

sight. A movement and the *theory* of a movement are two different and distinct kinds of literary activity. I could illustrate this in any number of ways, but it would take too much of our time. A general statement will have to do; I hope you will take it on trust. Simply, that the *theory*, any theory of poetry, is always a secondary manifestation: poetics follow poems, not the other way round.

In the case of 'open form' poetry, I think we have seen a peculiar tendency to put theory first and poetic practice second. In order to write 'open form', the poet is assumed *first* to have read and mastered the principles of 'projective verse', in particular as these are expounded by the late Charles Olson, by Robert Creeley, and other American poets associated with them. Besides this, the movement, and some aspects of the theory as well, have combined (and confused) *poetic* revolution with *social* revolution, more consciously and obviously than any such movement since the Romantics nearly two centuries ago. Of course I'm thinking of the counter-culture of the sixties and seventies; the years when poetry in more or less 'open' form began to be epidemic—and the San Francisco years, in the fifties, when Ferlinghetti, Robert Duncan, Gary Snyder, and Allen Ginsberg gave such a big impetus to the movement.

In one sense the theory did come first; Charles Olson's essay called 'Projective Verse' appeared as early as 1950. But it didn't produce the new movement. I think it would be a wild guess that Ginsberg, for instance—whom I consider the one poet of unusual genius among them all—owed his highly individual style to the theorising of Olson and Creeley. Rather, it seems to me that the movement—the Beat generation and their successors—picked up the theory and swept it along, till today we find it on our own doorstep, alive and kicking or, shall we say, twitching? The theory was something the movement wanted, and there it was: a *poetic*, a mystique, a doctrine, an ideology of sorts.

All the same, however it looks to us now, Charles Olson, in 1950, did announce what he conceived to be a new poetic, a new programme for poetry. In doing this, he invoked the authority, and the example, of major American poets of an earlier generation: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane, E. E. Cummings. Pound and Williams in particular interested him; but they were the forerunners, the beginners; what Olson proposed was a more advanced theory than theirs, and (at least by implication) a superior poetic practice.

I have been rereading Pound's famous 'A Few Don'ts' of the year 1913, and his poetic *credo*, written in 1911. With Olson's 'Projective Verse' and a few other revered scriptures of the movement fresh in my mind, I find myself wondering, a little, how much has been