is a quagmire of unresolved
confessions. Lady, I follow.
I walked away from myself,
I left the room, I found the garden,
I knew the woman
in it, together we lay down.
Dead night remembers. In December
we change, not multiplied but dispersed,
sneaked out of childhood,
the ritual of dismemberment.
Mighty magic is a mother,
in her there is another issue
of fixture, repeated form, the race renewal,
the charge of the command.
The garden echoes across the room.
It is fixed in the wall like a mirror
that faces a window behind you
and reflects the shadows.
May I go now?
Am I allowed to bow myself down
in the ridiculous posture of renewal,
of the insistence of which I am the virtue?
Nothing for You is untoward.
In side You would also be tall,
more tall, more beautiful.
Come toward me from the wall, I want to be with You.
So I screamed to You,
who hears as the wind, and changes
multiply, invariably,
changes in the mind.
Running to the door, I ran down
as a clock runs down. Walked backwards,
stumbled, sat down
hard on the floor near the wall.
Where were You.
How absurd, how vicious.
There is nothing to do but get up.
My knees were iron, I rusted in worship, of You.
For that one signs, one
writes the spring poem, one goes on walking.
The Lady has always moved to the next town
and you stumble on after her.
The door in the wall leads to the garden
where in the sunlight sit
the Graces in long Victorian dresses,
of which my grandmother had spoken.

History sings in their faces.

They are young, they are obtainable,
and you follow after them also
in the service of God and Truth.

But the Lady is indefinable,
she will be the door in the wall
to the garden in sunlight.

I will go on talking forever.

I will never get there.

Oh Lady, remember me
who in Your service grows older
not wiser, no more than before.

How can I die alone.

Where will I be then who am now alone,
what groans so pathetically
in this room where I am alone?

I will go to the garden.

I will be a romantic. I will sell
myself in hell,
in heaven also I will be.

In my mind I see the door,
I see the sunlight before me across the floor
beckon to me, as the Lady's skirt
moves small beyond it.17
Any examination of the Black Mountain poets leads one to Charles Olson's essay entitled "Projective Verse." The literary theories expounded in the essay stem from the Creeley-Olson correspondence which runs into thousands of letters.

Before Olson's involvement with Black Mountain College began as a full-time venture, he had developed distinct attitudes toward Western governments and societies and more especially, toward the direction of contemporary poetry. His "Projective Verse" essay, published in *Poetry New York*, 1950, was initiated from a belief that the status quo government and the artists of the era represented two opposing forces. Olson believed that Western civilization had "cut itself off from direct perception, and consequently, from a compassionate understanding of the phenomena of nature."¹⁸ It was this vacuum that Olson believed poetry could fill and act as teacher.

Olson scholar Paul Christensen has devised a graphic design by which one may visually analyze Olson's poetry. Christensen has said that "a word placed anywhere can be seen to have meaning merely by its location on the page."¹⁹ Christensen's graphic analysis of the projective verse form is divided into four quadrants by two axes, namely, the vertical axis of event and the horizontal axis of thought. The left side of the page is the origin of thought while
the right side of the page signifies argument or the resolution of a problem.

The upper left quadrant sets the poetic stage, much as a Shakespearean prologue does, initiating action or rumination within the verse. The upper right quadrant concerns the poet's attempt, or the attempt by the persona of the poem to interpret and define the subject matter. Quadrant three, lower left, is dominated by sensory images and begins the unraveling of the dilemma. The last area, quadrant four, or the lower right portion is the resolution of the poetic dilemma or it will leave the reader with several possible solutions. Should the poet resolve the dilemma he may center his final words on the axis of event.

With this information as a basis, Charles Olson's "Letter 22" is presented. This poem is only one of many which comprise several volumes and are referred to collectively as the "Maximus" poems. The poems are unified by the persona of Maximus. They concern the wonderings and wanderings of Maximus as he searches for a personal and societal identity. In "Letter 22" Maximus attempts to justify limiting his attention solely to the township of Gloucester. While this poem is one of Olson's lighter verses, it sets the stage for subsequent Maximus poems by relating to the audience scant visual images of the township. In the third movement, Maximus tells the audience that he wishes to preserve these images for future generations.
Letter 22
Charles Olson

(Trouble
with the car. And for a buck
they gave me
what I found myself
eating! A polishing
cloth. And I went right on
eating it, it was that good.
And thick, color
orange & black, with a nap -- the billowing dress
the big girl wears
every so often

1
What weeds as an explanation
leaves out, is
that chaos
is not our condition.
Not that relaxation.

All,
has no honor as quantity.
And the attention,
in each of us,
is that one, not the other
not the perfect one. Beauty,
is too quick
for time

If man is omnivore,
and he is, he eats anything
every so often, he is also
amorvore
as well

(She lost her finger.
And the problem was,
at the celebration,
where to seat the
stranger:

Goomeranian,
his name was.

And he wore

a big smile

"Satie, enough"
was what is said

Satie,

enough
And I wear it,
as my blazon

moving
among my particulars, among
my foes
And what I write is
stopping the battle,
to get down, right in the midst of
the deeds, to tell
what this one did, how,
in the fray, he made this play, did grapple
with that one, how
his eye flashed
to celebrate
(behavior will not wait)
men,
and girls

(I swung the car to the left, confronted
as I was by the whole hill-front
a loading platform, the lip of it
staring at me, grinning,
you might say,
five feet off
the ground
And made it. It was only after
that the car gave me
trouble.
For there is a limit
to what a car
will do.20
While Olson acted as a catalyst bringing people together, Robert Duncan acted as a catalyst between the Black Mountain poets and the San Francisco literary scene. It was these contacts which aided Creeley in combining both poetic ideologies and verse in the last *Black Mountain Review*, published in the Autumn of 1957. It included not only works by Black Mountain writers, but works by poets of the San Francisco school such as Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Jack Kerouac.

Of Duncan's influence on succeeding poets, Kenneth Rexroth has stated, "From San Francisco and from Black Mountain College, his personal influence on young writers has spread far and wide." Rexroth goes on to say that Duncan is "one of the most accomplished, one of the most influential . . . one of the most mature."²¹

Unlike Creeley and Olson, Duncan began publishing in college reviews at age eighteen. He recounts the drive to create: "By my eighteenth year, I recognized in poetry my sole and ruling vocation."²²

Duncan's poetry is often cryptic in nature bordering on mysticism, Marxism, and Eastern philosophies. In "The Dance" he incorporates four voices to explicate a May dance. The voices include two narrators, one which is philosophical in nature and one which has a more practical outlook. The other two voices are participants in the May dance. Duncan divides words at the ends of lines to simulate the turns in
a dance movement. This technique provides a sense of syncopation when the poem is read aloud. Also, Duncan refers to Olson's Maximus, intimating that Olson had "called us to dance" with regards to the "Projective Verse" essay. Notice the rhythm of the poem as well as the vibrant images as he illustrates a May dance.

The Dance

Robert Duncan

from its dancers circulates among the other dancers. This would-have-been-feverish cool excess of movement makes each man hit the pitch co-ordinate.

Lovely their feet pound the green solid meadow, the dancers mimic flowers--roots, stem, stamen and petal our words are our articulations, our measures.

It is the joy that exceeds pleasure.

You have passed the count, she said or I understood from her eyes. Now old Friedl has grown so lovely in my years. I remember only the truth.

*spelled as in original
I swear by my yearning.
You have conquerd the yearning, she said
the numbers have entered your feet . . .

Turn, turn, turn
when you're real gone, boy, sweet boy . . .
Where Have I gone, Beloved?
into the Waltz, Dancer.
Lovely our circulations sweeten the meadow,
In Ruben's riotous scene the May dancers teach us our
learning seeks abandon!
Maximus calld us to dance the Man.
We calld him to call
season out of season-*
d mind!

Lovely
join we to dance green to the meadow
Whitman was right. Our names are left
like leaves of grass, likeness and liking, the human greeness
tough as grass that survives cruelest seasons.
I see now a radiance.
The dancers are gone.
They lie in heaps exhausted,
dead tired we say.

*spelled as in original
They'll sleep until noon.
But I returned early
for the silence,
for the lovely pang that is
a flower
returned to the silent dance-ground.
That was my job that summer. I'd dance until three, then up to get the hall swept before nine--beer bottles, cigarette butts, paper mementos of the night before. Writing it down now, it is the aftermath, the silence I remember. Part of the dance too, an articulation of the time of dancing. Like the almost dead sleeping. I've got it in a poem, about Friedl, moaning in the depths of.
But that was another room. Part of my description.
What I see is a meadow . . .
I'll slip away before they're up
and see the dew shining.23

In sharp contrast to Duncan's poetry, Creeley's verses are succinct, highly imagistic lyrics which progress through a variety of images within a single poem. Creeley once wrote of poetry that "form is dependent upon content; that one perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception." Creeley continues to say that a poem should not draw attention to its form, but to center attention into the
content—"not in itself a structure of recognition . . . (but) cognition itself."  

In "The Awakening," which is dedicated to Olson, Creeley paints for his audience a pastoral scene in a forest. The persona describes his subject with regards to the forest. In the initial movement of the verse, Creeley is alluding to Olson's physical height of six feet nine inches and in the last movement alludes to Olson's poetic height and professional influence. The poem seems to relate directly to Olson's influence upon Creeley as a writer. Creeley says of this influence, "Olson, I believe, was a decisive influence upon me as a writer, because he taught me how to write. Not to write poems as he wrote, but how to write poems that I write."  

Other images in "The Awakening" concern the persona's attitude toward being directed to a new awareness and insight. A paradigm for this verse could be stated as, "One is motivated to achieve because the achievement is the motivation."

The Awakening

for Charles Olson

Robert Creeley

He feels small as he awakens,
but in the stream's sudden mirror,
a pool of darkening water,
sees his size with his own two eyes.
The trees are taller here,
fall off to no fields or clearing,
and depend on the inswept air
for the place in which he finds himself thus lost.
I was going on to tell you
when the door bell rang it was
another story which as I know
previously happened, had occurred.
That was a woman's impression
of the wonders of the morning, the same place,
whiter air now, and strong breezes
move the birds off in that first freshening.
O wisest of gods! Unnatural prerogatives
would err to concur, would fall deafened
between the seen, the green green,
and the ring of a far off telephone.
God is no bone of whitened contention.
God is not air, nor hair, is not
a conclusive concluding
to remote yearning. He moves
only as I move, you also move to
the awakening, across long rows, of beds,
stumble breathlessly, on leg pins and crutch,
moving at all as all men, because you must.26

While Creeley expounded upon Olson's influence, the
following poem by Olson sets forth developmental influences
upon the life of the Maximus persona. In "Maximus, To
Himself," the persona philosophizes, discusses texts, makes
dialogues with an apparent lower, working-class people. The persona describes himself as being estranged from the familiar and as not benefitting from the communication with others. Predominate images concern water, solitude and isolation. If you will recall what was said of Olson's projective verse theory, should the persona resolve the dilemma, the concluding words of the poem would be centered on the vertical axis of event. However, in "Maximus, To Himself," the persona states that it is "all undone business" and consequently, the concluding remarks are not centered which illustrates that the persona has not reached a conclusion.

Maximus, To Himself
Charles Olson
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. Was delayed,
and not content with the man's argument
that such postponement
is not the nature of obedience,
that we are all late
in a slow time,
that we grow up many
And the single
is not easily
known
It could be, though the sharpness (the achiote)
I note in others,
makes more sense
than my own distances. The agilities
they show daily
who do the world's
businesses
And who do nature's
as I have no sense
I have done either
I have made dialogues,
have discussed ancient texts,
have thrown what light I could, offered
what pleasures doceat allows
But the known?
This, I have had to be given,
a life, a love, and from one man
the world.
Tokens.
But sitting here
I look out as a wind
and water man, testing
And missing
some proof
I know the quarters
of the weather, where it comes from,
where it goes. But the stem of me,
this I took from their welcome,
or their rejection, of me
And my arrogance
was neither diminished
nor increased,
by the communication
2
It is undone business
I speak of, this morning,
with the sea
stretching out
from my feet.27

In the following two poems by Creeley, one may observe the exacting precision he utilizes in his writing. With minimal amounts of words, Creeley is able to create detailed poetic illustrations. The first poem, "Words," is an excellent example of Creeley's belief that a poet's work should reflect his own pattern of speech. "Words" is comprised of extremely short line lengths, the longest consisting of only six words.
Words
Robert Creeley

You are always
with me,
there is never
a separate
place. But if
in the twisted
place I cannot speak,
not indulgence
or fear only,
but a tongue
rotten with what
it tastes--There is
a memory
of water, of food, when hungry.
Some day
will not be this one, then
to say words like a clear, fine
ash sifts,
like dust
from nowhere. 28

"Oh No" alludes to either death or insanity. The images
are simplistic and easily understood.

Oh No
Robert Creeley
If you wander far enough
you will come to it
and when you get there
they will give you a place to sit
for yourself only, in a nice chair,
and all your friends will be there
with smiles on their faces
and they will likewise all have places.\textsuperscript{29}

The concluding poem by Olson is believed to be his masterpiece. It is also one of his longer works. In "The Kingfishers," there is a sense of moving toward something, a progression. References are made to Mao and to Eastern religions. Mao is quoted as saying that, "We must get up and act." Several times in the poem the thought that change is inevitable and constant is repeated. A reference is also made to discovering an answer in the east. This relates to Olson's interest in Eastern ideologies and practices. Following is the last movement of "The Kingfishers" in which the persona analyzes his own personality and outlook.

The Kingfishers
Charles Olson

III

I am no Greek, hath not th'advantage.
And of course, no Roman:
he can take no risk that matters,
the risk of beauty least of all.
But I have my kin, if for no other reason than
(as he said, next of Kin) I commit myself, and,
given my freedom, I'd be a cad
if I didn't. Which is most true.
It works out this way, despite the disadvantage.
I offer, in explanation, a quote:
si j'ai du gout, ce n'est pierres.
(If I have any taste it is only for the earth and
the stones.)
Despite the discrepancy (an ocean courage age)
this is also true: if I have any taste
it is only because I have interested myself
in what was slain in the sun
I pose you your question:
shall you uncover honey
where maggots are?
I hunt among stones

From the literature and information presented here, one
can, perhaps, understand what a profound impact Black Mountain
College and the three poets, Charles Olson, Robert
Creeley, and Robert Duncan, have had on contemporary American
poetry. As we've seen, the primary force behind the Black Mountain
movement was Charles Olson. Through correspondence
and poetic counseling, he influenced others to teach and
create at Black Mountain College. He acted as a literary
catalyst, serving as mentor, teacher, counselor. His verses
serve as guide posts in American poetry. Olson died in 1970. His legacy to succeeding poets is his innovative poetic theory. The "Projective Verse" essay describes a design in poetry which had a great impact on post World War II poets. Olson's primary influence on American poetry is as a theoretician rather than as a poet.

Robert Creeley's editorial abilities provide succeeding poets with a chronicle of the poetic innovations of Black Mountain College. Creeley continues to teach and write poetry. His brief, haiku-like verses are the current model for many younger poets who are attracted to the imagistic powers of poetry.

Robert Duncan's literary relationships provided a bridge between two of the predominant literary movements of the era, namely the San Francisco "Beat Poets" and Black Mountain College. His influence on young writers has spread far and wide. As Kenneth Rexroth states, Duncan is "one of the most accomplished, one of the most influential . . . one of the most mature" poets writing today.

The poetry of Creeley and Duncan, as well as many other poets, reflects the fact that they continue to follow Olson's advice when he said

These Days
Charles Olson

whatever you have to say, leave
the roots on, let them
dangle
And the dirt

just to make clear
where they came from$^{32}$
NOTES


2 Duberman, p. 11.

3 Duberman, p. 11.

4 Duberman, p. 19.

5 Duberman, p. 52.

6 Duberman, p. 61.

7 Duberman, p. 223.

8 Duberman, p. 391.

9 Duberman, p. 392.


11 Duberman, p. 378.


19 Christensen, p. 87.


22 Christensen, p. 87.


29 Creeley, "Oh No," For Love, p. 62.

30 Olson, "The Kingfishers," Archaeologist of Morning, n. pag.

31 Rexroth, p. 35.

32 Olson, "These Days," Archaeologist of Morning, n. pag.
APPENDIX A

Copy of Letter From Vance James

June 15, 1980

June 15, 1980

Mrs. John F. Huskey
Rt. 1, Box 37
Black Mountain, NC 28711

Dear Mrs. Huskey,

I am a graduate student at North Texas State University and have begun research into the literature and poets of Black Mountain College. This research is in preparation for a master's thesis centering on the poets, Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan.

Your niece, Laura Pentecost, suggested that I write you for information concerning the college since you were a resident of Black Mountain during its existence. While I have found a great deal of information about the college, I have been unable to locate information concerning the literary events at Black Mountain College. Martin Duberman's book, Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community, mentions poetry readings, seminars, and other happenings centering at the college. Perhaps you or your friends attended some of these events.

I will greatly appreciate any information you can send concerning the college and other residents I may contact.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Vance James
4703 A Bradford Dr.
Dallas, TX 75219
APPENDIX B

Copy of Letter From Opal S. Huskey

June 29, 1980

Mr. Vance James
4703 A. Bradford Dr.
Dallas, TX 75219

Dear Vance,

First I will list the names of friends that you may like to contact. I have talked with each of them and have their permission to give you their names.

Mrs. H. McGuire Wood (wife of a deceased professor).
615 Azalea Ave.

She will loan you some information if you promise faithfully to return it within a few days after receiving it. Her husband would not allow it out of his possession but she wants to help a dependable thesis writer. I am mailing the letter that you wrote to me so that she may have a clear understanding of your plans.

Mr. and Mrs. Edward DuPuy (Camp and Conference photographer but not at the time of the college)
116 North Blue Ridge Road

Mrs. Douglas Jones (she and her first husband sold seafood)
Box 1326

Mrs. S.S. Cooley (wife of a deceased local doctor)
Doughrty Avenue
(no number listed)

Mr. William Hickey (retired president of the present Northwestern Bank of Black Mountain)

Black Mt., N.C. 28711 is the mailing address of those listed.
I assume that you have read the book "Black Mountain an Exploration in Community by Martin Duberman" c 1972

There is a new book but I have not seen or read it. There is a film strip at our local library. We are leaving for Berea, Ky. in the morning for Alumni College and my husband's 55th class reunion. When we return, I shall plan to see it. Our Librarian attended the Black Mt. College but refuses to give interviews oral or written.

Laura's grandmother Bennett and I visited Black Mt. for the first time in 1957 when I bought the lot on which our house stands. All that I knew about the college has been hearsay. Most of the people here who could give a first hand report are deceased or have moved away.

I hope the contacts that I have made for you will be helpful and that you may have good success in writing your thesis. If I find anything that I think will be helpful to you, I will write to you.

If you talk to Laura, tell her "Hello" for me.

Most sincerely,

Opal S. Huskey

( Mrs. John F. Huskey )
APPENDIX C

Copy of Letter From Emily Wood

July 3, 1980

July 3, 1980
Black Mtn. N.C.

Dear Vance James—

Mrs. Huskey talked to me over the phone and sent me your letter to her regarding info. you wanted on Blk Mtn. College.

My husband "Mac" taught there 1941-43 hired to teach architecture (Antioch graduate) but took over much more--mostly the work program--and I had the privilege of joining the art students in Josef Albers Class. We had three and a little more--of the most stimulating years of our lives living on that campus.

A Mr. Hoffman assistant director in the archive division at Raleigh came to see me five years ago or so and persuaded me to give him all my material on the college. --that my husband would never part with--in return he sent duplicate plates of it to our library and I, in Mac's memory, gave a mimeograph machine to show them on. I am sorry to say it is seldom used because hard as I have tried to advertise its' presence very few know about it & the wealth of information it holds isn't communicated to interested persons.

I have had many calls for material as my name has gotten around.- Articles written up in newspapers- thesis students have sent me to show they used bits of info I've sent them. I have collected much that has been printed since the college's demise. I have it all in a big box in my basement and a few pictures that have been found since Mr. Hoffman's collection.

The thing is Vance James--can I be sure it will be returned to me-- I dislike to distrust people but I like to help anyone interested, I really do.

Martin Duberman, before he published his book on Blk Mtn College sat down in our basement and copied a wealth of information--but was a little put out because we wouldn't lend him pamphlets, etc. Promised me his book but never delivered it.
A Mr. David Pittman, Caldwell Comm. College, Hudson, N.C. came a few wks ago and I did lend him what he wanted to copy-- he returned all in one week.

I have Duberman's book but it can be borrowed or sent for by any library I'm sure.


Do you ever get up this way? or are you stationed in Denton, Texas?

Perhaps I could send you some pamphlets and news sheets if you specify just what you want and PROMISE TO RETURN-- Okay?

Mrs. Huskey did not include in her letter any list of questions you asked.

Hoping to be of help to you--

Sincerely,

(Mrs.) Emily Wood
APPENDIX D

Copy of Letter From Vance James

July 8, 1980

July 8, 1980

Mrs. Emily Read Wood
615 Azalea Avenue
Black Mountain, NC 28711

Dear Mrs. Wood,

I was so pleased to receive your letter this morning. Your experience at Black Mountain College and the resource material you have preserved is a vast wealth on a subject which needs more scholarly attention.

Unfortunately, at this time I am unable to visit Black Mountain. However, any correspondence will be greatly appreciated. I can assure you that I will treat any documents or pamphlets you send with the utmost care and respect. I give you my word for their prompt return.

To begin, I need to tell you about my graduate research into Black Mountain College. The thesis concerns the poets Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan; the influence of Black Mountain College upon them as writers; their professional influence upon each other; and their influence upon succeeding poets. This information will be culminated into a lecture recital incorporating historic data of Black Mountain and representative works of the three poets. The proposed title is "An Oral Interpretation Script Illustrating the Influence of the Three Black Mountain Poets on Contemporary American Poetry."

To date I have encountered some difficulty in researching the literary atmosphere at Black Mountain. Martin Duberman's book alludes to writing workshops and literature readings. These activities along with information on Olson, Creeley, and Duncan are of interest to me. I have researched the issues of the Black Mountain Review, but they only present an external impression of Black Mountain's literary life.

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Perhaps you attended the readings, are familiar with such events, or have information pertaining to them.

Again, let me express my gratitude for your assistance and giving of your time.

Most sincerely,

Vance James
APPENDIX E
Copy of Letter From Emily Wood
July 18, 1980
Black Mtn. N.Car.
July 18, 1980

Dear Mr. Vance James--

I am sending you under separate cover some material you may find useful--and am sorry you are unable to make contact to our microfilm machine here in our library.

I faintly remember Creeley, and Robert Duncan not all all--and as I mentioned Olson came on when the college was in the process of folding up -- Nell Rice tried her best to outstay him but lost out.

I feel sure you will take care of the material I am sending and will return as soon as you have perused it to your satisfaction.

Wishing you luck with your venture

Sincerely,

Emily R. Wood
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Duncan, Robert, Roots and Branches, New York, New Directions Publishing Corp., 1964.


