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RETRIEVING TEMPORALITY IN CHARLES OLSON'S POETRY VIA JUNG'S THEORY OF ARCHETYPES, PLATO'S IDEA OF THE THIRD MAN AND BACHELARD'S POETICS OF ELEMENTS

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Abstract: This essay is based on the assumption that the characteristic feature of Charles Olson's poetry is his concern with retrieving temporality by learning to see the outer and inner worlds in depth. For further revealing the process of Olson's surfacing his dark inner drives so that he could control and understand them, Plato's Idea of the third man, Bachelard's poetics of elements and Jung's archetypal patterns will be extensively employed.

Charles Olson's poetry has been collected in two books, *The Distances* and *Maximus Poems*, both largely influenced by Ezra Pound's "Cantos", by Williams Carlos Williams and to a certain extent, by Cummings. Such influences can be noticed in the lines which are "split", in the quotations which are "extensive", in the variations of the line – lengths, in the rapid transition from one poetic manner of expression to another, in his varied syntactical patterns, and in his unusual punctuation (Rosenthal, 163).

In spite of such influences, Olson's distinctive voice and intentions reverberate within the very first verse from the opening stanza of the second section of "The Kingfisher": "What does not change / is the will to change" (163). "To change what?" we would wonder. Rosenthal offers an interesting reading of this quotation in the sense that, in his opinion, Olson's main intention is to revive "the primal values that have been driven out of sight by the alienating forces of European civilization" (164). Rosenthal further claims, referring to "the Kingfisher", that its main concern is "the betrayal of humanly meaningful modes of life which we discovered before the emergence of the modern state" (165). This assumption together with the previously quoted line "What does not change / is the will to change" is extensively relevant as concerns Olson's entire poetic creation. By way of consequence, "the betrayal of humanly modes of life" necessarily implies a permanent and assumed striving for retrieving temporality and all the spiritual values organically associated with it (morality, kindness, selflessness, empathy).

We consider that Jung's theory of archetypes, Plato's Idea of the third man and Gaston Bachelard's poetics of elements could offer interesting keys of interpreting Olson's implied intention of linking the remote, almost forgotten past of humanity to the present and the future.

In order to depict the large and profound implications of the collocation "the will to change" and relate it to the concept of "retrieving temporality", two poems belonging to Olson will be closely analyzed: "Said Adam" and "As The Dead Prey Upon Us".

"Said Adam" represents some sort of spiritual testament and allows for several levels of interpretation. Its well-articulated and inspiring intuitive images can be decoded resorting to Plato's metaphysics built on his Theory of Forms or Ideas. Andrei Cornea's article entitled "What Are We to Do with "the Third Man"" is based on the assumption that "all sensitive people" together with the "Ideal Man" take part in creating a new Idea of man – the third man (15).

In Olson's poem, the Ideal Man stands for Adam before the Fall, before having sinned and lost his purity. He is emblematic of the original pure, pious, right creature. Such connotations stem from his ideal,

metaphysical, mythical and psychological significance. The psychological connotation of Plato's Ideal Man brings us closer to the second concept, that of the "sensitive man", who, in Olson's poem, is the sinful Adam, or Adam after the Fall.

How can these two entities participate in creating or, why not, re-creating a new Idea of Man? This can happen because both the sensitive and the Ideal Man possess a common feature – their conscience. And yet, the conscience of the Ideal Man is pure, strong, intangible, while sensitive people possess a rather impure, weak conscience due to their being permanently whipped out by all sorts of sensations.

Moreover, the Ideal Man can stand for Jesus Christ, called by Jung "master of the collective unconscious" (29). The relation between the sinful Adam – the modern sensory man and the Ideal Man – Jesus Christ – generates within ourselves what Jung call the phenomenon of individuation. More precisely, it signifies the will to change by accepting to take an inward journey and bring the dark socially unacceptable unconscious drives to conscious view. Of course, such a process is painful, but irreversible.

Olson's sensory imagery associated with Jung's theory of the necessity of growing aware of our unconscious inner nature by bringing it to conscious view can be interpreted via Bachelard's poetics of elements based on the psychoanalytical meaning of fire, water, air and earth.

Said Adam

I

The day red like the cardinal
color, not song
(his song the day's inadequate whippoorwill)

Dusk the whiskered bird
(no flight-or light)
from the ground sharp the sound:
whip-poor-will!
whip-poor-will!

Night, and still the bees
the large linden hums a honey loom
their work a wind,
no color no light.

II

Day and night we humans wander
without color without light
aimless as cattle feed
without wind without flight.

This tree does not bend its neck
needs not to,
goes upward year in and dark
at ease, absurd, in nature's round.

Cortex and spine,
bulls we are

caught in habit
prevented by a fence
from our desire.

III

All else moves easily
bee and flaming bird
tree, light and whipping song.
We lumber
make enigma
lack what we want
locked in what we have.

Our choice like the shades of green
but we limit spring
lose the joy of our short season
refuse the color
leave the light no place to go.

Cry why
do we have to chose
can we not flee and run
as bee and bull
wear red and sing
as whippoorwill?

IV

In the night
the whiskered song whips out:
whip-poor-will!
whip-poor-will!
whip-poor-will! (in Olson 54)

Olson's first two verses "The day red like the cardinal / color, not song" are built on the symbolic value of fire, through the color "red". Bachelard claims that the image of man contemplating fire resembles the pensive solitary individual engaged in a process of acquiring self-awareness. Within such an enlightening experience the fire looks as bright as "the conscience of solitude." (31) Moreover, the same Bachelard claims that the individual is a project of his own wishes, of his own reveries. And what could Adam dream of but his former primordial pure condition. Adam can be regarded, following Bachelard's approach, as a "mythical complex" understood as an "organized ensemble of representations and recollections with a powerful affective value, being partially or totally unconscious of them" (32).

If the color red can be associated with the "conscience of solitude", the bird's song from the third verse "whippoorwill" can be interpreted from a double perspective. On the one hand, the bird is normally associated with the idea of flight; on the other, "whippoorwill" has psychological connotations signifying our limited sinful human nature.

The first two verses of the second stanza "Dusk the whiskered bird / (no flight-or light) may be interpreted as the idea of unsuccessful flight via the poetics of the bird's wings which, in this case, are

incapable to fly. By way of consequence, we can infer the imaginary fall. The same Bachelard claims that man can stay before God only in a continuous fall, adding that it is the only form of real noblesse because it is entirely nonsubjective (32). Lack of light can also be associated with Adam's fall and the resultative absence of inner spiritual light.

The verses "from the ground sharp the sound: whip-poor-will! whip-poor-will!" can be decoded via Bachelard's symbolism of the ground, or the earth as being opposed to the previous pure edenic garden. The leitmotif "whip-poor-will" appears as an acoustic metaphor of our aspiration towards the previous spiritual pure condition.

Bachelard associates the earth with the reveries of the will in his study entitled "The Earth and the Reveries of the Will". He introduces the syntagm of "the function of the unreal" (16), which, in his opinion, is as important as the function of the real, being equally important for social adjustment. According to Bachelard, the reveries of the will correspond to the function of the unreal. Such reveries are animated by "unconscious pulsations" (19) and oneiric forces which reflect the mysteries of our conscious rational life.

In the third stanza "Night, and still the bees / the large linden tree hums a honey loom / their work a wind, / no color no light", the bees can also be associated with flight. The word "wind" diminishes their determination to succeed in their vertical movement, bringing us closer to the ephemeral which is stressed by the second leitmotif "no color no light". The "bees" can also be associated with the reveries of the will. The "bees" belong to a larger poetic project of the poet's own wishes to surpass failure, inactivity, and inconsistency.

If we look closer into Olson's poetic strategy we may say that his basic technique is that of employing his "material imagination", defined by Bachelard as "the faculty of creating images which surpass reality, but which sing reality" (33).

The bird's song "whippoorwill" inspiringly suggests how Olson artistically recreates a psychological reality. Adam's private states encapsulated within the leitmotif "whippoorwill" cannot be reduced to affection, to mere feelings. Their value is rather ontological, being synonymous with a profound apprehension of our existence, with an opening toward the world as a consequence of a tremendous cosmic trust. Olson's space is a place of cosmic solidarity because man is related to his own profound nature and to nature itself, symbolized by the bird and various animals. As concerns Adam's suffering, it is the necessary prerequisite for spiritual transformation.

The third interpretation of this poem arises from Jung's archetype of change. It consists of symbolically living apparently irreconcilable experiences of losing and winning, of confronting oneself with light and darkness. This archetype has for an object personal enlightenment and the acquisition of a superior "wise" (34) conscience through which unpleasant situations are surpassed, or elevated. The repetitive pattern "no flight or light / no color no light" may be interpreted as suggesting global depoeticization, associated with the diminishing of poetic wisdom.

This idea resounds in the fourth stanza: "Day and night we humans wander / without color without light / aimless as cattle feed / without wind without flight". The syntagm "aimless as cattle feed" signifies our being engrossed in sensuality, in the material ephemeral values of the prosaic world.

The fifth stanza offers as a possible solution for detaching ourselves from the prosaic world a retreat within some sort of locus poeticus symbolized by the tree: "This tree does not bend its neck / needs not to, / go upward year in and dark / at ease, absurd, in nature's round".

This tree stands for the tree of knowledge, for poetic wisdom which can be found only within us. Jung, in his book about archetypes, has invented the term "enantiodromy" (or self - retreat). The return within us is a condition sine qua non for discovering the power to animate the words. Yehan Calvus

claims that only through “reanimating”, through enlivening the words one could get to the “essential idea of things” (in Bachelard, 32).

The tree as some sort of locus poeticus sends us to the Adamic garden, to the possibility of retrieving the eternal temporality. Such temporal dimension may assist us in rediscovering the spiritual quality of our life, the pleasure of veneration, of learning again to indulge ourselves in astonishment and mystery. Retrieving eternal temporality, or at least contemplating it, would help us to rediscover intuition as a means of approaching life, of rediscovering poetic wisdom.

The image of the tree can also be related to the protective character of the maternal archetype. It also suggests some sort of “contracted serenity” (in Bachelard’s terminology, 32) in its determination to continuously go upward and never bend its neck.

Olson reveals the other side of the coin, claiming that if we fail to meet such demands we are similar to animals, “caught in habit”, “making enigmas”, “lacking what we want / locked in what we have”, “we limit spring”, become joyless, “refuse color” and “leave light no place to go”; we lose what Calvus called “the essential idea of things”. In the last but one stanza, Olson wonders why we have to look for inner reality in paradox: “Cry why / can we not feed and run / as bee and bull / wear red and sing / as whippoorwill?”

Such poetic instances can be interpreted as signifying the labyrinth of our daily depersonalization, reproduction, and globalization. The last stanza reiterates the leitmotif “whippoorwill”, which is repeated three times.

Via such a repetitive pattern, Olson suggests some sort of reconciliation between the inner and outer worlds. Following Jung’s archetypal theory we might infer that through will and conscience we can surpass materialness, physicality, transcend our biological limit and reach some sort of wisdom. Such an acquisition can be interpreted through the archetype of the self. It is considered the archetype of psychic totality, as the self represents “the totality of all psychic phenomena” (Pătru, 43).

This archetype consists of the “apprehension of our unique nature”, of our intimate relation with the animal and vegetal entities, with cosmos itself. Under such circumstances, the bird’s song acquires, towards the end of the poem, divine resonances. It signifies Olson’s aspiration for recovering his inner artistic purity. Such purity necessarily implies the idea of making an attempt at retrieving temporality, or as Blandiana says, at reintegrating time into eternity.

The title of Olson’s second poem “As the Dead Prey upon Us” suggests the tendency of the poetic self to become subjective. This subjectivity sends us to Jung’s concept of the archetype, defined as the predisposition to form images. As concerns the archetypal image, it is filled with the material of conscious experience.

Using Jung to analyze Olson’s poem requires the underlining of the archetypes present in it (the anima, the shadow, the material archetype and the Self). The concept of individuation reflects the manner in which archetypes, as universal images, can be surfaced so that the individual can become a totally integrated personality. Individuation is a natural process which grows from within. It is a process of self realization during which one integrates those contents of the psyche that have the ability to become conscious.

Olson seems to be willing to accept the contents of his unconscious, by becoming aware of his relationship with those who are dead, and, through them, with the entire cosmos.

Jung stresses that our modern world does not give enough opportunity to experience the archetype of the shadow, which represents the socially unacceptable repressed tendencies. Being repressed, they retreat to an unconscious primitive and undifferentiated state (91).

The dead who prey upon us are “the dead in ourselves”, referred to, by the poet, as “the sleeping ones.” Such strong intuitive images can be read as archetypal images, due to their unconscious

undifferentiated charge which continues to obsess the poet, to prey upon him. The dead stand for the shadow. The shadow represents those unknown or little known characteristics of the ego; in Olson's poem they appear under the form of unreal fantasies associated with those dead who either take care "to pass beneath the beam of the movie projector", or "record playing on the victrola, or "roam from one to another bored, poor and doomed to mere equipments".

Such images can be also decoded through the anima archetype; it is the personification of all female psychological tendencies in the psyche of a man, including feelings, moods, intuition, receptivity for the irrational and man's attitude towards the unconscious.

In Jung's opinion, the anima is the symbol of the existence of the unconscious. It provides for consciousness a bridge or link with the unconscious and contributes to the individuation process, which, as we have already shown, requires the bringing of the unconscious into conscious.

In essence, the anima is a guide to the psychological development of a man. One's anima helps the individual to tune himself to the correct inner values becoming the guide to one's inner world. Moreover, the individual has to take seriously those feelings, moods, expectations and fantasies sent by his anima and fix them in one form or another, for instance, in writing. This is precisely what Olson has done within this poem.

And yet, the maternal archetype is the most profound and most relevant. Jung posits that it offers a child some sort of mythological background filled up with authority and luminosity (93), being also a point of departure and of everlasting return: "my mother, as alive as ever she was, asleep / when I entered the house as I often found her in a rocker / under the lamp, and awaking as I came up to her, as she ever had / I found out she returns to the house once a week, and with her / the throng of the unknown young who center on her as much in death / as other like suited and dressed people did in life" (in Olson 59).

The last part of the poem, largely dominated by the dream – like imagery, brings us closer to another theory, that of M. Martin. He considers that through dreaming, a particular context enriches its meaning to such an extent that "a plus of being" is imposed upon "a minus of being" giving the impression of ontological plenitude (in Bachelard 32). And this is exactly the atmosphere which reverberates from the last verses where the image of the mother intermingles with that of the unknown young "who center on her as much in death as they did in life".

By evoking his mother, Olson has made a psychological attempt to retrieve temporality and, by extension, to integrate time and his spiritual destiny into eternity.

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