Charles Olson's Historical Vision in "The Kingfishers"

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Abstract

Charles Olson (1910–1970) is an American poet whose understanding of the poetic process is influenced by a broader perceptive of history. Trained primarily as a historian rather than as a literary scholar, he displayed much interest in cultural and historical issues. In his poem, "The Kingfishers" (1953), Olson takes on the role of the historical researcher. He tries to outline the historical and political dimensions of Western civilization. Olson's poem is a detailed exploration of a historically critical subject which is the deterioration of the glory of the ancient cultures at the hand of the Western conquerors. It sheds light on the vanity of the perfection of European civilization. Olson attempts to create a new vision in which poetry appears as a vivid reflection of history.

I

Charles John Olson (1910-1970) is a major figure in American poetry of the 1950's and 1960's. Olson is regarded as one of the most important theorists and practitioners of postmodern American poetry. Actually he was the first to use the term "postmodern."[1] He was widely hailed as a leader of a revolution in poetry until his death. Part of Olson's project is to re-energize American poetry. For Olson, poetry is a physical engagement with the energies of life and; therefore, an enactment of life itself. Olson redefines what poetry is in his most influential essay, "Projective Verse" (1950):[2]

> A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it . . . by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader. Okay. Then the poem itself must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge.[3]

Olson's most outstanding poetic work, ***The Maximus Poems*** (1960-1968), by the sheer weight of its geographical and historical information, signifies humanity's total physical and spiritual involvement with the energies of life itself. This poetic epic is a historical exploration of the origins of America and its long cultural background reaching back to Mesopotamia. Olson thinks that a study of America has to be deeply connected with an awareness of the influence of environment on history. It has to be geographical as well as temporal, taking "space (rather than time) to be the central fact to man born in America."[4]

Olson's poetry is marked by its historical openness to the world and by its orientation toward the language and forms of the past. Olson's sense of history is free from a linear and causal understanding. His conception of "history as a verb" is active, he thinks that "kosmos is history, and therefore alternatively chaos."[5] Olson's method of describing historical events, outside any causal or chronological sequence, reveals "inherent schemes of order that can be grasped only within a space-time matrix independent of a diachronic understanding of experience."[6]

Christopher Beach states that Olson's view of "history should reflect individual exploration and personal experience rather than doctrine or state ideology."[7] Olson defines history as "the function of any one of us"; it is not concerned with "events of the past" or with the "news" as conveyed by "radios newspapers magazines mouth" but with the "life value" of the individual, his or her own "morphology."[8] He regards the hieroglyphics as visual art. In his essay "Human Universe" (1965), Olson observes that hieroglyphs "retain the power of the objects of which they are the images."[9] He suggests that "our own verbal icon lacks the sort of vividness and that we ought to learn from ancient culture how to refurbish our language."[10] He concludes that pictographic languages stand closer to the spiritual forms of nature than do the more abstract languages of the modern West which reduces consciousness to logic.

Olson did not consider himself as "a poet" or "a writer" by profession. He classified himself as the "archeologist of morning."[11] An important part of Olson's ideas as a poet and cultural historian was derived from his studies of Mayan civilization.[12] After the publication of "Projective Verse," he undertook an expedition to Mexico's Yucatán peninsula to study Mayan temples and artifacts. He wrote vigorous letters about his own speculations and researches into Mayan hieroglyphs to the poet Robert Creeley (1926-2005),[13] later collected and published in 1953 under the title "Mayan Letters." From his study of the history of the Mayan cultures, Olson finds a harmony with the universe. In his "Mayan Letters" Olson states that instead of depending, as Western societies do, on a narrow "humanism" defined by "a whole series of human references," Mayan civilization valued human participation as "object" in a "field of force" defined by the larger world of nature.[14]

Olson firmly believed in his redemptive role as a historian. He declares: "My memory is / the history of time,"[15] for without memory, there remains nothing but the disconnected segments of an exhausted civilization. As Don

Byrd suggests that Olson allows "the energy of the poem to arise directly from its sources," thereby gaining "an immediacy of mythic and historical material which is missing in modernist poetry."[16] Olson refuses to create fictive structures of history and strives more than any other American poet to permit the facts to speak for themselves. He tries to arrange and organize these unconnected fragments of history in such a way that a continuity between the past and the present will become evident.

Olson's style is disjunctive and spontaneous. Sentences are often grammatically incomplete, and the tone is often excited and energetic. Olson weaves snatches of quotation and speech from other languages into the fabric of his poetry. His poems are full of references to ancient myths, to details of his own life, to obscure persons, to historical incidents, and to the early civilizations of Sumer, Egypt, Greece, and the Maya. Olson's first important poem, "The Kingfishers," which was published in 1949 and collected in his book of poetry, ***In Cold Hell, in Thicket*** (1953), blends fragments from various sources in a meditation on history and political action. Beach states that

> the inclusion of fragments of past discourse emphasizes the poem's relationship to space and time and thereby extends the poem beyond a purely intertextual realm in which other poems are its only referent. Furthermore, Olson's use of quotation contributes to . . . a formulation of philosophical, historical, and methodological principles that can be conveyed to the reader and to a new generation of poets.[17]

II

"The Kingfishers" is a historical survey of the futility of Western expansion over the centuries. With this poem, Olson may be said to have ushered postmodernism into being, with its array of anti-imperialist arguments and its desire to reconcile contemporary Western art with ancient myth and ritual.[18] Olson's poem presents a radical new mode of poetic expression that renounces European heritage and hails the return of native cultures at the end of

European colonialism. It weaves themes relating to archaeology, modern Mexico, and Aztec culture.[19]

"The Kingfishers" is a somewhat lopsided sequel in three parts, of which the first is itself subdivided into four sections. The first part is a meditation on change. It opens with a paradox taken from the early Greek philosopher Heraclitus,[20] which states that only change itself is unchanging: "What does not change / is the will to change."[21] Olson illustrates that the world is historically changing for the worse, not for the better. The poem sheds light on the corruption of modern Mexico. The civilization that began with the glorious achievements of certain ethnic groups, including the Mayas and Aztecs, has been brought by Spanish conquerors to its present degradation. Olson explains that state of cultural deterioration through the changed attitudes toward the kingfisher, and the dying out of its symbolic meaning for the Indians. The kingfisher was highly valued for its feathers, which in earlier Mexican cultures "were wealth" (Olson, ***CP***, 86). The feathers were exported at one time, and worked into golden ornamental sculpture whose totemistic meaning exalted the other birds and animals,[22] but the kingfisher has lost its value for the modern world: "The kingfishers! / who cares for their feathers now" (Olson, ***CP***, 86)?

A figure, who stands for Olson himself, is presented in the first section of the first part. He meditates on the ruins of an Aztec city, perhaps Tenochtitlán, the old Aztec capital that is now Mexico City. He observes the deterioration of Mexican culture. "The pool is slime" (Olson, ***CP***, 87), he concludes, and disappears into the ruins. Olson deals with a historically crucial issue which is the betrayal of humanly meaningful modes of life that were discovered before the emergence of the modern state. The European perfection of the state was a triumph of the abstract and impersonal over man as a rationally and

aesthetically oriented being. This theme is presented obliquely through the symbol of the kingfishers.[23]

In the second section of the first part, the focus is on the ancient symbol "E," cut rudely on an old stone which is an allusion to the ancient Greek oracles found at the temple of Delphi.[24] Hence, the *E* cut on the stone signifies the last mysterious expression of a lost civilization: "I thought of the E on the stone, and of what Mao said" (Olson, ***CP***, 87). This section also includes snippets of Mao Tse-tung's speech before the Chinese Communist Party in 1948, on the eve of the revolution that brought about an abrupt end of Western imperialism there.[25]

Olson, again, presents the kingfisher bird which acts as unifying chord tying the various topics together:

> but the kingfisher flew west
> …….
> he got the color of his breast
> from the heat of the setting sun (Olson, ***CP***, 88)!

The ancient *E* is the last remnant of a great culture. Mao's speech is the turning point of another civilization. The bird's mortal existence transcends the rise and fall of human civilization. Thus, the kingfisher, that flies towards the sun, is a legendary figure of enduring vitality that stands in vivid contrast to the tragedy of human history.

Olson describes the peculiar nesting habits of the kingfisher:

> It nests at the end of a tunnel bored by itself in a bank. There,
> six or eight white and translucent eggs are laid, on fishbones
> not on bare clay, on bones thrown up in pellets by the birds.
> On these rejectamenta
> (as they accumulate they form a cup-shaped structure) the young are born.

> And, as they are fed and grow, this nest of excrement and decayed fish becomes
> a dripping, fetid mass (Olson, ***CP***, 88).

The birds lay their eggs on fishbone pellets, and as the nestlings "are fed and grow, this nest of excrement and decayed fish becomes a dripping, fetid mass" (Olson, ***CP***, 88). The birth and growth out of the decay of the past illustrates the challenge of life and its continuously changing conditions. The image of the "dripping, fetid mass" is representative of a ruined Western heritage of colonialism.[26] Olson does not advocate getting rid of the nest. Instead he immediately follows that image with the words of Mao Tse-tung from a speech he delivered in France:

> Mao concluded:
> nous devons
> nous lever
> et agir (Olson, ***CP***, 88)!

Olson translated Mao Tse-tung's words as ("we must rise, act") (Olson, ***CP***, 92). So, the young, who stands for future possibility, are born into a nest of ruins, but they must rise up out of the ruins in order to make way for new modes of being.

The third section illustrates that the primal values have been driven out of sight by the alienating forces of European civilization. The poem is a commentary on human violence and aggression, in particular the invasion of Mexico by the Spanish Conquistador, Hernán Cortés, in 1517:

> In this instance, the priests
> (in dark cotton robes, and dirty,
> their disheveled hair matted with blood, and flowing wildly
> over their shoulders)
> rush in among the people, calling on them

to protect their gods (Olson, ***CP***, 89).

Olson quotes from ***History of The Conquest of Mexico*** (1843) by the American historian, William H. Prescott (1796 – 1859), who recorded some of the loot taken from the temples by Cortés's army,[27] including two gold embroideries of birds, possibly quetzal birds, whose feathers were important in Aztec mythology and rituals:

last, two birds, of thread and featherwork, the quills
gold, the feet
gold, the two birds perched on two reeds
gold, the reeds arising from two embroidered mounds,
one yellow, the other white (Olson, ***CP***, 89).

At the end of this section, Olson remarks,

And all now is war
where so lately there was peace,
and the sweet brotherhood, the use
of tilled fields (Olson, ***CP***, 89).

The wrecking of the ancient religious and cultural structure began when the invaders' assaults put a sudden end to peace, "sweet brotherhood" and "the tilled fields" (Olson, ***CP***, 89).

In the fourth and last section of the first part, Olson raises the discussion of historical change to a principle: Nothing remains the same; everything is driven to the next stage of development or mutation. Change is the pervasive force running throughout nature; it cannot be abstracted or directed by human means: "To be in different states without a change / is not a possibility" (Olson, ***CP***, 89). The poet has wrested a valuable lesson from his musings on history: Time is "not accumulation but change" (Olson, ***CP***, 89). Olson does not view history

as a static storehouse of information to be discovered, but as an inexhaustible source of possibilities. Olson's sense of the proper use of history is similar to that of the German philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002). Gadamer, in his major philosophical work, ***Truth and Method*** (1960), speaks of historical research:

> Modern historical research itself is not only research, but the transmission of tradition. We do not see it only in terms of the law of progress and verified results; in it too we have, as it were, a new experience of history, whenever a new voice is heard in which the past echoes.[28]

Olson sets out to seek how the past can resound with a new voice. He incorporates Mao Tse-tung's China and the history of Yucatán, in an attempt to expand his historical horizon.

The second part of the poem begins in the middle of a guided tour in an Aztec burial ground that has been partially excavated. The mounds contain the remains of the Aztecs who had lived prior to Cortés's conquest:

. . . , considering the dryness of the place
the long absence of an adequate race
(of the two who first came, each a conquistador, one healed, the other
tore the eastern idols down, toppled
the temple walls, which, says the excuser
were black from human gore)
hear
hear, where the dry blood talks
where the old appetite walks (Olson, ***CP***, 90).

Olson tries to uncover other traditions that are toppled by the conquistadors who "tore the eastern idols down, toppled the temple walls" (Olson, ***CP***, 90). The poet presents a sharply contrasting picture of the actions of the conquistadors and Indian burial rites:

They buried their dead in a sitting posture
serpent cane razor ray of the sun
And she sprinkled water on the head of my child, crying
"Cioa-coatl! Cioa-coatl!"
with her face to the west (Olson, ***CP***, 90).

Olson scorns the Western attitude that would destroy a civilization that lived close to nature.[29] He senses in his own time a decay in social ideals and reads in the Korean conflict that had broken out in 1949 a continuation of Western violence against other cultures. He declares,

The light is in the east. Yes. And we must rise, act. Yet
in the west, despite the apparent darkness (the whiteness
which covers all), if you look, if you can bear, if you can, long enough
as long as it was necessary for him, my guide
to look into the yellow of that longest-lasting rose (Olson, ***CP***, 91).

Olson recognizes the ruinous nature of the western colonial tradition. He emphasizes the difficulty of encountering the ugly whiteness of the face of history: "if you look, if you can bear, if you can, long enough." Olson is willing to look at: "The light . . . in the east" of the pre-colonial cultures to create a new vision of history which helps his present society to "rise, act." Furthermore, the poem points up the frailty and haplessness of human notions of order against the lasting, vital orders of nature. The Mexican guide turns from the ruins to admire "the yellow of that longest-lasting rose," the mystical figure of unity, spirit, and transcendent permanence within a realm of violent upheaval and chaos.

The last part of the poem is a coda in which the various themes of the poem are resolved in the form of a decision reached by the poet. Olson renounces the violence and errors of Western tradition, stemming from Greek and Roman civilization. He declares that he cannot turn to the imperialistic tradition or heritage: "I am no Greek, hath not th'advantage / And of course, no

Roman"(Olson, ***CP***, 92). He finds his true heritage among such rebel as the French poet, Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), who left his own country to live in the deserts of the Middle East.[30] Olson quotes from Rimbaud's poem, ***Une Saison en enfer*** (***A Season in Hell***, 1873): "Si j'ai du goût, ce n'est guère / Que pour la terre et les pierres." (Olson, ***CP***, 92) These lines are translated into English by Jeremy Denbow as ("If I have any taste, it is / For earth and stones—not much besides").[31] The reader observes Olson's own ritual rebirth as a poet, as he proclaims his new heritage and describes himself as a descendant of Aztec roots. He sides with the victims of imperialism and claims them as his true ancestors:

> I pose you your question:
> shall you uncover honey / where maggots are?
> I hunt among stones (Olson, ***CP***, 92).

It is Olson's way of protesting against the nature of war and the aggressions of his own civilization. The poet defines the present condition of American society as one of "maggots" rather than of "honey" where one must perforce "hunt among stones." Ralph Maud thinks that

> the poem is about America. The maggots are here; America is petrifying. It was brutalized from the start by a conquistador who predicted ourselves and our perjoracracy . . . we can study the origins of American history and face up to the offences against the aboriginal population, and the cannibalistic-genocidal impulses involved.[32]

Thus, "The Kingfishers" can be regarded as an exploration of the roots of American capitalistic history. In his study of this poem, M. L. Rosenthal suggests that

> One must recognize the fact that we have now a modern tradition of poetry that makes certain assumption concerning American capitalism and its eroding effect, from the days of the mercantilism and "nascent capitalism" of the early seventeenth century to the "corporative murder" of our own day.[33]

"The Kingfishers" is the first anti-imperialist poem written in an apocalyptic era that saw the end of many colonial states and the breakup of the major European empires. Olson's interest lies principally in his view of the deteriorated modern Mexico as the victim of European invasion and colonialism. That focus on one victim of empire opens into a historical vision of the frailties of all human civilizations, their vulnerability to the decay of time or to the instinct of human violence to crush them.

III

"The Kingfishers" is a revaluation of the civilizations of the West as Olson explores the history of certain ethnic groups of Central Mexico. The poet appears as the archaeological researcher who works on the great ancient ruins to see for himself the destruction that the "civilized" Europeans had brought about. In this poem, the Kingfisher at first was a mere subject for contemplation, somehow allied with the mystery of historical change and the depressed sense of the diminution of personality in modern age. Then it is related to the continuing, archetypal process of nature, to the realization of the loss of a whole civilization, and to the large philosophical question of the relation of human will to historical fatality.

"The Kingfishers" can also be considered as a meditation on historical change. Because what does not change "is the will to change" (Olson, ***CP***, 86), the poet's fragmentary and experimental verse paves the way for a new and different kind of American poetry. Olson challenged old assumptions about form and he widened the boundaries of poetry to include mythology, psychohistory, geography, and archaeology. He embraced historical change in all its fluidity and found his vocation as a poet and archaeologist in his commitment to hunting among its stones. Although the poet was disturbed by the ancient remains, he perceived himself as an object among other objects within nature, and he dug even deeper into the natural, endless changes.

Notes

[1]Ralph Maud, Charles Olson 's "archaic postmodern," charlesolson.org/Files/archaic1.htm (accessed October 16, 2013).

[2]Olson's essay, "Projective Verse," (1950) is the most comprehensive summary of his poetic beliefs. In this essay, Olson advocates an "open" form of irregular meter, in which the poem's line is shaped by the actual breath of the poet. He suggests that the poetic form should visually project or enact the dynamic unfolding of the poet's perceptions and thoughts. He believes that the poet must avoid the old rules of the iambic pentameter line, regular rhythm, and rhyme. Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," ***Collected Prose***, ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (University of California Press,1997), p. 239.

[3]Ibid. p. 240.

[4]Charles Olson, ***Call Me Ishmael*** (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), p. 11.

[5]Charles Olson, ***The Special View of History***, ed. Ann Charters (Berkeley: Oyez, 1970), p. 49.

[6]Christopher Beach, "History in a Cyclotron: Charles Olson As Poet-Historian and the Model of Ezra Pound," ***ABC of Influence: Ezra Pound and the Remaking of American Poetic Tradition*** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 103.

[7]Ibid., p. 100.

[8] Charles Olson, ***The Special View of History***, pp. 17–18.

[9]Charles Olson, "Human Universe," in ***The New Writing in the USA***, ed. Robert Creeley (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 189.

[10]Geoffrey Thurley, "Balck Mountain Academy: Charles Olson as Critic and Poet," ***The American Moment: American Poetry in the Mid-Century*** (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, Ltd, 1977), p. 130.

[11]Sasha Colby, " 'Man came here by an intolerable way': Charles Olson's Archaeology of Resistance," ***Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory,***Vo. 65, No. 4 (Winter 2009): p. 93.

[12]The Maya is a Mesoamerican civilization that survived the Classic period collapse and the sixteenth-century Spanish colonization of the Americas. The Maya people constitute a diverse range of Native Americans in southern Mexico and northern Central America. They maintain a distinctive set of traditions and beliefs and they are noted for the only known fully developed written language of the pre-Columbian Americas. Millions of people speak Mayan languages today. "Maya Civilization," http://www.crystalinks.com/mayan.html, (accessed May 1, 2013).

[13]Charles Olson was appointed first as an instructor, and later as a rector at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, where he taught from 1951 to 1956. There Olson influenced a group of poets, including Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Ed Dorn, and Denise Levertov, who initiated a movement in modern American poetry known as Black Mountain poetry or projective verse which gained national recognition in 1960. Anne Day Dewey, ***Beyond Maximus: the construction of public voice in Black Mountain poetry*** (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 17.

[14]Charles Olson, ***Selected Writings***, ed. Robert Creeley (New York: New Directions, 1966), p. 112.

[15]As quoted in Robert Creeley "Preface to ***Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life***, by Tom Clark," http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/creeley/creeleyonolson.htm (accessed May 1, 2013).

[16]Don Byrd, ***Charles Olson's Maximus*** (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), p.26.

[17]Beach, p. 104.

[18]Stephen Voyce, ***Poetic Community: Avant-Garde activism and Cold War Cultu***re (Toronto : University of Toronto press , 2013), p. 49.

[19]The Aztec people are certain ethnic groups of Central Mexico who dominated large parts of Mesoamerica from the 14th to 16th centuries. Aztec culture had rich and complex mythological and religious traditions, as well as reaching remarkable architectural and artistic accomplishments. In 1521, the Spanish conquerors defeated the Aztec and founded the new settlement of Mexico City on the site of the ruined Aztec capital, from where they proceeded with the process of colonizing Central America. " Culhua-Mexica," www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/46981/**Aztec** (accessed June 22, 2014).

[20]Heraclitus is a Greek philosopher of Ephesus who was active around 500 BCE. He was called "The Obscure," because of the riddling and paradoxical nature of his philosophy. He is best known for his doctrines that things are constantly changing (universal flux), and that opposites coincide (unity of opposites). "Heraclitus," plato.stanford.edu/entries/heraclitus/ (accessed August 12, 2014).

[21]Charles Olson, ***The Collected Poems of Charles Olson***, ed. George F. Butterick (Berkeley: University of California press, 1987), p.86.

[22]Totemic animals are thought to possess supernatural powers. There is a mystical relationship between this kind of animals and certain communities. The totemic animal can be the symbol of a tribe, family or individual. Native Americans believe that each individual is connected with a totem animal that acts as the main guardian spirit offering power and wisdom. James George Frazer, ***Totemism and Exogamy***, Vol. II (New York : Cosimo, Inc., 2009), p. 138.

[23]James Rother, "Charles Olson's ***The Distances*** (1960): A Retrospective Essay," www.cprw.com/**Rother**/**olson**.htm (accessed May 22, 2014).

[24]Edward Halsey Foster, ***Understanding the Black Mountain Poets*** (South Carolina: The university of south Carolina press,1995), p. 48.

[25]Mao Tse-tung or Mao Zedong (1893 –1976) was the founding father of the People's Republic of China, which he governed as Chairman from 1949 to 1959, and he was the leader of the Communist Party of China until his death. His military strategies and political policies are often shortened to Maoism. Mao is regarded as one of the most controversial figures in modern world history. Maoists view him as the principal architect of the new China who has great accomplishments including modernizing China and building it into a world power. In contrast, critics and historians have characterized him as a dictator whose rules contributed to the deaths of 40–70 million people through starvation, forced labour and executions. "Mao Tse-tung," www.history.co.uk/biographies/mao-tse-tung (accessed June 22, 2014).

[26]M. L. Rosenthal, ***The New Poets: American and British Poetry Since World War II*** (New York Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 163.

[27]Ibid., p. 166.

[28]Hans Georg Gadamer, ***Truth and Method*** (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p.253.

[29]Rosenthal, p. 169.

[30]Jean Nicolas Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891) was a French poet who deeply influenced modern literary movements, like surrealism and symbolism. He elaborated his theory of "voyance," a visionary program in which the poetic process becomes the vehicle for exploration of other realities. He started writing poems at a very young age, while still in primary school, and stopped completely before he turned 21. Rimbaud was known to have been a libertine and a restless soul. He traveled extensively on three continents before his death from cancer just after his thirty-seventh birthday. Daniel Mendelson, "Rebel Rebel: Arthur Rimbaud's brief career," www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/08/29/rebel-rebel (accessed May 1, 2013).

[31]Jeremy Denbow, trans., ***A Season in Hell: An English Translation from the French*** (Lincoln: iUniverse,Inc., 2004), p. 59.

[32]Ralph Maud, ***What does not change: the significance of Charles Olson's "The Kingfishers"*** (London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), p. 123.

[33]Rosenthal, p.164.

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ملخص

تشارلز اولسن (١٩١٠-١٩٧٠) هو شاعر أمريكي تأثر مفهومة للعملية الشعرية بنظرته الشاملة للتاريخ، فقد أبدى اهتماما" كبيرا" بالقضايا الثقافية والتاريخية لكونه قد تدرب على أن يكون مؤرخا" قبل أن يكون أديبا". في قصيدته "طيور الرفراف" (١٩٥٣) ، اتخذ اولسن دور الباحث التاريخي الذي يحاول أن يبين الأبعاد التاريخية والسياسية للحضارة الغربية. ان قصيدة "طيور الرفراف" دراسة مفصلة لقضية تاريخية في غاية الأهمية وهي اضمحلال مجد الحضارات العريقة على يد الغزاة الغربيين، كما يسلط الشاعر في هذه القصيدة الضوء على حقيقة تاريخية وهي أن الحضارة الأوربية لا يمكن أن تعتبر نموذج يقتدى به. لقد حاول الشاعر أن يقوم بخلق رؤية جديدة تؤكد أن الشعر هو انعكاس حي للتاريخ.