An Annotated Guide to the Maximus Poems of Charles Olson

"The 1950 publication of his essay "Projective Verse" marked the emergence of Charles Olson (1910-70) as a dynamic leader of avant-garde poetry in America. His poetry and essays—including "Human Universe", In Cold Hell, in Thicket, and the nine books of Maximus Poems—resonate with an intellect that has been compared to the likes of Herman Melville, Ezra Pound, and William Carlos Williams. Olson's poetry, packed with radical themes and a vast and eclectic spectrum of material, places extreme intellectual demands on the reader. Perhaps it was the difficult nature of his work that delayed any formal recognition of his achievement until 1988 when, 18 years after his death, he was awarded the National Book Award for The Collected Poems of Charles Olson."—Eniko Bollobas

History as Myth in The Maximus Poems of Charles Olson

Charles Olson was an important force behind the raucous, explicit, jaunty style of much of twentieth-century poetry in America. This study makes a major contribution to our understanding of his life and work. Paul Christensen draws upon a wide variety of source materials—from letters, unpublished essays, and fragments and sketches from the Olson Archives to the full range of Olson's published prose and poetry. Under Christensen's critical examination, Olson emerges as a stunning theorist and poet, whose erratic and often unfinished writings obscured his provocative intellect and the coherence of his perspective on the arts. Soon after World War II, Olson emerged as one of America's leading poets with his revolutionary document on poetry, "Projective Verse," and his now-classic poem, "The Kingfishers," both of which declared a new set of techniques for verse composition. Throughout the 1950s Olson wrote many polemical essays on literature, history, aesthetics, and philosophy that outlined a new stance to experience he called objectivism. A firm advocate of spontaneous self-expression in the arts, Olson regarded the poet's return to an intense declaration of individuality as a force to combat the decade's insistence on conformity. Throughout his life Olson fought against the depersonalization of the artist in the modern age; his resources, raw verse and unedited tumultuous lyricism, were weapons he used against generalized life and identity. This volume begins with an overview of Olson's life from his early years as a student at Harvard through his short-lived political career, his rectorship at Black Mountain College, and his retirement to Gloucester to finish writing the Maximus poems. Christensen provides a systematic review of Olson's prose works, including a close examination of his brilliant monograph on Melville, Call Me Ishmael. Considerable attention is devoted to Olson's theory of projectivism, the themes and techniques of his short poems, and the strategies and content of his major work, the Maximus series. In addition, there is a critical survey of the works of Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov, Paul Blackburn, and other poets who show Olson's influence in their own innovative, self-exploratory poetry.

The Collected Poems of Charles Olson

Letters written during the spring and summer of 1951 convey the artistic concerns of the two writers and share commentary on their poems and essays in progress.

Maximus Poems IV, V, VI by Charles Olson

Maud (English, Simon Fraser U.) offers a narrative account of the life and work of poet Charles Olson, focusing on the poet's lifelong reading material as a basis for understanding his work. Drawing on an annotated listing of his library, as well as his childhood books and poetry by his contemporaries, she links the books to the poet's intellectual and poetic development at each stage of his career. Annotation copyright by Book News, Inc., Portland, OR

Charles Olson's Reading

From the more than three hundred poems making up The Maximus Poems and the comparable number in Olson's Collected Poems, Creeley's selection makes available for the first time an essential sampling of Olson's poetry. Included are paradigmatic early works like "The Kingfishers," which Guy Davenport called "the most modern of American poems, the most energetically influential text in the last thirty-five years," as well as familiar pieces from Maximus like "Maximus, to Gloucester" and "Celestial Evening." Also represented are less known poems, such as "The chain of memory is resurrection" and "The Lamp," works that reveal a more personal side of this major American poet. Together these poems demonstrate Olson's genius and grace, a poet as at home in Gloucester as in the cosmos, a reckoner with dreams and myths, and "Western man at the limit of himself."

The Poetry of Charles Olson

How do readers approach the enigmatic and unavailing modernist long poem? Taking as the form's exemplars the highly influential but critically contentious poetics of John Cage and Charles Olson, this book considers indeterminacy—the fundamental feature of the long poem—by way of its analogues in musicology, mycology, cybernetics and philosophy. It addresses features of these works that figure broadly in the long poem tradition, such as listing, typography, archives, mediation and metereology, while articulating how both poets broke with the longform poetic traditions of the early 1900s. Brendan C. Gillott argues for Cage's and Olson's centrality to these traditions—in developing, critiquing and innovating on the longform poetics of the past, their work revolutionized the longform poetry of the 20th and 21st centuries.
The Creature Self

The Maximus Poems, Volume 3

Charles Olson

Presents information about American poet Charles John Olson (1910-1970) and his works, compiled as part of the Electronic Poetry Center of the Department of English and the University Libraries at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Offers access to essays, reviews, and manuscripts.

The Personae in Charles Olson's Maximus Poems

Background information accompanies Olson's poems about myths, mortality, language, love, nature, marriage, music, and time.

The Maximus Poems

A Study of The Maximus Poems of Charles Olson

Selected Poems of Charles Olson

Charles Olson & Robert Creeley

Poet as Map Maker

The Collected Poems of Charles Olson

Olson Mythmaker

Letter No. 13

A seminal figure in post-World War II literature, Charles Olson (1910-1970) has helped define the postmodern sensibility. His poetry is marked by an almost limitless range of interest and extraordinary depth of feeling. Olson's themes are among the largest conceivable: empowering love, political responsibility, historical discovery and cultural reckoning, the wisdom of dreams and the transformation of consciousness—all carried in a voice both intimate and grand, American and timeless, impassioned and coolly demanding. Until recently, Olson's reputation as a major figure in American literature has rested primarily on his theoretical writings and his epic work, the Maximus Poems. With The Collected Poems an even more impressive Olson emerges. This volume brings together all of Olson's work and extends the poetic accomplishment that influenced a generation. Charles Olson was praised by his contemporaries and emulated by his successors. He was declared by William Carlos Williams to be "a major poet with a sweep of understanding of the world, a feeling for other men that staggers me." His indispensable essays, "Projective Verse" and "Human Universe," and his study of Melville, Call Me Ishmael, remain as fresh today as when they were written.

Selected Letters

Contemporary Olson

“Staying Open, Charles Olson's Sources and Influences” investigates the inter-disciplinary influences on the work of the mid-Century American poet, Charles Olson. This edited collection of essays covers Olson’s diverse non-literary interests, including his engagement with the music of John Cage and Pierre Boulez, his interests in abstract expressionism, and his readings of philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. The essays also examine Olson's pedagogy, which he developed in the experimental environment at Black Mountain College, as well as his six-month archeological journey through the Yucatan Peninsula in 1950 to explore the culture of the Maya. This book will, therefore, be a strong research aid to scholars working in diverse fields – music, archeology, pedagogy, philosophy, art, and psychology – as it outlines methods for close inter-disciplinary work that can uncover the mechanics of Olson’s creative, literary processes. Building on the straightforward scholarship of George Butterick, whose Guide to the Maximus Poems remains indispensable for readers of Olson’s work, the essays in this volume will also guide readers through the thick allusions within The Maximus Poems itself. New interest in the wide-ranging and non-literary nature of Olson's thought in several recent academic works makes this book both timely and necessary. Physics Envy: American Poetry and Science in the Cold War and After by Peter Middleton as well as Contemporary Olson edited by David Herd have started the process of uncovering the extent to which Olson's inter-disciplinary interests inflected his poetic compositions. “Staying Open” extends the preliminary investigations of Olson’s non-literary sources in those volumes by bringing together a community of scholars working across disciplines and within a wide variety of humanistic concerns.

Staying Open: Charles Olson’s Sources and Influences

Charles Olson

Charles Olson
Charles Olson’s Maximus

Charles Olson

As poet, critic, theorist and teacher, Charles Olson extended the possibilities of modern writing. From Call Me Ishmael, his pioneering study of Herman Melville, to his epic poetic project The Maximus Poems, Olson probed the relation between language, space and community. Writing in the aftermath of the Second World War, he provided radical resources for the re-imagining of place and politics, resources for collective thought and creative practice we are still learning how to use. Re-situating Olson’s work in relation both to his own moment and to current concerns, the essays assembled in Contemporary Olson provide a major re-assessment of his place in postwar poetry and culture. Through a series of contextualising chapters, discussions of individual poems and reflections on Olson’s legacy by leading international writers and critics, the book presents a poet who still informs contemporary poetry, whose thought and compositional innovations continue to provoke. Remote as some of his fascinations must now seem, Olson is shown nonetheless to offer a poetry and poetics that speaks clearly to our own fraught historical moment. Contemporary Olson opens this major writer to new readings and new readers.

The Maximus Poems, 1-22

Charles Olson

A collection of modern poems probing the human feelings which penetrate life and history along the northern Massachusetts coast

Charles Olson’s Maximus Poems

Annotation "Through a detailed and thoughtful study of the impact of Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy on Olson's aesthetic theory, this book points out the conceptual unity underlying what seems to be a sprawl of fragments in Olson's major work, The Maximus Poems." "On the one hand, concrete poetic units of The Maximus Poems serve as a starting point for clarifying how different elements are joined together in one unity. On the other hand, the book traces the blending of the whole poem at the macro level, following its course through a temporal progress in which the poem moves from one poetic unit to the next; that is, from a unity (of multiplicity) to a new unity (in which the previous unity is already part of the multiplicity building the new one). Thus the book illuminates Olson's theory of the Long Poem as an “all-containing” corpus, governed by metaphysical principles, equal to life itself, enacted in the process of working on The Maximus Poems."--BOOK JACKET. Title Summary field provided by Blackwell North America, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

The Derivative Poetics of Charles Olson

The Maximus Poems

For Charles Olson, letters were not only a daily means of communication with friends but were at the same time a vehicle for exploratory thought. In fact, many of Olson's finest works, including Projective Verse and the Maximus Poems, were formulated as letters. Olson's letters are important to an understanding of his definition of the postmodern, and through the play of mind exhibited here we recognize him as one of the vital thinkers of the twentieth century. In this volume, edited and annotated by Ralph Maud, we see Olson at the height of his powers and also at his most human. Nearly 200 letters, selected from a known 3,000, demonstrate the wide range of Olson's interests and the depth of his concern for the future. Maud includes letters to friends and loved ones, job and grant applications, letters of recommendation, and Black Mountain College business letters, as well as correspondence illuminating Olson's poetics. As we read through the letters, which span the years from 1931, when Olson was an undergraduate, to his death in 1970, a fascinating portrait of this complex poet and thinker emerges.

The Maximus Poems 1-10

Reading the Modernist Long Poem

A Bibliography of Works by Charles Olson

Charles Olson and the Modernist Inheritance

00 Praised by his contemporaries and emulated by his successors, Charles Olson (1910-1970) was declared by William Carlos Williams to be "a major poet with a sweep of understanding of the world, a feeling for other men that staggers me." This complete edition brings together the three volumes of Olson's long poem (originally published in 1960, 1968, and 1975) in an authoritative version. Praised by his contemporaries and emulated by his successors, Charles Olson (1910-1970) was declared by William Carlos Williams to be "a major poet with a sweep of understanding of the world, a feeling for other men that staggers me." This complete edition brings together the three volumes of Olson's long poem (originally published in 1960, 1968, and 1975) in an authoritative version.

Language as Physical Fact

Charles Olson & Robert Creeley

Letters written during the spring and summer of 1951 convey the artistic concerns of the two writers and share commentary on their poems and essays in progress.

A Guide to the Maximus Poems of Charles Olson