

Hello, *Dispatches*:

I just got back from four nights in Gloucester. It was nice, as always. More to the point, in the 30 or so hours I spent in the Maud / Olson Library, I certainly got a better sense of what's there, and renewed insight into what Gregor Gibson calls "Olson's brain." For one thing, I was pleased to realize that the "concept" of the library holds up: as an "installation" that puts on display the marriage of poetry (Charles Olson) and scholarship (Ralph Maud), this is a special collection of real worth, even if those who currently benefit from it are few. It offers a scholar's view of the scholar's art, as that art is informed by reading. (I found Maud's reproduction of the Olson's notes and underlined passages in Whitehead's *Process and Reality* particularly impressive, as an example of a "close reading" of a close reading.)

By the same token, being in a room (actually, two rooms) with basically all of Olson's books at my disposal confirmed why I got drawn into Olson in the first place: there is something completely unique & timely about Olson's "archaeology of morning" that engages the need to "find out for one's self," essentially through reading and archival research. A strange paradox about Olson's library, as Ammiel pointed out to me, is its relatively small size: its approximately 4500 volumes contrast, for example, with the 30,000 volumes in Gerrit Lansing's library across town. In other words, the Maud / Olson Library is highly focused, *concentrated*—literally, a "high-energy construct" projecting like a rhizome into a variety of directions for further study. Working with the online database:

https://public.tableau.com/profile/gloucester.writers.center#!/vizhome/MaudOlsonLibraryCatalogue_1/SearchbyTitle

and the in-house catalogue, it became perfectly clear to me, for example, that there is a strong and definite archaeological matrix to this collection: books and journals dedicated to the archaeology of the Middle East, Greece, Northern Europe, the Americas, etc. in addition, of course, to the history and geography of Gloucester and New England. This is the "archaeologicistic" ball that Olson ran with; it's what distinguishes him from other American poets of his time (cf. Guy Davenport's "The Symbol of the Archaic," in *Geography of the Imagination*) and the basis on which he engages, for starters, the field of literature. In this respect, while it becomes pretty clear who was historically important to him—Melville, Lawrence, Pound, Emerson, Whitehead...—what was pretty cool, for me, was to come across the various journals, lit mags, mimeos, et. al, in which Olson's writing and the writings of his peers first started to appear.

(A parenthesis, here. I originally went to Gloucester with the intention of identifying and perusing the works by women that figured in Olson's library... but I quickly got caught up in the process of trying to get a better overview of what was on the shelves. (Among women important to Olson, H. D. and Jane Harrison seem to stand out.) But looking at those journals

of which the library has a fairly complete collection, e.g. the *Evergreen Review*, it was surprising, despite everything, to see how radically out of whack the representation of writing by women really was. Sporadically, poems by Di Prima will show up; also Barbara Guest; then Joanne Kyger; then, Levertov, Niedecker, and Anne Waldman... And this is true of virtually all the poetry rags in Olson's library—where, I would say, based on a cursory look at various Tables of Contents, writing by women represents somewhere between 5% to 10% of the published material... On this point, a poet friend responded that however minimal the input by women in these “counter-cultural” magazines, it was still better than in the more mainstream literary venues of the time. Maybe... I'm willing to take his word for it, it warrants further research... but the larger point I'd make here is that taking Olson to task for his “sexism” misses the bigger picture, and then some.)

But the paradox that really stays with me, that came out of left field really—when I realize that I am some eight years older than Olson was when he died (after having just turned 60)—is that he is now, in a sense, my “junior.” Coming out of the Maud / Olson library after a certain immersion in it, I actually got a sense of the “youthful” energy that Olson represents and projects, and will continue to project for new generations of readers. I guess that, like many, I had come to think of Olson, no doubt in large part because of his large size, as something of an “elder statesman.” But here I am now, strangely, seeing him not simply as a figure for the “new,” but for the fucking *young*, the *energetic*, the *beautiful*... Coming to poetry in, what? his late 30s? the man was a great poet (cut down) in full stride.