



## **The Maximus Poems**

*Charles Olson, George F. Butterick (Editor)*

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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.

## **The Maximus Poems Details**

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## From Reader Review The Maximus Poems for online ebook

### **Joe says**

Was surprised I didn't enjoy this more. Plenty appealed--the spiraling of time, history into a geographically situated self; the alternative and subjective cartographies;

...Harbor  
better than  
Champlain's--Champlain  
a European with a home, American  
no place  
to go in landlessness alone  
resides, the Earth a skid  
for the American the  
Skater all over the  
surface of (the  
skin

But something about the overall syntax of the 600 pages seemed haphazard, even on the relative scale of similar mega-life projects; it was too difficult for me to pick up some threads after they had disappeared so long. But maybe I'm expecting too much. Will probably return here once I'm in Buffalo and they can set me straight.

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### **Eric Phetteplace says**

Olson was just experimental enough in this ambitious volume and I like that his tone stays fairly lowbrow and relatable throughout. The random touches are great, like repeatedly using an open parenthesis with no close, or spelling "said" "sd". The only drawback is that the content can get quite boring: Massachusetts and fishing boats are not the most intriguing topics for me. But overall the collection sways between mythology, history, and personal events in a pretty compelling mish-mash. Very American, but in a universal way, not blind patriotism.

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### **James Murphy says**

This is Olson's heroic long poem in tribute to Gloucester, Massachusetts and to the people who lived there in which he tells much of its history as a fishing port, even going back to its place in the original Pangaean continent. The poem connects Gloucester to many of the cultural sources we associate with the eastern Mediterranean and south Asia. The larger-than-life figure of Maximus is both Maximus of Tyre and Olson himself. This is one of my favorite things, and i have to touch base with it from time to time.

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## Axolotl says

I do admire Charles Olson's poetry---for its highs and lows.

I do find "his" idea of 'istorin compelling (one of those elegantly simple yet difficult things) but a little dubious with regard to his own poetry in that

it's as though he is saying "find out for yourself and you'll see that I've been right about everything all along". On the other hand,

in his poem beginning

"at the boundary of

the mighty world", he does say (while personifying a geological formation,

no less) "I should like to take the time to be dull"

which mitigates, I think, some

of the other side criticisms:

at times, in the Maximus Poems, he certainly does

take the time to be dull and with these

no urge to 'istorin is elicited--but this is exceptional.

The Maximus Poems are patchy/scrubby \

in spots

but it is no exaggeration to say:

there are many glittering diamonds which become

(increasingly) harder & carefully defined (no room for carelessness)

with contact and time

within the mind--possibly more

so when, in contact with the "scrub-like"

local history of Gloucester poems here and there

--after all, as Creeley said "form is never more than an extension of content": Olson is able to conjure in these poems

his phantom/psychic "polis", giving us in the process the keys to our--respective and collective--kingdoms, archipelagos of words into matter(s),

all while sitting on a stump in Dogtown (dancing sitting down)

quite a trick to pull off.

And he makes it.

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## Alex Kennard says

I finished reading The Maximus Poems for the second time walking through a car park. Reading the words of an Englishman pulled from history and moulded into the shape of Olson's Gloucester while walking through the concrete landscape was incredibly fitting.

Olson is the close of the journey Ezra Pound began with his Cantos: a journey that started in the United States and expanded uncontrollably into Europe's long history and traditions. Here, that traveller returns to the small town of Gloucester, bringing with him those stories, those relationships, those lives, & trapping them.

As a poet, Olson is obtuse, complex, & willfully obscure. Despite this, he is also eminently readable. These poems are not meant to be read quickly. They are made to be lived with.

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### **Casey says**

big, rapturous and sedate by turns, image-thoughts cycled through the four seasons, maritime america, gloucester, mass. immortalized, formal innovation and structure always employed to specific effect, in response to a deeply-felt need. for those addicted to the collision of the monumental and the mundane in the narrative arts. and/or as a primer or a companion to MOBY DICK.

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### **Beth in SF says**

Mundane poems with historical tilts that suddenly jab you with a revelatory one liner. Quite unique and certainly not everyone's taste. I kept thinking that I was reading something special that held secrets for which I didn't have the key, but sometimes got the chance to peek through the keyhole.

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### **Sean says**

One of my poetry grandfathers.

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### **Jim Smith says**

Just started a thorough re-reading after 30 years. This is one of the few books I can identify that had a deep effect on me about what a poetic line was, the power of where a line was broken, how it was read. Although likely invisible in my work now, without Maximus I would not be the same poet I am. I recommend every reader check the few but precious youtube videos of Charles Olson reading several of these poems.

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### **Dawn says**

The Maximus poems will do as they do and I will read them all again in in in. But I have to read Heroditus and know nothing about Tyre and also the deep history of Virginia and Boston and the kinds of salt to keep fish and what exactly a shoal feels like and if Adam Smith really was what, a poet, if he was cured of his skin's burns and "meubles" and Thucidides and furthermore Orontes, which C.O. calls a "congested poem." You see all of this plus stuff is to be mine upon reading and reading my C.O.

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### **vanesa says**

sorry world, i simply cannot worship at the Olson altar- he's taken up all the space i could have used to

admire him himself. these poems are insular, self-obsessed, driven with a hyper-masculine fear of subtlety, nuance, or stillness. the imagery is leaden, and stuffed with a gross amount of literary references. so hopelessly academic that i wish Olson would have just written an essay instead.

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### **Molly Brodak says**

interesting...kind of self-absorbed at times. But lots to learn from.

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### **Peycho Kanev says**

Robert Duncan, in his essay "Regarding Olson's 'Maximus,'" writes: "Olson insists upon the active. Homo maximus wrests his life from the underworld as the Gloucester fisherman wrests his from the sea." Olson's striding poetic syllables, says Duncan, are "no more difficult than walking."

What is an epic? Pound said it was a poem with history. Olson disagrees. Olson visited Pound, argued with him, and Pound said Olson saved his life. But Olson disagreed with Pound on many issues. Olson actually began working on an epic in the 40s, but for some reason was unsatisfied. The remnants can be found in his first book of poems, "In Cold Hell, In Thicket" which was published around the same time as the first ten Maximus poems.

Olson did not consider himself "a poet" or "a writer" by profession, but rather that nebulous and rare "archeologist of morning," reminiscent of Thoreau. He wrote on a typewriter. "It is the advantage of the typewriter that, due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pause, the suspensions even of syllables, the juxtapositions even of parts of phrases, which he intends. For the first time the poet has the stave and the bar a musician has had. For the first time he can, without the convention of rime and meter, record the listening he has done to his own speech and by that one act indicate how he would want any reader, silently or otherwise, to voice his work."

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### **Bonnie says**

i hate you, charles olson.

HATE YOU.

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### **?Misericordia? ~ The Serendipity Aegis ~ ?????? ✨\*♥? says**

Too much blabbering that couldn't have been less poetic if it tried!  
Not enough poems in these Maximus Poems.  
Emphatic NO. Demented a bit. DNF.

