

Chapter I

A New Dimension in American Poetry

Introduction

One way of addressing the often raised question why should poetry address socio-political issue can be a similar rhetorical question in reverse. Why should poetry avoid such issue? If poetry is a statement of human experience, political aspect of such experience can not be excluded. So, poetry contains the politics in order to include the full experience of living. It can not be provincial just like a polite dinner-party conversation among strangers, or gossip over the fruits in the market. Some poets strongly think that politics is a very timely subject for quality poetry.

Poetry is fundamentally aligned with the aesthetic. The writers of such poetry perceive the text as a self-sufficient entity, and do not bother to connect the interior of the text with the outside world. Specifically, New Criticism focused on the internal features of works instead of external connection with society, politics, and history. At the same time there is another type of poetry that explores the interconnected relationship among art, life, and society. Such poetry manifests a break from restrictive literary politics. American poetry and critical projects, thus, emphasize both aesthetics and usefulness. This research explores the usefulness of art and observes how it is done (the aesthetics).

In the twentieth century there are two modes of poetry: one is engaged with politics and the other disengaged from politics. The majority of the poets, particularly after the war,

tried to indulge in pure aestheticism. But, political poetry explodes with the works of some writers in the later fifties. Many of them have offered a diagnosis of contemporary ills and celebrated past heroism. They have also revealed a prophetic voice. Engaged with both personal meditation and public content, these writers keep private self and public community together. Basically, aligning themselves with the counter-hegemonic struggle these writers function as political agents. Their corpus of writing is generally anti-state and remarkably liberal-left. Acting from a position outside the system these writers promote the movement of counterculture. Such oppositional poetry is also equipped with its own critical poetics. This research deals with such socially critical poetry and the poetics defining such poetry. While approaching the poetry and its poetics, both thematic and structural aspects have been considered.

Problematics

Though there have been some research works in political poetry in general and in the works of the poets discussed in this work, there exist a number of gaps and questions regarding politics and poetry. Several issues of inquiry are still vacant. This research tries to seek answer to some fundamental questions. Poetry of America or elsewhere, of present time or the past, has been mostly discussed and researched for its form, figures of speech, intertextuality, autobiographical elements and creativity. Its public, social, and political views are normally ignored. Though there is an abundance of political poems written in the second half of the twentieth century by American authors, it is still a not-much explored area in critical works. So, it is necessary to identify some of the salient features of contemporary American political poetry. In addition, it is essential to explore the linkage of contemporary American political poetry with its own past. It is noted that political poems of the past and those of the present significantly differ in tone, and the study will examine the significant variations between the past

radical poetry and contemporary. Some questions that emerge in this context are: in which aspects the tradition is maintained? And what are those aspects where there are deviations and counter traditions? How does a poet who sees socio-political matters as integral to poetry resist the conservative tradition?

Ezra Pound and Charles Olson are two giants in twentieth century poetry and poetics. They are the major precursors for the next generation of writers. It is, therefore, important to see how Pound and Olson deal with socio-political matters in their poems. What linkage exists between their critical writings and poems? The most significant stream in contemporary poetry is Language poetry. This poetry looks back to Pound and Olson and looks forward to a new dimension in the politics of poetry.

While dealing with socio-political matters, it is imperative to be associated with didacticism, elitism, and totalitarian system. The exploration of the relationship between elitism and totalitarianism is an important aspect of contemporary poetry. Whenever socio-political matters come under poetic discussion in the USA, the capitalist system comes on the way. So, it is necessary to investigate how the writers handle capitalist approaches. As political poets work with their own poetics and methods, it is obviously essential to connect the thematic and technical aspects, discuss how the use of various techniques of language and form serve their political goals.

In most of the studies, the politics of poetry is discussed just as a body of independent themes without applying the ideas from critical theories. So, what sort of picture might emerge when the political poems are theoretically approached? And finally, in which ways are these

poets idealistic and utopian? These gaps and problems provide space to conduct a research in the poetics of politics contained in contemporary poetry.

Linking Poetry with Politics

Poetry-politics relationship is often neglected. However, a poet is not an alien person in the society. He can have serious concerns with the society and culture of his place and time. Poetry has been already much discussed for its form, poetic license, figurative language, and versification. But, it is not only “pure imagination” or a work of art for the sake of art. It, obviously, holds relationships with where and in which context it was created. The poet, besides the search for newness in style, certainly has important messages for the readers. This research focuses on the conscious efforts of the poets to share their political thoughts. Therefore, in this dissertation how poetry addresses the social issues is discussed. It explores how poetry analyzes the social conditions of the people. Not only the politics of poetry is discussed but how it is done too has been considered. In that sense, it is a study of both themes and techniques. Moreover, insights from the leading twentieth century critical theorists have been applied to the study of poems. Likewise, the study focuses on contemporary and largely living writers.

Defining the Boundaries

In the surface reading all poetry may appear somehow political. The focus of discussion in this research, therefore, shall be about the poetry that is politically engaged in explicit or at least more implicit, immediate, purposeful, and activist way. Among a number of politically engaged poets of the twentieth century only five will be examined in length. The five are selected as the representatives of the Pound-Olson tradition on the one hand and as those poets who have explicitly mentioned their mission as political on the other. Ezra Pound is

selected as a representative modernist and an important precursor of political poetry. Next to him, Charles Olson from Black Mountain School has been incorporated as a bypass to postmodernism. However, the whole tradition of American political poetry is rapidly glanced in chapter two.

The features of Pound-Olson tradition and the legacies of other political poets split over the school of language poetry. However, only three poets of the language school—Ron Silliman, Barrett Watten, and Charles Bernstein—have been examined for detailed discussions. Some other important writers of this school and their practices have been just briefly discussed.

The poetic works of these writers have been approached using the ideas of literary theorists. However, out of several theorists who observe the relationship of art with society, only seven have been specifically chosen: George Lukács, Walter Benjamin, Mikhail Bakhtin, Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, Michel Foucault, and Fredric Jameson. In addition, only their selected writings which have closer relationship with art works are used to approach the poems.

Line of Conduct

This research will be, as the nature of all literary researches, a library adventure. The accumulation of primary and secondary sources will be followed by close reading and analysis. For the theoretical apparatus, ideas from different theorists associated with cultural studies, Marxism, New Historicism, and Post-structuralism are derived. Mainly, the selected ideas of seven theorists are applied upon the art works of five poets. In addition, how these contemporary writings are connected with the foundation of American political poetry comes under consideration. Likewise, how two precursor poets—Pound, the spiritual parent of the

trend and Olson, another fountainhead—have influenced contemporary writing has been observed. Among contemporary writers three typical postmodern living language poets' explicit political principles have been selected. So, focus of this study is how Pound-Olson ideas and practices function in the works of the contemporary language writers. Their divergent and unequal bodies of work are here interrogated and evaluated from the perspective of specific critical and interpretive tools.

A Look into Past Studies

Political poetry has received just a limited range of discussion. Yet, it is not a virgin area of study. Indeed, there are some valuable opinions and evaluations on public poetry. The literary historians have talked about the socio-political aspects of poetic art. Some of the critics believe that poetry is superior to politics itself in talking about social matters. Nikolopoulou opines, "Where politics failed to articulate its own necessity, aesthetics provided the vocabulary; conversely, art is a response to what politics could not even question—hence both anticipating and ensuing politics" (771). The observation rather sounds an overestimation of the contributions of poetry, though it is not an exaggeration to say that poetry serves politics. Franta makes a more balanced evaluation that "poetry serves politics not merely by registering an opinion about present conditions and factions but by trying to imagine a change in the formation of beliefs themselves" (773). It means that poetry is able to make direct effects on people and society. However, some critics try to limit the scope of political poetry within the confines of poetry itself. Orr believes that most of the contemporary American political poems are written for the American poets and generally they have more relevance to the politics of the poetry world than to the American politics. Whether political poems address the masses or only

the poets, the inclusion of socio-political elements in poetry has been justified. Anyway, these critics have tried to make poetry and politics integral.

Bugeja divides the political poems into three major types: revolutionary, patriotic, and protest (105). Revolutionary poems advocate the overthrow of a government or a culture and such poems live short lives. These poems, in his opinion, involve three features: timeliness, strong words, and the medium of mass media. But, the patriotic poems are generally unbound by temporal restrictions. Almost all the patriotic poems are generally similar in ideas and images. Protest poetry is more radical than revolutionary. It desires to change the entire system rather than overthrow a government. These poems are generally negative and express cynical ideas, yet invite a long term political debate (Bugeja 106). In addition to these types, there is another group—the universal political poem. Such poems consist of characters, events, and issues presented from a political perspective regardless of any nationality, era, and ideology. Bugeja presents political poetry as multi-faceted and a network of complexity. But, Michael Thurston evaluates the protest poetry as simple, coherent, and conventional. “The Protest poems, on the other hand, are coherent and accessible,” Thurston opines, “They speak in simple, often very conventional, voices” (21). Thus, Thurston departs from the former evaluation.

In all types of political poetry there is some common ground. They do have certain roots and causing factors. *Microsoft Online Encyclopedia* puts forward confessional poetry itself as the ground of recent political poetry. It states that though the early confessional poets did not openly explore political issues, their investigations of how personal identity is constructed laid the ground for a more openly political poetry. The Encyclopedia mentions that Civil Rights

Movement and Vietnam War provided more issues to the political poets. Finally, the Encyclopedia entry “American Literature: Poetry” concludes with the advice for more researches in political poetry as “Similarly, much of the most popular, politically astute, and radical 20th-century American poetry appeared in workers’ newspapers and journals and in popular songbooks. A great deal of this verse still awaits rediscovery” (<http://encarta.msn.com>). Indeed, the quantity, diversity and appeal of these poems have invited the critical eyes for investigations.

Some other critics too have looked at the causes of political poetry. Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury think that poems are written about new social issues in America due to urbanization and other social changes:

The challenges of poverty, of social justice and economic equity, of national identity and international power in a world feeling increasingly the presence of Soviet Union—these were the issues that forced the American writer toward the subjects, languages and themes of the Depression and war years. As his nation threatened to disintegrate, the writer recognized the fragility of its coherence and undertook to number the diverse strands that had come to constitute it with the hope that the most vital could be made newly relevant.

(318)

It means that American poets basically write patriotic poems or the works that are pro-government policies. According to Ruland and Bradbury these writers came to realize that “arts must function as a social force, that they had the power to cure the ills of a stagnant culture” (318). This statement gives force to the writers to litigate on public interest and search the

healing of social sickness through poetic composition. These historians have openly admitted the social force of poetry that was not often thought so in the past. On the basis of such assumptions, the claim that poetry has less direct social force than the novel or film might be objected (Kellogg 161). One of such sectors where poets have trespassed is resistance to war.

The war-resistance poetry too is not one dimensional. Robert Duncan divides the twentieth century reactive poets who oppose war into two groups: the conservatives who ally themselves with the conventions of institutional sanctuary to hold against the politics of action, and those turn to the traditions of the individual against the state. The former group's concept of language is corrective, not dynamic. The second group's poetry is of an obsessive personality's single voice to meet the obsession of the state. Both the conservatives and the individualists raise the significance of individual integrity. Duncan believes that war-resistance poems are much conventional, single-voiced, and individualistic. But the contemporary poems do not reflect this generalization. Though these poets may differ in style and technique, they are determined to achieve the same goal—oppose battling. In addition to the resistance to war, the writings sometimes incorporate various forms of social protests. In this context the poetic protests are reinforced by the powers of critical theories. Eliot Katz observes, "Theodore Adorno offered an even more adamant defense of modernism, arguing that high modernism was actually the only literary mode which offered meaningful social protest against a capitalist status quo" (21). With the support of the theories poetry made the intended resistance stronger. About literary discourse functioning as a vehicle of power as discussed by Foucault, Cary Nelson writes:

If power is a constitutive structuration of literariness that gives it meaning, then power is inextricably bound up with literature. Power is an effect of that

structuration, not an intrusive independent force. There exists no pure, socially uncontaminated “literature” in an ideal but vulnerable elsewhere than that can be invaded by the canon’s will to power. (*Repression* 56)

Power is inherited and exercised not only by the state sponsored canonical literature but also by the resistant writing. Such power by the contaminated social literature is directed against the domination of the canons. Nelson in the context of poetry further opines that this genre helps people to envision the ways of changing the material conditions of their existence and also offers an oppositional language that they can quote and identify (124).

A leading poet whose work assists the readers to understand their conditions and persuades to think of changing them is Ezra Pound. Indeed, his writing is the quintessence of the coordination of politics and poetry. Accrediting him as a “literary statesman” Nelson writes about Pound and *Cantos* that “One of the problems, however, that has so far blocked a more open and reflective inquiry into the relation between Pound’s politics and his poetry is the general repression of considerations of the mixed relationships of determination and displacement between personality and writing” (*Repression* 142). It means that there is a dominant presence of Pound’s personality in his poetry. On the other hand, Rosenthal believes that Pound’s attempt at politicizing poetry is his fundamental romantic error. Rosenthal writes, “He has tried to politicize an aesthetic slogan—the slogan that it is the poet who protects the “whole machinery of social and individual thought and order” against catastrophe through his heroic tribal role as purifier of the language—its clarity, precision, and vigor” (165). This evaluation is purely based on conventional aesthetic dictum about pure poetry. Pound does not express that it is the poet alone who legislates the society and provides order. But, of course, the poet should contribute to make the people aware from his side.

In addition to the politics of Pound's poetry there are some remarkable opinions about his method and techniques that go hand in hand with the message. Silliman argues that Pound's technique is based on montage, as a seamless deep structure coheres everything there instead of collage that keeps the conjunction of dissimilar (*New* 154).

This observation is convincing. Indeed, Pound applies the aforementioned technique in order to convey his message.

A number of critics have also evaluated poetry, poetics, politics, and methods of Olson. McPherson thinks that Olson's poetry is a contribution to the twentieth century's revolt against the humanism of the past, that is, a task of articulating "another humanism" (189). McPherson has rightly identified the contributions of Olson's poetry towards formulating a new poetics. Rifkin expresses that Olson's goal is radical organization, not anarchy and the action called for is the movement of recognition, not revolution (139). It means that the resistance of his poetry is of a mild nature. Clearly, the observations of these two critics are contradictory. On the other hand, for Benson the struggle Olson launched mightily is both public and private (358). Olson himself mentions that it's very difficult to be a poet and an historian together. History deals with the past and poetry with the present. But Stimpson opines that they can go together and in Olson they are mixed up (159). Indeed, Olson's poetry is a combination of private, public, past, and present. About the political engagement of his poetry in comparison to other writers, Breslin observes:

Olson, though very much a political poet, was not a topical one. Though he lived through the turbulence of the late 1960s and welcomed the counterculture as a sign of an emerging new consciousness, he did not write directly about the

events of those years; but Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov did confront the times directly. (183)

Merrill expresses similar idea in special reference to “The Kingfishers” as, “Presumably the quotation from Mao triggers the notion that “The Kingfishers” deals with shifting political realities, but in fact the poem is political only in the broadest sense of what Olson intends by the term polis” (508). Certainly, the politics of Olson’s poetry is not specific and directed like that of Duncan and Levertov. But, some well-established themes and issues can be accumulated there.

Regarding Olson’s contributions to the next generation poetry of non-narration, Watten presents *The Maximus Poems* along with Pound’s *The Cantos* as typical pioneering examples of non-narrative poetic works. He writes in the context of *Maximus*:

Olson raised the possibility of a nonnarrative history in his refusal to transcend or close his epic, even if his ultimate horizon in a tragic self—which inevitably must disintegrate to prove the discursive truth of history—qualifies his poem’s inclusion of events that are not only to be subjectively identified, events within a present social horizon, for example. (Watten, “Nonnarrative” 222)

As Silliman and Watten have eagerly commented on the works of Pound and Olson, these two poets play significant positions in the shaping of language poetry. A post-theory discourse, language poetry too has been viewed with varying responses. Michael Greer hesitates to name language poetry a movement or style. He writes:

The theory of “language poetry” is best understood as a loose cluster of intellectual and discursive projects—a strategy for movement—rather than a

series of identifiable positions or propositions. This, then, suggests a view of “language poetry” not as a focused aesthetic “movement” or style, but as a contradictory, multiple set of assumptions and writing practices. (Greer 342))

The observation is not much convincing. In fact, typical language poets have fixed ideological positions and stylistic propositions in their works. For instance, Watten thinks that his prime poetic method—negativity as the truth of art, a Foucauldian proposition (“Foucault Reads” 60). Of course, there might be some contradictions in their practices but several commonalities can be easily traced.

One of the significant ideologies of Language poetry is the resistance to capitalist hegemony. The projects of these poets are like those of different Marxist critics. Comparing the theoretical claims of Jameson and Silliman, for instance, Perelman writes, “...Jameson and Silliman both make wide theoretical claims; both are trying to fight reified parataxis—commodification—with a more committed, critical parataxis—the finding of hidden categorical similarities” (323). Silliman himself asserts:

Words not only find themselves attached to commodities, they *become* commodities, and, as such, take on the “mystical” and “mysterious character” Marx identified as the commodity fetish: torn from any tangible connection to their human makers.... Thus capitalism passes on its preferred reality through language itself to individual speakers. And, in so doing, necessarily effaces that original connecting point to the human, the perceptible presence of the signifier, the mark or sound, in the place of the signified. (New 8)

The extract reveals Silliman's engagement with ideological and methodological aspects. Silliman plays with language because it is the main vehicle of social manipulation. The language used in academic discourse, journalism, and politics affects every walk of life. So Silliman deals with it. Various critics have found his poetic method to be collagist, but he does not feel comfortable with such judgment. In a "1982 Interview" Silliman says that in traditional collage technique there is not a political and critical usage of returning back to the world, but he intends to reexamine those objects. However, his contention is not with the use of collage technique, but with the traditional way of its use.

Bernstein too is in consensus with Silliman that poetry is required to play an ideological role. He writes in *The Politics of Poetic Form*, "As a poet, you affect the public sphere with each reader, with the fact of the poem, and by exercising your prerogative to choose what collective forms you will legitimate. The political power of poetry is not measured in numbers; it instructs us to count differently" (242). Obviously, he believes that poetry can affect the society by choosing appropriate issues and form. With this approach poetry can even keep utopian visions. Bernstein, Susan M. Schultz opines, means to strip us of our layers of expression in order that our means of expression can clothe us in new and utopian possibilities. But she does not explain how it is done. Partly, Hélène Aji tries to explore such method in connection to the idea of Wittgenstein. Aji writes, "With Ludwig Wittgenstein, Bernstein integrates the idea that thought advances in language and that the borders of conceivable coincide with the frontiers of the sayable" (342). So, it has been necessary to explore how such things are expressed that are generally supposed to be unspeakable.

Poetry readers have a dominant belief that political poems are simple and straightforward. Normally, they are conventional, single-voiced, and personality-dominated.

But, it might not be so in the case of contemporary works. Poetry's merging with theory is indicated, but not adequately justified. Similarly, how poetry resists the state hegemony and exercises power is not convincingly explained. Sometimes, even the politicizing of poetry is claimed to be erroneous. The evaluations regarding whether these works serve resistance movement or they just recognize the abuses are not adequately explored. These poems are labeled political only in the broadest sense. But, at times they make explicit assertions on socio-political issues. Whether language poetry follows the patterns of a movement and style or not is still unanswered. They are anti-capitalistic, but with what specific issues and aspects needs investigation. How they affect the public sphere, too, requires a search. Moreover, whether these poems exploit collage technique for resistance or not demands a thorough study.

Present research focuses on addressing these issues. To meet these goals the dissertation has been framed into five prominent domains. Chapter two deals with the poetics of political poetry and also observes its supportive and opposing opinions. Chapter three traces the conceptual framework from the ideas of different leading theorists that are to be applied in poetic works. The fourth chapter paves a way to link the Pound-Olson tradition of political poetry with that of language school. Chapter five and six—the fourth domain—deal with poetry, poetics, and politics of Ezra Pound and Charles Olson respectively. The next three chapters fulfill the last domain—a poetics of politics in the poetry of three language writers: Ron Silliman, Barrett Watten, and Charles Bernstein.

Chapter II

Poetry and Politics

Drawing the Confines

The term “political” used as a qualifier before “poetry” instantly strikes many readers with skepticism. The collocation “political” and “poetry” is often perceived as unsuitable. Indeed, when the terms “politics” and “poetry” are conflated several norms and boundaries are challenged, transgressed, and even shattered.

“Politics” has been defined and perceived in diverse ways in different disciplines. But, in simple terms it is the public practice of power with the enactment of collective ideas and interests. Fundamentally a public affair, politics is a cluster of perceptions and practices that shape this common world. It does not only mean the electoral matters and regimes but expands up to the idea of social and sometimes even personal. In addition to social and public reality, it incorporates personal matters that are the outcomes of social matters. Such private affairs, as poststructuralists would say, become always already public. Politics may deal with how someone might live a life involving authority and government. And poetry may become political by incorporating the elements that explicitly or more implicitly manifest such activities. For instance Langston Hughes’s poem “One More ‘S’ in the U.S.A.” attacks the abuses of capitalism:

Put one more S in the U.S.A.

To make it Soviet.

One more S in the U.S.A.

Oh, we'll live to see it yet.
When the land belongs to the farmers
And the factories to the working men—
The U.S.A. when we take control
Will be the U.S.S.A. then
But we can't join hands together
So long as whites are lynching black,
So black and white in one union fight
And get on the right track.
By Texas, or Georgia, or Alabama leg
Come together, fellow workers
Black and white can all be red: (ll. 1-15)

The poem dreams of a communist America like then USSR. Apart from this, it blends the racial and class oppression as the outcomes of capitalism.

Political poetry, above all, is the writing based on public content. Such verse is socially engaged, and mostly critical. This kind of poetry challenges the customary belief that poetry is a totally independent cultural domain. Some twentieth century English poems with overtly political contents, for example, are W. B. Yeats's "September 1913," W. H. Auden's "September 1, 1939," Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck," and Thom Gunn's "The Man with Night Sweats."

Every human activity may be called political in a broad sense as it takes place in a context of history. If poets are not the alien members of society, then they should be aware of

the major public events and debates of their times. However, to be aware does not mean to have a full understanding of or engagement with the issues. When the poets are aware of the contemporary socio-political events of their geography and time, it is not surprising if such elements appear in their writing. Indeed, poetry is required to call up the fullness of human experience. Therefore, political poetry—in a stretched frame—can be called cultural poetry as the term includes society, history, politics, and economy.

The twentieth century American poetry has complex galleries of individual poets. Though there is not a single representative school or style of this period, several prominent groups and styles have been recognized. Political poetry, obviously, is one of such loose spectrums. The validity of such writing can be traced in the Poundian idea that artists are not only the solo singers of their emotion but also the antennae of the race (*ABC* 81). The political poets writing as the antennae of the race can be tentatively divided into two types; who write with direct political intention, and those who softly incorporate political elements. The first type poems are immediately engaged with politics in an activist way. Such poems deal with specific political issues and take sides. They announce their claims and try to move the audience to action. Ginsberg, to illustrate, in “America” talks about some celebrated injustices of immediately previous US history:

America free Tom Mooney

America save the Spanish Loyalists

America Sacco & Vanzetti must not die

America I am the Scottsboro boys. (ll. 57-60)

Such is the poetry of participation. It empowers the idea of poet as a participant in organized activist struggles. The second type, without the radical voice and side-taking, just incorporates socio-political events and issues in the style of demonstration.

Political poetry, belonging to whichever kind, communicates its message largely by intellectual statement. Utilizing argumentative poetics, it is rather persuasive. It makes a sentimental appeal to the political beliefs of the people. By commenting on the social issues it performs the critical responsibilities and social functions of language art. Addressed to a mass audience, political poetry takes pride in its public currency. For such school of thinking, the poems made simply of words not ideas are just sound-toys.

At times it is even pleaded that any poem is political. The claim sounds rather forced. To illustrate, to call "My Mistress' Eyes..." by Shakespeare a political not a love sonnet is a forced reading. Likewise, to say "The Red Wheelbarrow" is about politics and not raining; and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is not about sparing some time amid busy schedule to appreciate nature but about revolution can be nothing than a forced reading. Similarly, not to call "Skunk Hour" a poem with socio-political elements and label it as a love poem, or raining, or natural beauty is also a forced reading. *The Waste Land* can be read as a revolutionary poem; what is "dying" can be easily read as capitalism, and the thunder's "da" as an announcement of revolution. So, this dissertation deals with the poems which incorporate socio-political elements explicitly or at least more implicitly as exemplified above. This is a study of such poetry as an important sub-genre of humanistic studies by using insights from literary theory and cultural studies.

Political poetry has its foundation in the very hegemonic model of political struggle and change. And the majority of such writers are found to be antagonistic to the privileged and the powerful of the society. As a result, considerable amount of protest and leftist or politically progressive poetry is produced. Protest poetry, obviously, encourages the movements for social change. Generally, such poems express or reflect—either explicitly or at least more implicitly—the leftist, working-class, populist, democratic, anti-fascist or similar views. They resist various forms of oppressions existing in the society. Like a tortured man screams, protest poets speak out the perennial social sufferings. As an exemplary piece the poem titled “Workers of the World Awaken” by Joe Hill reads:

Workers of the world, awaken!

Break your chains, demand your rights.

All the wealth you make is taken

By exploiting parasites

Shall you kneel in deep submission

From your cradles to your graves?

Is the height of your ambition

To be good and willing slaves? (ll. 1-8)

The poem stimulates the workers for revolt. Presenting the exploiters as parasites it tells that the workers are exploited right from their birth to death.

Political poetry is not a new phenomenon. Its history echoes the history of literary writing. Such writings spread from early days to the present. Indeed, the issues of nationality, social inequality, desire of change urge the writers to write about socio-political issues which were and are prevalent in every period and society. Such writing has a long-standing tradition in American and World literary history. About the social inclination of writing Rancière comments, “Literature did not act so much by expressing ideas and wills as it did by displaying the character of a time or a society” (18). As several dynasties and civilizations developed and collapsed, poets with political opinions memorialized the events. So far the American poetry is concerned, as early as the first settlers visited America, poetry became a clear medium for people to express their political views. Colonial writers used poetry to convey their patriotic pride as well as their uneasiness concerning the impending war with England. Wheatley, for example, wrote numerous poems about the glory of leaders like George Washington.

The Poetics

From conventional perspectives, of course, poetry differs from the sphere of politics. Mostly, it lacks the active power of politics. It can just protest but is unable to bring a noticeable change. Political power corrupts, whereas poetry cleanses. Unlike the politicians, the poets mock the prisons and praise the skies. However, the clash between poetry and politics is only on the surface. There are various common points between them. Both depict similar passions with a sense of urgency. They sublimely appeal to the irrational at the center. Both contain incomplete or changeable force and climax. Both of them create their own state of mind through the use of words and imagination.

Poetry is created with socio-political issues in order to address the public. When poetry remained silent about public affairs, it started to decline. The decline was largely caused due to its indifference to the matters of public interest. So, the newer poets felt the need to keep alive a heightened sense of public communication. In fact, to address social problems understanding is a far harder task than escaping them. It is similar to the statement of Wallace Stevens about the function of poetry, "The way through the world/ Is more difficult to find than the way beyond it." Therefore, a poet regards himself as a representative of community. He acts as a liberal and skeptical intellectual through the political protest. He believes that a poet's public voice can provide more direct engagement in public dynamics than that of a politician. He is engaged with the "political public sphere" that is connected with the practice of the state. Engaged in a rational critical debate, he takes a line of action and attempts at building a discursive formation of opinion. In a period when people are reduced from citizens to consumers, American poetry has been obliged to explore the total human experience.

Many modern poems speak about public concerns by juxtaposing poetic elements with public issues. But, these are weak political poems as they adopt a conventional model of creation. Unlike them, the value of strong poems lies in how the poem speaks to a public concern. These poems use language not as an outsider but as part of a community of discourse. They shift from poetry's conventional boundaries and use the genre as a means of thinking through contemporary issues and alter the reader's expectations. They think about politics from artistic and cultural perspectives. The poems show the poet's view emerging from some ideology.

The poet as a thinker is neither a pure left nor a pure right. Such a poet does not fit into any category like left or right, but as a synthetic political thinker he combines different

intellectual and political traditions as the clash between rival intellectual movements. When a certain political thought mixes with the personal viewpoint of the poet, it becomes the poet's political thought. The poet can not dismiss an established thinking about the world, but he can always challenge it and modify it according to his own ideology. This type of poet considers politics simply as a part of life. So, he writes the epics of social and humanist commentary. He believes that a poet is required to think of himself as an aware citizen and intellectual. As cultures, technologies, and nature intermix in modern society, so does he in poetry.

Modern political poetry offers a memorable interpretation of history, past or recent. It writes pre-history or post-history, but not a smooth story. Like confessional literature it reveals history to a broad audience. Along with the recurrent problems in human nature, it addresses the topical problems. By combining the historical facts and the questions about human nature it deals with the trans-historical emotion. The poet also speaks to address certain specified groups. In the disasters of the terrorist acts poetry's value even lies in consoling. In such writing the poetic voice moves from fear to confidence. It reveals the relation between intellectual creativity and proximity to power. He believes that a poet is condemned not because he is guilty but is guilty because he is condemned. Thus, he works to forge himself the identity of an aware citizen and a free thinker.

Poetry becomes political in terms of the content it manifests along with the methods and techniques it adopts. Such politics of form is no less important than the poem's ideological statements. One of the political strategies American poetry has utilized is a shifted focus from writing to reading or from writer to reader. Indeed, the act of reading is identified as equivalent to the act of writing. A poem does not attain its total recognition unless it has been worked out by the reader. This is a general shift from production to reception.

Likewise, the focus received by the poem's formal and rhetorical aspects has been replaced by the social, economic, and cultural contexts of creation. Therefore, instead of the meaning or the internal mechanism of the poem, questions like who reads poetry and how it is read are important. What kind of social issues are raised and how they are featured bear significant value during the act of reading.

Modern political poetry puts the genre of poetry into a dialogue with other art forms. As in the mural tradition, the shared political ideas are combined with autochthonous themes and interest.

Mainstream Versus Political

American poetry, particularly of the twentieth century, is generally categorized into two groups; the canonical mainstream and the marginalized "side-spring" poetry. Such division of poetic writing is largely a result of political bias and scholarly manipulation in the last couple of decades. By 1982, Marjorie Perloff does not see a clear line of demarcation between the raw and the cooked, the oppositional and the established, the experimental and the safe ("Whose" 109). Obviously, ideological filters select and restrict literary history. Poetry being hugely anthologized and read is the dominant culture's selection. It is produced by the publishing industry and the academic world. The poems featured in wider circulation journals like *Harper's*, and *Colliers, Scribner'* fall in the mainstream wing. The mainstream poetry is regulated by the government and market in the way the financial institutions are regulated by the central bank. In the case of "side-spring" poetry, the poets are regulating themselves.

When the corporate system decides the kind of poetry to be offered to the public, poets and poems out of the certain criteria are banished—refused by big publishers, un-approached,

and consequently unheard. For Kuo, the principal rule that still governs poetry, though it is unwritten, is national security; poetry headed for mainstream publication must not take the side of an official U. S. enemy (41). But not every form of political writing is ignored. Many poems opposing the Nazi oppression of the Jews appearing in mainstream group is an example of poetry being regulated in accordance with the state's politics. However, poems on the bankruptcy of American culture and radical questionings of state policy are neglected and sometimes even suppressed. Mainstream modern poetry sometimes includes ordinary life as Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow," just because such poems do not have a clear political message and are purely academic in nature, dealing more with craftsmanship than with any meaning. Indeed, politics and mainstream American poetry rarely mix. Mainstream criticism, also, attempts to dissociate the connection between the poetic and the everyday life. As a result, only a few of so called mainstream figures have come to represent modern American poetry. And only a few political poets have survived the mainstream's restrictive tendency.

The concept of an idealized vision of American life—a by-product of the dominant culture's hegemony—frames a limited boundary of literary excellence. The other perspective of American culture and literature that favors the alternatives is quietly repressed. For example, the dominant culture's sexism, racism, and ethnocentrism ignore the poetry by women and minorities. The canon instantly pushes minor literature elsewhere—outside the textbooks and curricula. Such writing is often considered as less than literature. So, most of them have been lost from contemporary memory. And literary historians have felicitated than resisted such tendency of exclusion. It is a process of cultural erasure. Thus, the texts are erased on ideological ground. In that sense, the study of political poetry is a sort of reevaluation of the texts often thought mediocre and no-good for the simple reason that they do not further state

or corporate interest rather pick holes in what the system is doing. Ironically, it is the state's political interference that supplies the energy for the writing of "political" poems.

The poetry of the mainstream noticeably addresses manifest content, rather than the latent ones. The poems which avoid public awareness, social reality, and politics as general subject matters are apolitical poems, and they deal with the natural world, privacy, family, and isolation. The mainstream national politics generally curtains the reality of poverty, inequality, sexism, racism, and other forms of injustice. Instead, these poems try to popularize an idealized national image. And the poems which do not serve such purpose and speak differently are sidelined. A similar tendency appears in the case of criticism too. Only minor criticism of marginalized literature celebrates the linkage of art and society. For such poets and critics the personal is the political.

The marginal side-spring poetry conveys an explicit political message. For this purpose it articulates various elements of social life. These are the poems with a "social bias." They deal with society as a whole than the individuals who form it. Society, as it exists at present, for these writers, is doomed. Such poets feel a necessity to question the divorce of poetry from politics. In this kind of writing poetry and politics complement each other, seem almost one and the same, that is, two worlds of poetry and politics fuse. The people who favor political literature keep the notion that every poem, novel, or drama must have a social theme, and if not it is merely a confectionery (Katz 14).

Socio-political poetry is ignored or trivialized by mainstream corporate media. Literary history canonizes a few and obliterates the many. When writing is connected with life and society various repressed and almost forgotten poets come into front. Much of such poetry is

eliminated from the cultural memory of the nation. But Cary Nelson perceives such diverse and interactive political poetry as a real treasure of American literary heritage (*Repression* 102). Opening the canon to some minority poems can not bring change in the system. Canonizing some minor poems might label remaining poems inappropriate to be read. So, he attempts a total revision of the past.

Evaluated from the perspectives of repressed poetry and criticism, the mainstream poetry is stale and dull both in matter and method. Mainstream poetic works published by big companies are criticized for sounding the same, being decorated by the same worn out images and ideas, and for never confronting the socio-political reality. Thematically centered on personal epiphany, they are mainly about the universal, transcendent values, nature, the home, meditations on the self, poet's childhood, family, driving, and love. Nostalgia for the innocence of childhood is a very standard theme of this group. The contemporary mainstream poetry very rarely deals with wars in the Middle East, rapes, torture of the immigrants by the police, and so on. These subjects are clearly political and generally thought of as journalistic matters or various forms of non-fiction by the mainstream writers. A large chunk of life is excluded from the subject matter of poetry.

In the thematic side mainstream poems share a consistently uniform voice, point of view, imagery, and other formal qualities. In this sense, all mainstream poems sound the same (Kuo 17). Trees and flower imagery populate this type of poetry. It is basically introspective and largely uses the imagery from a standard stock. In a research conducted by Michael F. Kuo 722 poems published by the leading poetry magazines in 1992 were thoroughly analyzed. The images that counted very high, that is, a hundred to six hundred times were trees, birds, references to art, flowers, children, parents, love, family members, eyes, hands, hearts, music,

the moon, poetry, the seasons, stars, doors, the weather, windows, the suns. The images like bombs, guns, starvation, devil, Gulf War, homelessness, rape, Auschwitz, enemies, and disease occurred less than a dozen times. (Kuo 17). So he concludes that trees, birds, parents, gardens, and the rest are the currency of mainstream American poetry. The year 1992 was the year right after Gulf War and life in America was largely affected. But, war appeared only in three poems. So, mainstream poems are obviously more interested in trees than in human beings. Kuo declares:

The fact that our poets write about the universal significance of birds and flowers, or their middle-class childhoods, is linked to the fact that they write primarily from and for a literary establishment in which the paychecks come from universities and huge, corporate-owned presses (entities whose interests, as we saw, are well served when poets ignore, say, the raped and mutilated body of a *maquiladora* worker in Juarez), and linked to the fact that the aesthetic informing this literary establishment conceives of art as fundamentally removed from the real world. (157)

The mainstream themes and imagery are limited and very much market-determined.

Political Poetry: Then and Now

The history of political literature is as long as the history of creative writing. The explicit expression of a socio-political perspective and content has a long tradition in poetry. The subjects of war and appreciation of heroism are abundantly found in ancient poems. In English poetry from *Beowulf*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* Marvell's "An Horatian Ode," Milton's *The Paradise Lost*, Shakespeare's History Plays, Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, and down to Yeats

and Auden are some major examples of this tradition. Talking about the seventeenth century English political poetry Alan Roper differentiates it from pious poetry and lists three important political elements of that time's poetry: against popery, on affairs of state, and political satire (584).

Dante is a politically engaged classic poet. He is a model and inspiration to modern political poets even though they do not agree with his politics and theology. For him political struggle was a central human activity. He is a poet who fought for a just society though his idea of a just society may differ from present perspectives. His *Divine Comedy* is a highly public and politically directed poetic work. Likewise, Milton was at the center of contemporary political debates. He suffered a lot for his convictions, and wrote overtly political poems. Both of these poets saw politics as an ethical and moral system, not just a power game.

Shelley is another big name in the history of political poetry. A thinker in poetry, he utilized the genre as a form of political action and instrument. Apart from this, he made a great contribution to the trend by defining poets as the unacknowledged legislators of the world. He used poetry as a novel method of distributing political propaganda in works like "Ode to the West Wind." His *Queen Mab* worked as a bible for British radicals. Another work *Prometheus Unbound* discloses his political imagination that involves a utopian vision of a future state (Franta 773). Shelley used poetry as a safe medium of expression to avoid repression and censorship.

In America, around the Declaration of Independence the authors wrote patriotic poems for the recognition of a new nation. They dreamed the prosperous future of America through the poems. Philip Freneau stood at the apex of such poets by speaking for the prosperous future

of the entire country. Phyllis Wheatley's "To His Excellency, General Washington" and the anonymous "Revolutionary Tea" appear in the patriotic side of the American Revolution marking the first phase of the history of American political poetry. In the nineteenth century political poems primarily dealt with the problems of slavery and racial discrimination. Longfellow's *Poems on Slavery* (1842) and James M. Whitefield's "America" (1853) are the landmarks of abolitionist poetry. Whitman chose to write in favor of democracy.

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century and in the whole of twentieth century, political poetry has made a wide coverage in American literature. The political poetry in this period, as it normally happens, is very much shaped by the social, economic, and political contexts. From the last years of the nineteenth century there appeared significant changes like large scale mass immigration to the cities, rapid urbanization, change to consumer oriented production, empire of advertisements, vast development of communication networks, new industrial revolution, arrival of radio, movie, and automobiles. All these complex cultural transformations left the masses and simultaneously elated and distressed.

Linda R. Williams presents T. S. Eliot as a rediscoverer of political poetry(70). Likewise, the red poets of the thirties wrote to sympathize with the proletariat. Joseph Kalar, Kenneth Fearing, Kay Boyle, Langston Hughes, Edwin Rolf, and Rolfe Elgia composed remarkable political poems of protest in the 30s and 40s. These poems are very diverse in style and subject matter. Carl Sandberg (1878- 1967) is often praised as a political visionary. Involved in radical leftist politics he was acutely aware of class struggle. Allen Tate, J. C. Ransom, and Robert Penn Warren expressed their strong disgust with the contemporary society, though they proposed different solutions. Thus, in the new years political poetry was enriched with new matters and methods.

The face of political poetry in the 40s changed with a shift from the global war to Cold War. It moved ahead in the spirit of politics. Many poets composed explicitly political poems opposing the political oppressions. Other poets also got engaged in various protest politics in the next decades too. The changes in the American scenario from World War to Cold War encouraged poets to write implicitly political poems. During this time American people faced McCarthyism, Civil Rights, and the Vietnam War, and poets used these external conditions to impinge upon their creative outputs.

The condition of cultural repression is felt by Americans also in the twenty first century. In the second half of the twentieth century American authors have written a variety of politically motivated poems. The issues of these poems range from economic polarization to gender discrimination, from ethnic identities to religious controversies, from local disputes to international matters, from patriotic to ideological assertions. Whatever the issue may be the poets either reveal their discontent or appreciate something, or even urge for a revolutionary change. Ginsberg's "Howl" (1956) came as a landmark with its protest and prophetic announcement. The Holocaust rooted in the Second World War, the Soviet Union and the Cold War became other important fountainheads of political poems.

Political movements of the 1960s also encouraged the poets to write of politics. Some significant movements around 1960s which have produced important socio-political poetry are the Black Arts Movement, the anti-Vietnam War poets, ethno-poetics, contemporary women's poetry movement, and the language poets. Besides its political agenda, the Black Arts Movement admitted black speech into poetry as done by the Harlem Renaissance poets. Such admission formed a populist audience for poetry by relating it to jazz and rock music. The Black Arts Movement used literature as a weapon of revolutionary struggle. Its belief was that

literature must serve the black revolution as weapons of liberation. Donald Allen's anthology *New American Poetry* (1960) is a fountainhead of radical American poetics. However, he presented "new poetry" not as an alternative or rival to anything else but as the successor of previous generations.

From 1960 the Vietnam War became the central political issue in American life. Almost all of the writers and intellectuals opposed it from the very beginning. They took it as anti-life, shame, horror, and self-hatred. In the next decades Gary Snyder, Denise Levertov, Robert Lowell, Adrienne Rich, Gwendolyn Brooks, Rita Dove, Amiri Baraka, Audre Lorde among others wrote about various social and political issues. Hughes, Baraka, Dove and other black poets manifested the voice of the oppressed people.

The school of Deep Images or New Surrealism came into existence in the late 50s and into significant notice in the 70s when confessional poetry was gradually losing its hold. M. S. Merwin, Robert Bly, James Wright, Galway Kinnell, Mark Strand, James Tate, Charles Simic, and other younger poets Peter Everwine, William Matthews, Gregory Orr, Richard Schramm, and Greg Kuzma are the well-known members of this school. Almost all of these poets were quite active in the anti-war movement and other forms of political radicalism. Their poems are terribly mysterious and profound.

Largely a Ginsberg influenced experimental form, Spoken Word poetry of 1990s is a product of young performance-oriented poets who deal with oral poetry—both live and recorded—on stage or radio and television. This sort of poetic exercise is promoted by Olympic-style poetry-recitation contests where the audience cheers and shouts insults. For these poets there is no separation between poetry and politics. Their writings display multiethnic

consciousness and environment. They express solidarity with progressive social causes and perform for humanitarian organizations. Apart from domestic issues recent political poems address the international matters and affairs. Laird believes that recent political poems now, in lieu of national questions, ask about the globalization.

Signs of the revival of political poems have appeared with the opening of the twenty first century. The established writers of this tendency are continuing their jobs, and new voices have also come into the front. Especially, the terrorist attacks and US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq have produced numerous political verses. Remarkably, Auden's then celebrated poem "September 1, 1939" became surprisingly re-popular after the 9 / 11 attacks. Since 9/11 there has been an explosion of responses to the terrorist attacks, and later to the conflict with Iraq. Indeed, the Gulf War Era has reintroduced political writing through both poems and songs. Perhaps the greatest anti-war response came in the genre of Country Music. Immediately, artists began releasing new songs that they had written in response to the attacks of 9-11.

The Affirmatives and Negatives of Political Poetry

The term politics has been largely supposed as unusable in literature. Some poetry readers opine that poems with political content sound like pamphlets with rhyme, and so politics is an inappropriate subject for poetry. Another assumption often made about contemporary American poetry and politics is that poetry is passive, but politics is active like war. So that poetry and politics are dissimilar entities and they do not mix. In addition, political poetry is accused for being propagandist and using matters that are not universal and eternal. Similarly, sentimentality or the appeal to readers' emotion with an attempt at moving them is often taken as a flaw of political poetry (Thurston 7). Such discouragement of the linkage

between art and socio-political reality is reinforced by Kant's notion of art's aim—purposiveness without purpose. Teachers, too, have done a lot to erase the politics from poetry and literature in general. Consequently, many of such poems are placed in the rare (and so not much visited) book rooms of the libraries.

The relationship of poetry and politics has always been debated. Poetry with political content has been presented as bad poetry. But some badly written love poetry or stupid nature poetry do not make love and nature unsuitable as poetic contents. The reason for the separation of political poetry from poetry was encouraged because the academia, earlier, wanted to see poetry as non-political and criticized such works. But since 1980s the trend has been to dissect political elements in various literary discourses. Poetry and politics were thought unfit for each other in the past, but now this idea is declining. For example, *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* has included a three-page entry (960-3) on "Politics and Poetry." Various innovative and unconventional practices in poetry get accepted, honored, and preserved because the time and audience have become culturally prepared for it.

As Jefferson suggested truth does not rise to the top in a republic without debate. Likewise, the political poets are involved in debates with announcements. People who are not much fond of poetry too, seeing a political poem that debates on some social issue, at times, know this stuff is about the real world. Likewise, the scholars who favor political poetry oppose the practice of poetry being idealized as ahistorical, and self-contained. For them poetry-politics relation is not heterogeneous like the relationship of poetry with neuroscience, television writing, and basketball which too are quite important areas of American life and culture. This natural relationship just suffers a forced segregation. Strengthening this relationship, Dawes opines that political poetry is as old as poetry and either it challenges or champions the status

quo through the force of poetic language. Though such idealization makes a discourse honored in society, it also contributes to repression in areas like class, race, gender, and religion.

Somehow there is a suspicion about the artistic merit of political poems. Of course, there are some bad political poems. There are a number of brilliant works too which manifest a sense of political mission and aesthetic values. The academy has basically condemned the political poems of the early twentieth century as propaganda pieces. But Nelson's criticism justifies that such poems bear both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. Nelson proposes a general reconsideration of the relations between poetry and the rest of social life (*Repression* 19). He thinks that poetry can do useful cultural works even in the present time.

Political poetry is often abused for being leftist. Of course, a large number of political poets come from the left, but not all. For instance, when America had not yet entered the World War II there was a flood of poems either encouraging or discouraging USA from entering the war. In like manner, the poems about the Holocaust, projection of fascism, anti-Communism, Vietnam War, dehumanizing nature of daily life, racism, sexism, casualty in battlefields, imprisonment of activists, and a general public despair do not all belong to leftist poetry. The political poems of Pound and Eliot obviously keep right-wing political views. In addition, it is not right to think that all proletarian literature and criticism is leftist. On the other hand, the terms like "capitalism," "revolution," and "working class" are profusely used in language poetry which makes it look leftist. As the term "political correctness" means a politically and morally right thing to do, Daggett believes, the idea of political poetry is just to take the right side. So, a poem with progressive political content that favors the right side is better than an apolitical or right-wing poem.

Poetry and politics are both matters of verbal persuasion, that is, both have strong connections with the art of rhetoric. Both poets and politicians try to persuade the audience on the matters of common interest. Probably Plato would not have banished poetry, had it dealt with socio-political issues. Plato banished poetry not only because he thought it was doubly removed from truth, but also because he saw it was very powerful. A major characteristic of political poetry lies in its “power.”

The notion that poetry is a wholly independent entity is no thing more than fiction. In fact poetry exists within a network and it has affiliations with other discourses and institutions. The meaning of poetry largely depends on its varied relations with other discourses and the contemporary social institutions. Poetry can serve any social function that language can. The claim and accusation that political poetry is narrow, issue-bound, and temporal can not be accepted. For instance, the war poetry of a past century can be equally relevant in the present time to oppose war; the protest poetry of 1930s USA can be used now to speak against the contemporary class oppression in a developing country, and the poetry of sexual difference of the past can be contextualized to illuminate the present gender issues.

W. H. Auden once declared “poetry makes nothing happen.” But while leaving to join the Spanish Civil War he opined, “I am not one of those who believe that poetry need or even should be directly political, but in a critical period such as ours, I do believe that the poet must have direct knowledge of the major political events” (qtd. in Thurston 4). Though poetry makes nothing happen, it certainly makes itself happen; it makes other poems and critical judgments happen. If poetry can not have a direct effect on the changes in history, it makes indirect effects. Poetry solely can neither end nor combat exploitation. But neither can it really perpetuate it. A political poem can not affect politics just like a nature poem can not save a rain forest.

Poetry is not a substitute for political movements, but it can enhance public consciousness and political transformation. It is able to serve multiple social purposes. It keeps a rich relationship with other discourses of that time. It has the power of redefining human relations. As it is dependent on other discourses, it also influences them. About the reciprocal relationship of poetry and politics Nikolopoulou writes, “At the same time that poetry is called to inspire and enrich politics, it is also enframed and betrayed by politics” (758).

The dominant separation of art from politics designed by aestheticism and “art for art’s sake” was largely aided by New Criticism. Principles for seeking public interest in poetry might be seen as reactions against an older and opposite New Critical principle that forced to distance literature from the matters of public concern (Burt 550). New Criticism in a way came as a reaction to the Marxist criticism rejecting the connections between poetry and politics. Though formally experimental, this school of criticism is politically disengaged. With its emergence and increasing influence, the role of poetry as social discourse fell into a shadow. As a result, poets felt pressure to compose poetry with a higher degree of historical aloofness.

The people who dream of an ideal and utopian society strongly appreciate political poetry. Such poetry, like the most oppositional literature, is culturally representative and displays the utopian visions. About the role of poetry Nelson writes, “Part of its use is to keep alive utopian visions that history may otherwise seem to have extinguished” (*Repression* 216). Poetry, obviously, cannot effect any instant change. Opposite to the idea poetry “makes nothing happen” political poetry criticizes, memorializes, and mobilizes. It allows people to express their views regarding topics that affect everyone—politics. Committed to opposing injustice, it illustrates what makes modern society unique. Such poems encourage the alternatives to those values and practices recommended by the dominant culture. Having a sense of utility it shows

what ought to happen. It complains against injustice and expresses the desire for a social and healthier planet. It functions as an appellate court against injustice. It often demonstrates that the affluent economic system can not solve the problems related to wealth distribution. Political poetry can be written with a variety of immediate purposes; however, it eventually aims at healing the social ills. In sum, it wants a progressive Welfare State; decentralization of power, political pluralism, inclusive democracy, system of mixed economy, and so on.

Political poets are truly concerned with bringing about a decent society. Yearning for healthier human possibilities is the main intention behind all political poems. They encourage the people to create a more peaceful and democratic future. Traditionally, the utopia or the best life is never fully defined by a system. But, it is close to the partly visible indeterminate sketches which are mostly incomplete. Political poetry traces such scaffolding on which a full picture can be developed in the future.

Both political and apolitical poetry supporters have points and logic for and against each other. Some scholars honor aesthetics for its inherent features of uselessness, its unwillingness to provoke action, and its separation from the material world. Whereas there are others who do not see a basic difference between aesthetics and politics. They are different, of course, mainly in the ways they function. A purely aesthetic text also has usefulness as it promises “beauty.” This play between use and uselessness, distance and engagement is largely superficial because, history that drives politics drives poetry too.

Techniques

The uniqueness of political poetry is noteworthy not only in themes but also in its methods and techniques. Poetry is often taken as a highly personal and self-reflective genre but

political poetry is highly public and externally scattered. The major avant-garde poems are rich in cultural and literary allusions, use multiple voices, exclude frank comments on contemporary events, and invite the participation of readers to work with fragments and mosaic. But, the poems of protest written in the twentieth century are methodically different. They are simple, straightforward, and maintain coherence through an easily identifiable traditional sort of voice. They often incorporate the events and persons of immediate spatio-temporal proximity. Generally, they exclude allusions from literature and history; and even if used, they are only a few. The expression is normally complete without demanding the readers to cooperate. Moreover, in these poems text is itself a signified, not a mere signifier. Edwin Markham's "The Man With the Hoe" is a landmark poem in this tradition. It presents a very pathetic depiction of rural working conditions. The poem opens with the description of a poor, hardworking, and exploited farmer, "Bowed by the weight of centuries he leans/ Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,/ The emptiness of ages in his face,/ And on his back, the burden of the world. /Who made him dead to rapture and despair" (ll. 1-5). Then, the poem raises a number of rhetorical questions about the prevailing discriminations among the people. The poem connects the injustice and exploitation in the world with God:

Through this dread shape humanity betrayed,
Plundered, profaned and disinherited,
Cries protest to the Powers that made the world,
A protest that is also prophecy.

O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,
Is this the handiwork you give to God,
This monstrous thing distorted and soul-quenched? (ll. 29-35)

The poem encourages a revolution against the exploiters and repressors in order to bring a just society. It ends with the repetition of questions and the identification of exploiters.

O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,
How will the future reckon with this Man?
How answer his brute question in that hour
When whirlwinds of rebellion shake all shores?
How will it be with kingdoms and with kings--
With those who shaped him to the thing he is--
When this dumb Terror shall rise to judge the world,
After the silence of the centuries? (ll. 42- 49)

The closing clearly encourages the people to be united to rebel and bring the revolutionary changes. In addition to the poverty and difficulty of workers, the poem reminds the readers of American agrarian and industrial history.

Traditionally, poetry used to be judged in terms of its formal perfection. But, on the basis of formal excellence political poetry may not be remarkable. Quatrains with rhyming lines became a model of political verse for a long time. Poetry in traditional forms was itself an appreciated vehicle for strong social commentary. The task is done without violating major aesthetic criteria. Such poetry mixes political notions or agendas with aesthetic ideas of beauty or heroism.

But new experiments have been noticed in contemporary attempts. Contemporary political poems demonstrate unique linguistic properties. They richly explore the liberating possibilities of language. The linguistic tools of contemporary political poems are rather thorny.

Many of these speak in an angry, passionate or direct tone. They often express in humorous, ironic, and satirical tone. A strong political poem asks questions rather than answering them. It takes a roundabout route toward the subject taken. These poems attract the reader's sight, because they incorporate radical tone and opinions, and catch the audience's ear. They instantly attract the reader's attention as the poems take sides in debates, the readers either praise such poems or strongly stand against them. Thus, the political poems are quick to arouse the readers due to their multi-faceted appeal. They feature strong claims through vivid images appealing both to the intellect and emotion of the readers. Besides its primary appeal to the head, political poetry hits at the heart too. Such poetry thinks along with feeling and feels along with thinking.

In the recent changed scenario a poem in blank verse or sonnet form can not be revolutionary even if it speaks so in words. These forms are inherently taken as conservative, and devoted to the bourgeois capitalist economic system. Maintaining a kind of subordination they essentially serve orthodoxy. Being basically elitist, in these forms the interior of the poem can not reflect external politics. Radical political content does not fit inside a conservative form. Though some poets have ventured to experiment along traditional lines, such attempts of rearticulating the form are limited. Form is determined by the content and to a large extent in political poetry the content is the form and vice versa.

Chapter III

Theoretical Modality

Political poetry consciously makes use of literary theories to develop its content. Especially, the Language poets even write theories in their poems, and because they have clear political agendas, they seek justification for their agenda in various literary theories, which are themselves based on strong political ideologies. Lukács, Benjamin, Bakhtin, Horkheimer, Adorno, Foucault, and Jameson are some scholars who work on establishing a relationship between the art and artist, work and society, imagination and reality, creation and ideology.

Dream and Resistance

Lukács has reflected upon the relationship of art to politics. In reference to the ideas of Lenin, he discusses about the linkage of dream and reality. Lukács emphasizes that a writer should dream. Dreaming might be different from reality, however they are interdependent. According to Lukács dreaming “adds a new dimension to every revolutionary act, however insignificant” (“Critical” 166).

Lukács also advocates the tendency of “critical realism” though he refuses the vulgar Marxist dictum that literature should be overtly didactic. Thus, his idea of realism is slightly different from its normal use. He writes, “Great realism, therefore, does not portray an immediately obvious aspect of reality but one which is permanent and objectively more significant, namely man in the whole range of his relations to the real world, above all those which outlast mere fashion” (“Balance” 1049). His position on realism is opposite to subjectivity, alienation, and fragmentation.

Lukács demurs with modernism for its indulgence with individual subjectivity and a retreat from reality. He opposes the bourgeois aestheticism’s subjectivism that makes a work just the author’s individual expression or the superficial propaganda of private views. From the

dominant sense of alienation and fragmentation under capitalism emerges his notion of “reification.” It is a condition of objectification a person feels by subordination to the rationalizing processes of commodity production. As a result, individuals are reduced to the things. So, Lukács opines that modern progressive literature should not further alienate an audience as it is already alienated. Literature, instead, should reveal the audience the deep-rooted objective totality of the economic system that is reducing human beings into things. He urges to wage a relentless struggle against the subjectivization of art dominant in contemporary bourgeois aesthetics (“Art” 806). For that, he encourages to produce “artistically progressive” literature.

He calls art for art sake a parasitic resignation because it promotes social isolation of the individual, and a divorce of work from any connection with life (“Art” 799). He is interested in the framework of the dialectical materialist conception of the unity of content and form. These elements have an interrelationship and contain the quality of mirroring each other. Form is the highest abstraction and the highest mode of content’s condensation. So, the role of art is the annihilation of subject matter through form. The successful mutual conversion of content and form results in “artlessness.” If a work of art is much artless it gives a fuller effect of life and nature, and concentrates more on objectivity (“Art” 804).

He believes that bourgeois aesthetics ignores the objectivity of form, while Marxist aesthetics regards form as important. The bourgeois aesthetics advocates the inner harmony of man and art. But, Lukács tries to dismiss such harmony labeling it illusory or superficial. The harmony of life and beauty, Lukács believes, separates man from the society’s struggle and reality (“Ideal” 903). It keeps art divorced and alienated from life. He urges to resist such degradation and destruction of the individual under capitalism. “In this uneven battle the

individual is doomed if he relies solely on his own powers," Lukács argues, "he can maintain resistance only as a participant in the opposition movement destined to secure the final victory humanism in society, economically, politically, socially and culturally" ("Ideal" 907). Thus, he believes that state power largely shapes individual life; therefore this power should be resisted through movements, artistic or otherwise. From a strongly anti-modernist stance, Lukács produced a fundamental and comprehensive aesthetics of the theory of art and literature.

Political Correctness

Benjamin believes that a writer's social surrounding forces him to choose in the interest of which class to write. The writer of bourgeois entertainment literature intends to escape this choice but a progressive writer chooses to write in the interest of proletariats, which consequently becomes the end of his autonomy ("Author" 167). Benjamin believes that a writer is necessarily engaged in the material, historical conditions of which one writes. He emphasizes on the affirmative claims to rightness, virtue, and correct thinking. Benjamin favors the politically correct literature that sympathizes with the working class. He thinks that a work of literature can be politically correct only when its literary tendency is correct. The dominated are in a perpetual "state of emergency," especially because the ruling class solely captures the idea of history to vindicate its right to rule. He writes, "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule" ("Theses" 682). So, it is the task of a progressive writer to bring about a real state of emergency which will also enhance the struggle against Fascism. He keeps the belief that a writer should teach the people, particularly the writers who produce for the people. He states, "*A writer who does not teach other writers teaches nobody*. The crucial point, therefore, is that a writer's production must have the character of a model: it must be able to instruct other writers in their production ..."

("Author" 170). Thus, the Benjaminian honor of the didactic writer is a privilege to a political poet because he is dedicated to convey some message.

But, Benjamin is dissatisfied with the modern art work's lack of counseling quality. He observes, "In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers. But if today "having counsel" is beginning to have an old-fashioned ring, this is because the communicability is decreasing. In consequence we have no counsel either for ourselves or for others" ("Storyteller" 3). His storyteller has an orientation toward practical interests. Because of such quality of counseling for many situations, he places the storyteller to the ranks of the teachers and sages (14). Counseling, however, is not the psychological connection of the events being forced on the reader. But, it is left up to interpret things the way each reader understands them. In such method, no explanations are offered. It is a suggestion rather than an answer to a question. The unaffected listener is always in companionship with the storyteller and there is a possibility of reproducing the story. Thus, Benjamin's project is programmed for a productive reception. Through a rejection of the ideal of the unified personality and decentering of the subject, this idea has become a precursor of post-structuralism and deconstruction.

He thinks that in modern times there is not much difference between a writer and reader. In the past some writers used to be approached by many readers. But, currently, because of the excessive development of mass media, a reader can easily express one's opinions and gets read. "Thus the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character," Benjamin writes, "At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer" ("Work" 1178). Many of the political poets are largely readers turned to writers. Because of the immediate reaction to the political issues they compose poems and most of them get published in magazines or by small press.

Benjamin proposes a novel notion of “aura” as an essential feature of art work. Though this concept is never definitely analyzed, Benjamin talks about the experience of perceiving a work “auratically.” However, aura is basically an aesthetic concept that provides special sensitive anticipation of broader perceptual and social trends. Sometimes it appears as atmosphere covering a scene or an object. It is also a task of experiencing nature as an aesthetic phenomenon. McCole observes its requirement that “...the subject must assume a position of response in order to establish the necessary distance from the object” (4). So, it is an entwinement of space and time to give the appearance of a distance. It makes a work of art apparent. Thus, an artwork contains aura, which is similar to a sacred object in religious scriptures. But, unfortunately, the status of artwork has changed because of the capitalist mass production. Aura has been removed from art work. Yet, he does not show any nostalgia for the period when aura existed in art work.

Benjamin challenges the conventional paradigms of cultural criticism. For him, tradition lies in coherence and communicability rather than in a particular canonical text or in values. He both celebrates and mourns the liquidation of tradition. Benjamin wants to listen attentively to tradition, but without letting it blind him. As a model, he appreciates Kafka’s work projecting a sickness of tradition. There can be no insight into the new without a serious experience of tradition, and no manipulation of tradition without some specific perception of the new. Benjamin’s modernist cultural criticism operates in the way “not for purposes of détente or compromise, but to locate the unredeemed utopian potential of a tradition and thereby to criticize cultural conservatism from within” (McCole 20). In this particular aspect, his influence on the Frankfurt School, especially on Adorno and Horkheimer, is noteworthy. He argued art was inseparable from its environment of technology and social class. He moves from a purely

cultural avant-garde into organized political involvement and his Marxist position that ideas and culture have no independent history.

The Dialogism

For Bakhtin language is itself always ideological as well as dialogical. Such features of language are visible both in structure and content. All the speech acts spring from previous utterances and they are structured in expectation of future responses. An utterance sprouts out of the dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it. Therefore, an utterance is not only an alien utterance but also an echo of another speech act about that subject. For Bakhtin, Tolstoy's discourse has such a sharp internal dialogism. He thinks that the language as a system is a historical dead end, yet an author becomes able to express one's fundamental ideas and observations only with its help ("Prehistory" 128). Thus, his philosophical observations give importance to ideological as well as dialogical literary writings.

The notion of "poetic discourse" itself was at the heart of all the concepts of literary style in the past. Novel too was judged through poetic parameters. Scholars used to evaluate how poetic a novelistic discourse was. Lack of poetic quality was taken as a flaw of the novel. But the scenario has changed now, particularly since the 1920s. Before that stylistics was almost deaf to novelistic dialogism. But Bakhtin is not much affirmative about verse as he is about prose writing. According to him the dialogical and ideological features of language remain strongly present in prose not in poetry. He favors the novel best and banishes the epic ("Epic" 838). He criticizes epic primarily because it lacks the multi-linguaged consciousness and a stretched epic distance exists between the epic world of the past and the contemporary real world. Epic in particular and all non-novel genres in general are far from the zone of familiar contact. For the

sake of this “distanced plane” the so called high-genres lose the connection with real life (“Epic” 846). The monologic nature of a poetic discourse closes the potential that a dialogic discourse germinates.

In poetry, the uniqueness of the poet’s individuality gets reflected in the writer’s language and speech, Bakhtin opines, but in a novel internal stratification of language and the variety of individual voices gets reflected. The novel has a tendency toward polyphony and it is dialogical. It incorporates the point of view of others, but a poem is essentially monological. The author of a novel keeps a special relation with various interior components of the text. He has various routes and roads to go ahead that the author of poetry lacks. In case a poem tries to do so, then it’s a gradual “novelization” of the poem. Bakhtin believes that “...the novel can include, ingest, devour other genres and still retain its status as a novel, but other genres cannot include novelistic elements without impairing their own identity as epics, odes or any other fixed genres” (Holquist xxxii). Bakhtin criticizes poetry for its tendency of isolating the reader. In poetic language the individuality, image, symbol, style are all oriented toward the singularity. Thus, the conception of poetic discourse is too narrow and cramped.

To uplift the status of the novel Bakhtin coins the terms like heteroglossia, carnivalization, and chronotope to name its essential features. By heteroglossia he means the conditions or converging of internal and external forces that control the meaning of an utterance. He emphasizes that each single work should incorporate free heterogenic and multiple styles. The carnivalization means the forms of unofficial culture like early novels that oppose official culture, political repression, and totalitarian order. Chronotope is an intrinsic connectedness of time and space and the role they play in the making of literary genres.

The heteroglossia of prose promotes the centrifugal stratifying forces. But, poetry's unitary language gives space to centripetal force and tendencies. Unitary language moves toward a concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization as it develops with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 1198). Thus, Bakhtin seems to have believed that poetry favors the "center." Particularly, novel is shaped by the current of decentralizing and centrifugal forces that go towards the ground level. But, poetry—by accomplishing the cultural, national and political centralization—goes towards the higher official levels.

The language of poetic discourse is authoritarian, dogmatic, and conservative—by dissociating itself from extra-literary social dialects. So there is domination of the idea of poetic language or a priestly language of poetry. At one time, languages of various epochs and periods cohabit with one another. Language can be different from day to day. Vocabulary and accentual system of one day can be different from that of another day. Prose intensifies such differences whereas poetry does not. Poetry depersonalizes "days" in language ("Discourse" 1223). It represses all aspects of language, intentions and accents of other people, and destroys diversity. In poetry, natural dialogization or mutual interaction of the word is repressed because it does not go to other utterances beyond its own boundaries. Thus, an internal dialogization of discourse is artificially extinguished in poetry, but in prose it is elaborated.

The sense of bounded-ness, historicity and social determination found in dialogic notions of language is alien to poetry. However, this reduction of epic is not the specified reduction of modern poetry. More importantly, contemporary political poetry seems largely free from this Bakhtinian accusation. Such poems do not exhibit the traits of historic epics. These poems are more distanced from old style epics than they are from modern novels.

Therefore, purely epic forms, though, might be monologic, modern poems are not. Sonya Petkova, in this context, defends modern poetry that it also has dialogic elements and that Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia is relevant to artistic discourse in general. Furthermore, Bakhtin perceives poetry like a painting that hangs on the wall, and prose like a kitchen machinery. But, this analogy does not fit in the case of political poetry. It is an arrow that pierces, a ball that blows, a pillar that supports the weight. The most important aspect of Bakhtin's view is his attempt to bring literature closer to human life and the surrounding. His principle ultimately focuses on the humanity of literary discourse. The underlying mission of political poetry is the same.

Negation of Truth and Culture Industry

Adorno thinks that art can not, normally, achieve autonomy. The dialectic of art resembles the social dialectic. The tension in art is a replica and essence of tension outside ("Relation" 233). Being tied to the real world, art holds the tendency of that world's self-preservation. Art works communicate not just internally, but also with the outside reality. Adorno opines that "works of art do not lie; what they say is literally true" ("Relation" 233). However, he is dissatisfied with mass culture and bureaucracy. In general, Adorno seems to be deeply pessimistic; but also optimistic as he constantly keeps a utopian vision.

Generally, it is supposed that the lyrical subjective being is opposite to the collective and objectivity. But, subject and object are not rigidly isolated elements. The meaning of a poem is not just the articulation of individual emotion and experience. Essentially it is general or social in nature. This philosophical proposition has been experimented and tested by Adorno in certain

poems. For him, lyric poetry is not purely individual that is set against society. It is the subjective expression of a social antagonism ("Lyric" 162). The poet's subjectivity has relation to its antithetical social reality. The demand of uniqueness is itself social in nature. Just an individual experience of a hostile and oppressive social condition is projected. By protesting these conditions, the poem dreams of a different world. The idiosyncratic opposition of the overpowering material force is a "reaction against the reification of the world against the rule of the wares of commerce over people which has been spreading since the beginning of the modern era" ("Lyric" 157-8). For Adorno, the value of lyric poetry does not lie in what it contains, but what it leaves out. The meaning of a poem is not its ideology, but the concept of ideology tries to unmask false thought and catch its historical necessity. In fact, the great art works should let the things be heard which ideology conceals ("Lyric" 157). Thus, by showing the social nature of lyric poetry Adorno is "objectivizing" the subject.

A political poet, like Adorno's cultural critic, is discontented with civilization. Cultural criticism depends on the economic system; it is ideology as well as a criticism of ideology ("Cultural" 1036). Political literature too is largely manipulated by ideological motivations which are ultimately caused by economic reasons. In addition, ideological criticism regards the culture itself and "its relation to something external, to the material life process" ("Cultural" 1038). Obviously, a political poet approaches culture, not like an alien entity as an anthropologist, in terms of its relation with other surrounding factors—close and distant. Political literature and cultural criticism trade the same object—conflict of the individual with the society.

Horkheimer and Adorno see culture industry as entertainment business that produces film, television, radio, magazine, and popular music. These are not art but industries that deliberately produce rubbish and millions participate in them. In these phenomena created by

mass technology the lines between art, advertising, and propaganda get blurred. As their ideology is business, an independent thinking from the audience is not expected. The audience is repressed to think that any form of resistance is possible. It is a world of manipulation and carefree amusement where mass art serves the liquidation of the individual and the status quo. The culture industry serves the totalitarian impulses of modern capitalist society as it is economically interwoven with other capitalist industries. Art is transformed into commodity and people into consumers. People's desire of pleasure and happiness is deferred in endless entertainment. Thus, the desire for happiness is repressed as pleasure is meant to promote a resignation ("Culture" 1232). Avoiding negation, the culture industry controls and disciplines the people—enlightened in a bourgeois sense. They are reduced to stupidity. It perceives people merely as customers and employees. They remain objects both on the screen and in the press. There is an abolition of the individual. Individual is a mere illusion; life and face of every person is transformed by the power of the generality. Ideology is made vague and noncommittal in order to maintain the status quo. Adorno and Horkheimer further state:

What might be called use value in the reception of cultural commodities is replaced by exchange value... the prestige seeker replaces the connoisseur. The consumer becomes the ideology of the pleasure industry.... No object has an inherent value; it is valuable only to the extent that it can be exchanged. The use value of the art, its mode of being, is treated as a fetish; and the fetish, the work's social rating (misinterpreted as its artistic status) becomes its use value—the only quality which is enjoyed. ("Culture" 1239)

Thus, Horkheimer and Adorno offer a critique of modern culture where instrumental reason, monopoly capitalism, and political totalitarianism fail to fulfill the utopian promise of the

Enlightenment. But, what is needed is the art that resists the absolute power of capitalism. So, the artists who embody a perfect style are not great but it is them who use style against the chaotic expression of suffering as a negative truth.

Horkheimer highlights such role especially in the context of philosophy. For him, criticism of the prevalent is the social function of philosophy. It does not mean that philosophy has to complain about different isolated conditions and propose remedies. Horkheimer says, "The chief aim of such criticism is to prevent mankind from losing itself in those ideas and activities which the existing organization of society instills into its members" ("Social" 693). It should enable man to find the relationship between the particular existence and the general life of society, between his everyday projects and the great ideas. Philosophy exposes the social contradictions in which man is entangled. Horkheimer also sees the historian of art or literature having corresponding task. Horkheimer opines that criticism in philosophy is not a condemnation of certain thing as in business or politics. But, it means an intellectual and practical attempt of reluctance to accept the prevailing ideas, and social conditions unthinkingly ("Social" 695). He analyzes the distortion of artistic labor and of cultural products under capitalism. With Adorno, he reiterates that regulation by the law of value and the transformation of cultural products into commodities reduce culture and the arts to the status of conformist, repetitive, worthless things, whose function is to ensure political issues. This is the manifesto of American political poetry especially of the Language school.

Author and Resistance

About the dominant narratives found in every culture Foucault observes, "there is barely a society without its major narratives, told, retold and varied; formulae, texts, ritualized

texts to be spoken in well-defined circumstances; things said once, and conserved because people suspect some hidden secret or wealth lies buried within" ("Discourse" 152). Such texts exist in religion, jury, science, literature and other discourses. But it is not necessary that these narratives are stable, constant, and absolute for all time. Foucault, thus, presents the strategies to think differently and break familiar patterns of thought.

In the essay titled "What is an Author?" Foucault directly questions a fundamental assumption of literary criticism. As an organizing device and the source of a text, he gives a great importance to the author of a discourse. He believes that the author is not just a proper name or an element. The discourse an author creates is not a simple everyday speech that comes and goes. But, it holds certain values and authenticity. Foucault views the author as the unifying principle of writing at the seat of its coherence ("Discourse" 153). Though the author may not be significant in mundane remarks, orders, contracts, and technical prescriptions, it is the governing principle in literature, philosophy, and science. The status of the author is more heightened in literary works as he is expected to answer for the unity of the works published in one's name and the real story that gave birth to that writing ("Discourse" 153). He tries to highlight the "author-function" by showing the inevitable presence of the author in the universe of the discourse and stating that it is not a real individual but a cluster of different selves ("What" 205). He believes that an author is not only an individual who wrote a book, but can be a propounder of a theory, or a discipline. He not only creates a piece of work but inaugurates an endless highway for the birth of many other authors and works.

Foucault does not consent with the view that power always represses. For him, power does not belong to anyone nor is it exercised only by the state. But, it is diffused throughout

social institutions and exercised by many functionaries. So, power is decentralized as well as depersonalized. He also establishes a close relation between power and knowledge:

We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. ("Discipline" 465)

He believes that there is resistance everywhere because of such decentralized nature of power. His thesis of the mutual constitution of power and knowledge, each being dependent on the other, also paves way for resistance. One of his main innovations is to reject the view that power is merely repressive. Power has manifold relations "which permeate, characterise, and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse" (*Power/Knowledge* 93). Thus, a discourse plays the role of a vehicle for the functioning of power.

Jon Simons observes Foucault's principle of power resistance as, "Where there is power, there is resistance. Each power relation generates an adversary reaction on the part of others. Resistance is possible when power pushes toward its limits. Power relations should always be analyzed in terms of adversarial struggle and confrontational strategies" (195). The counter and resistance from opposing powers can be possible due to the circulatory nature of power itself. "Power must be analyzed as something which circulates," says Foucault, "or rather as something

which only functions in the form of a chain" (*Power/Knowledge* 98). Power is never single and alien; it exists in relationship with others. It is challenged, threatened, and even replaced by another. Political poetry also either supports the existing power or the opponent one, that is, its role fits this Foucauldian modality of circulation. Political poetry itself being much interested in power relations, therefore, tries to promote another power in order to challenge the existing one. Foucault also opines that power can not be exercised except through the production of truth. He perceives literature in relation to, as a reflection of, or as a critique of the various regimes of power/ knowledge (Kellogg 174).

The state for Foucault is an important power. However, it is not the only power. He keeps the notion that the state power exists because of the existence of other powers that are beyond the limits of the state. He writes, "In two senses, first of all because the State, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations, and further because the State can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations" ("Truth" 1142). Political poetry might support any of such powers, but primarily it speaks against the state power.

Foucault also thinks that intellectuals are drawn closer to the proletariat and the masses. As the condition of intellectuals is analogous to those of proletariats, it is obvious to have the sympathies of poets to be directed to them. Being a writer when he sits to write, obviously, he supports the dominated and ridicules the dominant. Simons puts light on this tendency as, "Foucault consistently understood his role as an intellectual to support those who are engaged in refusal, 'all those on whom power is exercised to their determinant, all who find it intolerable'" (198). Political poetry is largely associated with such refusal, resistance, power, knowledge and discourse. Political poetry as discourse talks about power, diffused or

concentrated, and power aligns political poets with the state, against the state, and beyond the state.

Interpretation and Postmodernism

Jameson believes that ideological debates can go on together with the issues related to postmodernism. His theory is guided by the Marxist imperative that art is not simply to interpret the world but to change it. The cultural analysis is directed towards identifying and encouraging the utopian and progressive social elements. He keeps a wide range vision by seeing the possibility of a new cultural counter-revolution that stretches from the aesthetic ("Politics" 377).

According to Jameson a work of art can perform various duties, which seem contradictory but really are not. Out of such multiplicity, he gives priority to the political readings of literary text's social function. About the inevitability of the social function of art and the significance of political interpretation, he writes, "...there is nothing that is not social and historical – indeed, that everything is "in the last analysis" political" ("Interpretation" 183). He keeps the belief that political perspective is the required final analysis that can unmask the cultural artifacts as socially symbolic acts. Indeed, the cultural and aesthetic questions can not be separated from political and economic ones. Jameson writes, "...ideology is not something which informs or invests symbolic production; rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal "solutions" to irresolvable social

contradictions" ("Political" 1944). So, all literary texts and other cultural artifacts should be perceived as symbolic acts of real social and political contradictions.

In *The Political Unconscious* Jameson observes that literature is central to Marxism because it is a supreme form of narrative that meditates between consciousness and history. Narrative, and all cultural activity, invents imaginary or formal solutions to un-resolvable social problems. It also contains a "critical moment of truth." He pays due attention to this "dialectic of utopia and ideology." The work opens with a vehement assertion "Always historicize!" and proceeds with this as a morale. In this work, he discusses about three important phases of interpretation. Interpreting a text within the horizon of history, for him, is "a symbolic act." Here, an individual work is "no longer construed as an individual "text" or work in narrow sense" ("Political" 1942). Second is the interpretation of the smallest unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes which he calls "the ideologeme" ("Political" 1942). This sociological interpretation, however, does not erase the first. The last, "the ideology of form" links the literary work with the mode of production.

The death of the subject or the end of individualism is opposed to the modernist invention of a unique personal or private style unmistakable like one's fingerprint or body. This stale bourgeois individual subject no longer exists in the age of postmodern corporate capitalism and demographic explosion. Bourgeois individual is not only a matter of the past but also a fake and a myth. Retrospective style of the nostalgia mode is particularly prevalent in film as in other art forms. There is desire to return to the older past and experience its strange old aesthetic artifacts, but without reinventing a picture of the past in its lived totality. There is a perpetual search of the historical past that is itself forever out of reach.

The present society is a postindustrial, multinational capitalism, consumer, and media society. Jameson laments that the concepts of class politics and industrial labor have disappeared from the contemporary affluent postindustrial capitalism. A major feature of this trend is a false and unreal culture, a consumerist dream world of artificial stimuli and televised experience (Heffernan 255). Postmodernist cultural forms do not just reproduce and reinforce the logic of late capitalism but keeps a critical relationship to it. His famous essay "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" talks about the relation of art to current capitalist production. He thinks that as modernism was caused by the imperial stage of capitalism, postmodernism and its ideology of form are in response to the contemporary consumer capitalism. For him, this task of revealing such postmodernism of resistance is "a cultural politics" which has been a primary space of struggle at present. So, postmodernism is redefined as "the cultural logic of late capitalism." The well-accepted narrative's role of binding past, present and future no longer exists. A sense of unique personal identity has gone away. Based on Saussure's notion, Jameson calls the individual text a "parole," and the vaster system of class discourse "langue" ("Political" 1948). Then, he emphasizes that a parole should retain its formal structure as a symbolic act of langue. For him, the role of culture in a post-capitalist society should be to create a vision of an original harmony between culture and cooperative social life (Heffernan 257). He concludes the essay by posing a question, "We have seen that there is a way in which postmodernism replicates or reproduces—reinforces—the logic of consumer capitalism; the more significant question is whether there is also a way in which it resists that logic" ("Postmodernism" 1974). Indeed, this has become an important point of investigation.

To conclude, this chapter has laid the groundwork for the study of contemporary American political poetry. The notion of art as an expression of a universal human creativity and

as a liberating force suggests two approaches to art. The first is that art should develop freely and should not be required to conform with some artistic dogma, least of all imposed by a political authority. The second is that alongside the development of “high art” by gifted individuals, artistic creativity should be widely fostered and encouraged as a human need and source of enjoyment. In the following chapters, these two theoretically emerging ideas will be discussed in relation with the poetic achievements of the chosen poets and an effort will be made to see how the two approaches mentioned above find their due place in contemporary American political poetry.

Chapter IV

The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poetry: Pound-Olson Tradition and Counter Tradition

The Language Poets: An Introduction

Contemporary American poetry has innumerable schools, camps, and regional groupings of writers. All of these groups are generally divided into two contesting frames; traditional and experimental. An explicit conflict between tradition and innovation in contemporary American poetry is widespread. The cooked and the raw poetry, closed and open form, new formalist and language poetry are further chains of this division (Caplan 123). Language poetry—a significant wing of the second type—is innovative, creative and challenging. It is a school of radicalism in American poetics. An avant-garde school of younger writers, it is not only linguistically innovative but also committed to emerging alternative values of taste. Though inspired by the traditions developed by Pound and Olson, language poets also depart from such traditions.

Language poetry is a broad stylistic term coined to identify all the different writing practices demonstrated by a rather loose group of writing communities, mostly printed in magazines such as *This*, *Totter's*, *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* and *Poetics Journal*. Some of the leading writers of this school are Barrett Watten, Ron Silliman, Charles Bernstein, Bob Perelman, Bruce Andrews, Ray DiPalma, Lyn Hejinian, and Clara Harryman. Having a general fascination with the idea of space and form these writers play with language. Language poetry goes beyond the traditional boundaries of language use regarding the production of meaning. It has remarkably produced prose-poems, especially in long formats. All these poets take theory seriously. Highly critical of the contemporary poetic practice, this school exists by questioning the ideological character of literary language. Furthermore, it keeps a mocking gaze at writer-oriented writing. With their own presses, magazines, and circulatory system, and reviewing apparatus, this school of poets is at times theoretically militant.

Language poetry sees a strong tie existing among art, individual, and society. So, it contains a mixture of the textual politics of two diverse and internally contested theories—Marxist criticism and post-structuralism. It shares its process or productivity with post-structuralism, while it attempts to expose the traces of history and politics in the texts that intend to repress them with Marxism. In this sense, the project of language poetry is political and formal at the same time. However, it follows Adorno much as it is interested in the politics of form more than of content.

Language poetry advocates as well as serves the social function of art as highlighted by Jameson. The poetic practice is in agreement with Bakhtin that language itself is always ideological as well as dialogical. "Language poetry might indeed be regarded as a realization by more drastic means of the dialogic project Mikhail Bakhtin assigns to the novel; rapid collage,

answer as more disconcerting strategies of interruption, exhibit a multitude of received discourses and dialogize their hegemonic claims,” (304) observes Nathanson. Language school has produced ideological literature. It largely maintains relation between the poetry world and the real world. It contains the bounded-ness, historicity and social determination that Bakhtin wanted to see in literary works. It is poetry of use like his idea of kitchen utensil. This oppositional school of writing alienates itself with the power that is repressed by the state Like Foucault’s intellectuals language writers favor proletariats and the masses as one of their governing ideologies. They have always felt threats of multinational corporations.

Though basically dedicated to the present, the language poets like Lukács’ dreamers keep passionate visions for the future. Frankly going against the harmony of man and art, the school presents social problems as the significant business of writing. Maintaining a resistance against the crippling capitalist environment, it defends human integrity that Lukács wanted to see. Another very important aspect where Lukács and the language poets overlap is the focus on collective project. They too believe that individual attempt of resistance is sure to collapse. So, they have got actively engaged in collective oppositional movement. Like Benjamin’s progressive writer, the language poets have opted to write in favor of the working class. Expressing open sympathies for the workers their poems fall in his category of politically correct literature. The support these poets express in the interest of the repressed group goes to the readers as their message. In principle language poets do not intend to teach, but the message automatically reaches the readers as some form of instruction for affirmative action. Being discontented with the civilization these poets project themselves as Adorno’s cultural critics. They deal with the economic factors as the cardinal players of cultural matters. To sum up, as Bakhtin emphasized language poetry brings literature closer to human life.

It conveys the way how discursive practices produce the reality. Through the disruptions of discourse and syntax, the school hinders references or smooth projection. It promotes the Bakhtinian inter-textual force of dispersion within language. As Bakhtin advocates, this poetry maintains a dialogic openness by communal production and collaboration of the reader. Theoretically, language poetry vehemently demurs with Foucault's idea of author function. The collective writing of language poetry is opposed to the idea of author function. But it is closer to his proposition "fellowship of discourse" (Foucault, "Discourse" 156). Obviously, there are instances of personal life to some extent in these poems. Language poetry's critique of personal lyricism shares much with the ideas of Adorno. Its minimization of writer and maximization of reader is also in harmony with Jameson's idea. About Jameson's observations on language writing Perelman states "Fredric Jameson, in the course of his mini discussion of language writing in *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, identifies language writing not only with the new sentence—a reductive move, as we will see—but also with depthlessness, simulacra, Lacanian schizophrenia, and the end of personal identity" (314). Indeed, this school deliberately puts the authorial dominance under shadow. It is dedicated to eliminate the distinction between author and public. As Benjamin opines the reader in this poetry turns into a writer. Though language poets attempt to shadow their personal identities as authors they have propounded a theory as an endless highway of discussion.

An Overview

Language poetry is often perceived as a reaction to as well as an extension of contemporary American poetry represented by the Black Mountain poets, the New York School, and the Beats. Possibly begun in 1971 with the magazine *This*, its spiritual forefathers are Pound, Stein, and Zukofsky. This body of writing has been approached from different

perspectives and taken to extreme points—idealized and marginalized. These poets seek to challenge, question, and rewrite some fundamental notions about poetry and its cultural values. Though they do not bear a self-conscious identity as a movement, the trend has been well-identified as a school. But, some scholars still regard it as a movement. Anyway, attentive to the material of language itself these poets use words for things like Pound's Chinese Written characters.

More than a movement, in some instances, it is a broad historical trend of writing. Indeed, several features of language poetry have been central to contemporary American poetry. Greer opines that the name "language poetry" is a misnomer because "writing" rather than "language" is the central term in this field of work. Poetry, poetics, or theory are taken not as distinct field of discourse, but writing as a space where distinct genres, forms, and modes can intersect, undermine, reinforce, echo, contradict, transform or restate one another (Greer 351). So, a language poem is a typical poststructuralist work.

Within the school too different language poets practice their poetics in their own distinct ways. It is hard to trace a single doctrine that guides their poetries. The naming of this school itself has been at times controversial and unspecific; L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, Language, and language-centered writing. Silliman opines that there are a million ways of defining language poetry but none of them is adequate. Indeed, language poetry resists a precise definition. It is a broad community of poets with a concern for language. It is very hard to trace a single, monolithic definition as the poets associated with this movement have produced multifaceted bodies of works. Likewise, there is much difficulty in assigning stable generic classifications to these works. It is even difficult to form a single manifesto of language poetry. The poets display broadly shared aesthetic, theoretical, and political concerns which in general divert away from

mainstream tendency. However, as Bernstein indicated, it does not assume syntax, a subject matter, a vocabulary, a structure, a form, or a style but all these are explored in the writing.

Perelman notes the primary writing techniques of the movement as:

1) a high degree of syntactic and verbal fracturing, often treating the page as a structural frame; 2) use of found materials, cutting-up borrowed texts; 3) a focus on rhythmic noun phrase, bop rather than incantatory, with semantics definitely soft-pedaled but not inaudible; 4) a hyperextension of syntactic possibilities, more Steinian than surreal; and 5) philosophic lyrics. (315)

Language writers like Andrews, Hejinian, Watten, and Bernstein, afterwards, took these points of departure and connected them with theories. The multiple features mean that the movement contains a great diversity within. It is even hard to locate a typical language poem. But, it challenges the concept of the natural presence of a speaker behind a poem, emphasizes the disjunction and the materiality of the signifier, follows longer prose poem method, and maintains a non-narrative form. It shares such convictions and practices as the rejection of referentiality, dismissal of voice-lyric, theory being inseparable from poetry writing, reader's participation in the production of meaning, search for new socio-political space for poetry and so on. In addition, this movement ideologically opposed five things; narrative, personal expression, organization, control, and the bourgeoisie values.

The language poets were outside the economic and institutional academy. Emerged during the time poetry was being synonymous with university-based writers, most of these poets juxtapose creative writing, critical work, and political engagement. Their critical works explain the formal strategies used in their poetic works. These poets differ from earlier tradition

with a practice that creative and critical writing are community works. The language writing is very closely linked with marginal small presses and magazines. Canonical magazines and big publications almost ignored it.

Language poetry is politically charged and formally radical. As an intellectual American writing, it attempts to join words with the world. Language poets claim their works to be experimental, oppositional, and dedicated to social justice and freedom of the reader. Openly and aggressively oppositional in their political stance these poets are, indeed, engaged in a social enterprise. Some significant contributions of language poetry to postmodern poetics are participatory readership, the commodity form, and decentering of political subject (Nealon 585). Talking about the political motivations of the language poets, McGann divides such writing into two types; oppositional and accomodational. Based on Watten's statement "The test of a 'politics of poetry' is in the entry of poetry into the world in a political way," McGann concludes that politics means "opposition" rather than "accommodation" (626). He prefers the latter type to the former because it is of paramount concern for the majority. Likewise, Bernstein opines that "language control = thought control = reality control: it must be decentered, community controlled, taken out of the *service* of the capitalist project" (*Content's* 60). Thus, he shows thought and language as the two integral things and they are equivalent to reality. Bernstein claims language poetry to be closest to a mass or popular culture among the literary works ever created after the printing press. Moreover, they are generally anti-capitalist and at times reveal Marxist inclination. They may not be political; but they do affect politics.

Foundations and Precursors

This highly decentered movement has more than one specific origin. To look at the distant origin, Gertrude Stein and particularly her work *Tender Buttons* is a precursor. Language school has inherited the abstractness of her prose. It also owes immensely to Pound and Zukofsky. It has also derived largely from Olson, Creeley, and Ashbery. It is often viewed as a movement running on the heels of Black Mountain and New York School. Language poetry has contradictory roots in Objectivism and French Surrealism that focused on linguistic indeterminacy. Both of them refuse the conservative ideas about the nature of language and its relationship with the producer and both deny the stable self-subject. It is also associated with French academy. About its overlapping with these schools Arnold writes that "...in some specific instances, Language writers, Objectivists and Surrealists are linked by the ways in which they map 'the murky realms' between subject and object" (165). Likewise, Russian Futurism is a direct predecessor of language-centered writing. Silliman opines that both of them place language at the center of their work and they deal with a program of conscious and active class-struggle and believe that every creative act is revolutionary (*L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Sup. No. 1* 33).

Its emergence and development is significantly contributed by some previous larger aesthetic contexts. For instance, the emphasis on the repressed signifier was highlighted in the aesthetic philosophy of John Cage's music a decade earlier. Cage spoke for a poetics of non-intentionality that a work should not be a self-expression. His aesthetic beliefs like "poetry focused on process instead of object," and "activity instead of communication" became the bedrocks of language poetry (Delville 190). It is also enhanced by 1960s' Minimal art movement of painting and sculpture which questioned the very borderline of art and non-art. It is influenced by the Frankfurt School in the conviction that literature must reveal some truth in order to be effective (Hartley 314).

Several issues of cultural poetics that took place in the 1960s created space for the formation and growth of language poetry in the 70s. According to Watten, the Free Speech Movement (FSM) at the University of California, Berkeley in 1964 is one of them (“Turn” 156). Both of these movements used language as a tool for power exercise. The prohibition of free speech and FSM members’ struggles for speaking their resistance inspired a track to the writers for thinking of poetry as an alternative way of expression.

What the language poetry has done was earlier indicated in Ginsberg’s *Indian Journals* (1970). In this work he indicated the need of language-centered writing though he himself was already late in demonstrating such an experiment. Yet, he kept dream records, automatic images, lists, news quotations, argument in the text (Watten, “Turn” 165). The work also hinted at a dialectic of identity between the “I” and the “not-I.”

The emergence of language poetry has many affiliations with two other contemporary events—the Vietnam War and the development of literary theories in American universities. McGann expresses that language writing developed in a climate where the hegemony of the American military and multinational capitalism was manifest (640). In the initial months, it was a dominant propaganda that Vietnam War was being fought on national consensus. And a handful of people who opposed the war were unimportant. But gradually the protest voices increased, and there appeared thousands of anti-war banners. Vietnam Day Committee march, October-November 1965 turned into a big series of demonstrations. Ginsberg’s method of protest turned the student movement to counterculture. And his reading of incomprehensible mantras “*Hare om namo shiva*” at the back of the truck became an icon of counterculture. These events responded to politics by developing a certain concept of language. They paved the ways for

writing poetry with an idea of language as a politically motivated text of representation. Thus, the roots of language poetry are varied, but political in almost every care.

Socio-political and Marxist Concerns

According to sociolinguistic claims, all writings are the products of the society's dominant ideology where they are created. Writing, therefore, manifests and conserves the values and ideologies of that culture. However, it can also be used to invalidate the status quo and challenge the dominant social discourse. Language poetry is one of such politically sophisticated radical writing. Language poets have an acute desire of change; the world, language, and the writing (Brill 57). Some of these poets are even committed to a socialist politics. Like left-wing writers, they view language as a social product. They believe that, in order to revision the world it is necessary to revision the language.

Discarding the concept of the "self-sufficient world," language poetry moves to explicitly social and political issues. This poetics endeavors to formulate a social reconstitution that primarily society is the business of poetry. In this sense language poetry is political in carrying the social responsibilities. The failure of traditional communism strengthened the idea that a political system that disregards the prime value of individual self-esteem can not exist with honor. A system that places community at the apex can not honor individual's self-esteem has already remained another conviction. Amid such situations language poetry has come as a challenge by paying due honor to community and diminishing individual status through the disregard of voice.

Language poets are committed to create useful texts. They perceive writing fundamentally as a social act and advocate a transformation of art into a social praxis. For these poets, writing seems to be an engine of social change. So, they work against creating an illusion of life. The political content language poetry uses is consciously antithetical. However, it normally does not celebrate the immediate social and political circumstances. “And though it does not talk directly of a politics of poetry,” comments McGann on the politics of language poetry, “the politics of such writing—the theory and the practice of it alike—are plain for anyone to see” (647). This school also encourages the reader to reconsider the political dimensions of literary works.

Language poets felt themselves marginalized by hegemonic poetry establishment of the power elite. Therefore, they felt committed to “giving poetry back its appeal to the masses and so breaking down the elitism bred by modernism” (Gilbert, “Textual” 254). Socio-political comments are nestled among sentences without any clear political job. The poems contain momentary political flashes. To illustrate, an extract from Hejinian’s *My Life* reads, “The yellow of that sad room/ was again the yellow of naps, where she waited, restless, faithless, for/ more days. They say that the alternative for the bourgeoisie was gulli-/ bility. Call it water and dogs” (Hoover 389). Here, the first sentence deals with a sad woman hopelessly waiting in her room. The third sentence creates an uncertainty between two disparate things. But, the middle sentence like a flash makes a serious political comment about the credulous nature of the bourgeoisie. Thus, politics is inseparably interwoven with the ordinary. Here, poetry and politics maintain the oil-and-water separation or a seamless weaving. Moreover, its politics is not much the declaration of a position or an agenda as it is an effort to alter the way texts are approached.

Language poetry has made the connection between ideology and form apparent. It has theorized the relationship of form and politics. Language is fractured to rebel against the dominant socio-political structure. Such explicit convergence of aesthetics and politics is a rare moment in American poetry. About the type of politics language poets are engaged with, Middleton writes:

Political projects on which the poets are engaged are then no more than linguistic inflammations determined by the body of an alienated society. We are indeed back with Lukács' repudiation of the argument that a fragmented society demands aesthetics of fragmentation as no more than acquiescence in the ideological inversions of the deep structure of a unifying capitalism which foments such illusions. (246)

Though these experimental poets have noticeable varieties between and among them regarding the poetry-politics connection, they have some significant commonalities. They view writing and criticism through the lens of political work. Indeed, the language poets envision a new reality by means of offering new linguistic forms (Brill 60). The basic instrumental function of language is, thus, diminished. Questioning the nature of language it tries to remove the notions existing with language such as the transcendental ego, the authentic self, poet as a lonely genius, and a unique artistic style. Rather, it anatomizes the dominant society and class discourses in order to subvert itself.

By changing the language it attempts to change the society, which is a remarkable politics of language poetry. The poets desire to change the society by changing the mind, which is a change in poetics. Thus, it is poetry for use. Language poets are for "opposition," whereas

mainstream academic poets are for “accommodation,” if the terms of McGann are borrowed. The former are objective whereas the latter are subjective. For the language poets subjectivity hinders their desire to change social life. It is difficult for a change-seeking poem to be subjective and social at the same time. Thus, language poetry rejects the totalizing methods that consequently enhance totalitarianism.

Post-war American poetry is fundamentally a writing of revolt. More specifically, language writing is a Marxism-inclined critique of contemporary American capitalist system. Its oppositional poetics is based on a Marxist analysis of reification. Middleton perceives it as a cultural formation developed from a long-silenced pre-war socialist culture and Marxist theory (247). The poets struggle against capitalist reification on the terrain of textuality. Highlighting the political determinations and their causes, Perloff mentions, “Both in San Francisco and New York, the Language movement arose as an essentially Marxist critique of contemporary American capitalist society on behalf of young poets who came of age in the wake of the Vietnam War and Watergate” (“Word” 7). Indeed, language schools’ resistances to the official verse culture, capitalist market system, dominant consumerist culture, and hegemonic ideologies are obviously of Marxist-orientation. For example, “Stalin’s Genius” by Bruce Andrews reads:

Stalin’s Genius

Little more than words; self makes meaning —

fatter than margarine. I gave you an F — violations appear to invert the

power of the king; examples are there to deter —

nationalism just means delegate somebody else's self-importance. (Hoover 532)

Here, Andrews is linking Stalin with the removal of monarchy and nationality. Linking language writing and Marxist theory Chakroborty writes, "Thus post-war America with its Avant-garde aesthetics has been seen by the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Writers as a pure capitalistic society where everything is judged by its market value – even the very fact of reading is also a subject for commodification. L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Writing negates the idea of commodity fetishism..." (21).

Language poetry actively critiques the bourgeois society. Woznicki rightly remarks that it believes capitalism to have been built on a system of exchange which universalizes the individual and stays attached to capitalist ideology. Under the capitalistic system the poet is obliged to look for the lyrical form of individualistic domination. So, these poets are against the bourgeois myth of the sovereign subject. This school's belief on the equal value of each word is also in agreement with the Marxist orientation. The capitalistic approach of commodification is challenged by the practice of each sentence acting as a unit of meaning. They have a great fear of the risk of language becoming a mere commodity. Likewise, the emphasis on the reader's active participation in the meaning production proposes a social engagement and breaks down the commodity fetishism. Such practice enfolds language into an act of socio-political engagement.

Concepts about Language

The language poets believe that language is a political act. If Silliman's statement "Language is, first of all, a political question," is accepted then language movement can be designated as a metaphysical politics (Lavender 200). It tries to develop non-authorial poetic vocabularies for literary composition. Unlike the Coleridgean concept of poetic diction that

creates a hierarchy of appropriate and inappropriate lexicons, language poetry's proposition of poetic vocabulary is open-ended and critical. They claim that language should not be judged in terms of its appropriateness for poetic diction, rather for its relationship to language (Watten, "New" 149). It promotes the use of jargons, dialects, idioms, and technical senses. A language poem is precisely equivalent to language. So, it is a shift from poetic diction to poetic vocabulary. In fact, it is based upon a rejection of Chomskyan linguistics and generative grammar. Silliman's *The New Sentence* and Watten's *Total Syntax*, for instance, openly refute Chomsky. Maintaining a criticality of the poetic language these poems treat the objects of their art. Avoiding a unifying aesthetic or style, they are similar to the "series of series," as explained by Foucault.

Language poets are interested in writing that places its attention largely on language and the ways of making meaning. They dislike taking for granted the language elements such as vocabulary, grammar, process, shape, syntax, or subject matter. Language is used not only as a medium of communication but also as a material for poetic construction. More than a vehicle to carry preexisting meanings, language is seen as a system with its own operational rules.

Language poetry celebrates the "material signifier" by viewing writing as a demonstration of the "materiality of the sign." Andrews writes in "Text and Context" that "Texts are themselves signifieds, not mere signifiers" (*L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Sup. No. 1* 22). It laments the insignificance being attributed to language by contemporary literary culture. In this sort of poetry the signifier is dismembered from the signified. In this aspect language poetry shares a lot with Derrida's deconstruction. It appeals for a subversion of the dominant poetic and linguistic paradigms for the new ways of thinking. In this aspect, feminism and lesbianism are indebted to language writing.

Like the depolarization of theory and writing, language poets are committed to emphasize the difference between writing and speech. Programmatic focus on writing rather than speech is a typical feature of language poetry. Robert Grenier's celebrated and ironic declaration "I hate speech" inspired the early language-centered writing. Speech in this context especially means expression with a dominant self-presence. The statement came as a questioning attitude to the referentiality of language. Language poetry in the next decades constantly attacks these self-presence and referentiality. In a strong disgust at speech, it reveals a resistance to speech-based poetics. These practitioners believe that writing always loses something while being translated into speech. Though the language poets are opposed to speech, they are seriously committed to the acts of speaking, performing, and conversation themselves. "Writing/talks" have always been the central feature of this school (Mann 172).

Process vs. Product

Language poets challenge the methods of the poetry establishment. They use a variety of formal techniques as examples of poetic postmodernism. They demonstrate intensive experiments on the page; visual layout, orthography, and typography. The key to this writing is emphasis on process and method. Application of process is done particularly at the level of sentence. Preoccupation with a "contaminated" rather than a "pure" language is its distinguishing feature. These poems have richly used the strategies of the new forms of prose, collaboration, proceduralsim, and collage.

Experimental poetry is normally political as it intends to subvert or disrupt the dominant representative forms. Because of its mission, political poetry should be careful both of content and form. Politics of the poem's form is even more important than that of its content (Mann

175). So, language poetry politicizes the poetic form. It focuses on the arrangement of objects as the basis of syntax. For instance, at the age of 37 Hejninian wrote *My Life* (1980) with 37 paragraphs of 37 sentences each. Grenier's three books appear in special formats; *Sentences* (1978) consists of 500 poems on 5 x 8-inch index cards, *CAMBRIDGE M'ASS* (1979) has 265 poems on a 40 x 48-inch poster, the trilogy *What I Believe Transpiration/Transpiring Minnesota* (1989) contains majority of handwritten poems in 8.5 x 11-inch photocopied pages. *Sentences*, having one poem per card, is intended to be read in any order and rejects a book format. It has a general refusal of closure like capital letter or period that marks a complete thought. The text is similar to the full-length features made of discrete bits (cf. Charlie Chaplin). Likewise, the poems in Coolidge's *Suite V* are composed of two words per 8.5 x 11" page—placed one at the top and the next on the bottom. The middle is to be worked by the reader.

Language poets like Perelman, Hejnenian, Silliman, DiPalma actively manipulate standard punctuation rules too. For example, a stanza from Perelman's "Cliff Notes" appears without any mark of punctuation:

Because the language are enclosed and heated

each one private a separate way

of undressing in front of the word window

faces squashing up against it

city trees and personal rituals of sanitation

washing the body free of any monetary transaction (Hoover 498)

Linguistic resistance of the language poets occurs in syntax and grammar too. Techniques of fragments, distortion, writing over or under, cut up, splice, collage are widespread. Montage and pastiche are exploited as structural devices. Particularly talking about Bernstein, Perloff generalizes the figurative qualities of language poetry as, "...it playfully exploits such rhetorical figures as pun, anaphora, epiphora, metathesis, epigram, anagram, and neologism to create a seamless web of reconstituted words" ("Word" 5). An extract of Hejnenian's *My Life* can be a fine example of fragments, collage, prose-poem and many other strategies of language poetry.

Long time lines trail behind every idea, object, person, pet, vehicle, and event. The afternoon happens, crowded and therefore endless. Thicker, she agreed. It was a tic, she had the habit, and now she bobbed like my toy plastic bird on the edge of its glass, dipping into and recoiling from the water. But a word is a bottomless pit. It became magically pregnant and one day split open, giving birth to a stone egg, about as big as a football. In May when the lizards emerge from the stones, the stones turn gray, from green. (Hoover 386)

Fragmentation here creates a notion of textual equality. Like this, most of the language poems depart from normal syntax and focus on rapid shift of matters, objectivity and indeterminacy. They take syntax as crucial to displace metaphor as a major poetic tool.

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, the school's first theoretical journal, itself is a form of reflexive engagement. More than the literary works, the journal published articles to announce the

poetics. The works featured in the journal differ from conventional literary writing. The coverage of the works ranges from signification, sound and schizophrenia to analysis of the works by Stein, Riding Jackson and Zukofsky. It featured not only the types of language-centered writing but also theoretical articles about the movement.

The typography $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ stops reader's gaze on letters as things. Bernstein's partner and also an artist Susan Bee designed this unique logo by spacing the letters with equal signs from the graphically modified noun "language." Equals signs (=) were used in the magazine title with uppercase print. The uppercase used for each letter indicates the idea of "blocks" carrying heavy meanings. Equal signs mean that letters are harmoniously connected to each other and all of them are equal. Each letter contains the same heaviness and the power of communication. Watten believes that the equal signs unite a series of similar and dissimilar individual letters to perform organized violence on language as Mann's notion of the theory death, and it also constitutes a Foucauldian discursive formation ("Secret" 595). The letter "L" does not have any connection with "A" except both of them are independent letters. Their projection as equal items means that not only the letters are equal but the individual works in the journal are given equal status. Equal signs are obviously motivated by a politics or aesthetics of equivalence and a disruption of expository conventions. It further shows the equality among writer, text, reader by violating the hierarchy, that is, writer=text=reader. Thus, the title name itself evolves dialectic of theory and practice. These writers have a collectively held set of notions. They exercise Bakhtin's reception for a poetics of intertextuality and dialogism. The notion also shares many values of democratic politics.

A base of language poetry is the rejection of the narrative model which has been identified as a foundation of any literary discourse. Instead, the poets focus on the use of non-

and anti-narrative strategies. They urge to compose radically disjunctive non-narrative and non-referential poems. In such non-referential poems language is divorced from reference as Stein has done. Additionally, collage, disjunction, spaces, and silences liberate these poems from conventional narrative structures. Bernstein's "Artifice of Absorption" speaks for a poetics of transparency and opacity. His poetry disfigures the words, opens up syntax, and reduces the signifiers to their sub-verbal elements.

Absorptive & antiabsorptive
works both require artifice, but the former may hide
this while the latter may flaunt
it. & absorption may dissolve
into theater as these distinctions chimerically
shift & slide. (Bernstein, *A Poetics* 30)

According to Bernstein the anti-absorptive works flaunt their artifice. Language poetry endeavors to dramatize such artifice.

Language poems use constant back and forth movements. These poems are like a television set tuned to four channels—each quarter featuring one channel. It looks like a kind of stream-of-consciousness text. Watten says that "A poem can be a stretch of thinking" (*L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E No. 2 4*). Sussman writes about the techniques:

...a serpentine poetry of dispersion, wandering about the page, demonstrating the silence and emptiness surrounding its far-flung signifiers; a rigid and erect lyric composed of ultra-short lines, initially explored by Williams, emphasizing the mass of individual words and the arbitrariness of line-breaks; and

conventional lyrics, whose seemingly ordinary lines camouflage unmarked deletions. (1202)

Language poems make abundant use of repetition too. For instance, Ray DiPalma in “[Each moment is surrounded]” uses repetition with slight variation as, “Each moment is/ surrounded/ by the correct torrent/ Each moment is/ surrounded by/ the correct torment” (Hoover 429). The sentence fragments are used as complete sentences to challenge the dogmatic rules of grammar. Likewise, the poets use quotation as cultural intervention. Hejinian, for example, uses quotation in *My Life* as ““Everything is a/ question of sleep,” says Cocteau, but he forgets the shark, which does/ not” (Hoover 386). The quotation includes the words that are overheard and written down. Quotations sometimes work as report, and enhance resistance. They often suppress the author’s voice. The language poems, thus, create a verbal vortex the reader has to work with.

Rejection of Mainstream Meaning, Voice, and Lyricism

Rules are formed, developed, and afterwards perfected. After some time, they become tedious and get challenged. Then new rules and conventions come into existence. The Language school questions, contests, and tries to overthrow the conventions of traditional poetry and communication on a broader level. For Meters, it is a blow against the mainstream illusions of transparency, subjective lyric I, a purified common language, an image as window into the real. Refusing the bandwagon of mainstream American poetry’s conventional autobiographical writing it offers a systematic challenge.

In mainstream writing the poetic terms come from the same bank of images. The poetic language is required to be natural and it needs a unique and authentic voice. It demands clarity,

transparency, and direct communication. But, language poets question these privileged poetic values. Language poetry is often called counter-communicative and “cipheral,” as the experience of reading itself promotes the counter-communication. Indeed, a new concept of the meaningful has emerged with such counter-communication. Mainstream interests in depth psychology, primitivism, mysticism, poetic line too are questioned. Focusing on the material of language itself, it criticizes the bardic, and personalist impulses. An oppositional poetic practice this school opposes the tendency of plainspoken lyric and its hostility towards critical theory and philosophy.

Before the influential emergence of language writing it was a customary belief that as a poet can constitute a poem he can also place meaning in it. But with this school not only the authenticity of the poet in placing the meaning is questioned; a general focus on meaning itself has shifted. Instead, it advocates a postmodernism of open text. Having a very little concern with interpretations, language poetry intends to reveal the power of writing. It is interested in how a particular text works instead of what it means. So, it pays attention to smaller units of signification than to theme or sentence. The poetics of indeterminacy is, thus, at the heart of language poetry. Ashton presents Stein’s line “A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose” as an aspiratory example of indeterminate meaning that language poetry inherited (67). Here is a general refusal of “one-word-one-meaning theory of language” and any personal control over meaning.

Riding Jackson initially thought that language remains under the author’s control. But when she realized it to be an impossible attempt she gave up poetry writing forever in 1941. Exactly from this failure and dismissal of poetry begins the space of Language school. A poet can neither control his poem, nor what its readers make of it. Treating poems as objects, different individual readers can respond to a poem differently. In postmodernism, there is an expectation

of active involvement of the reader in the making of the work. So, writing is that what the readers make of it. Reader's performance with the indeterminacy of writing produces the poem. The poem, thus, is taken as a productive field. McGuirk highlights the specific role expected from the reader as "... what might be even more significant is its invitation not to interpretation (which it resists), but to the practice of writing. Not simply reading but writing along—or what Jed Rasula writes as "wreading"" (215). Indeed, language poetry has little concern with tracing the meanings or making interpretations. The reader has to act as another writer.

The cult of personality dominated the American poetry of the 50s and 60s. The leading poets and critics could not imagine any space outside that scaffolding. William Stafford's "Traveling Through the Dark," for instance, is a typical piece of such voice poetry with the first person domination. The speaker of this poem is in a superior position suffering no effect from the words. Like this, academic mainstream wing is the workshop voice-poem with the lyric of personal experience stated in natural and clear language (Lazer, "Politics" 525). The job of a poem is to transmit an experience or emotion from writer to reader is the very concept of the mainstream which the language poets go against. The author or speaker, in a language poem, is no more an expressive and authoritative source controlling the words and their reception. For instance, Grenier's "Crow" opens as, "stated as arr/ from the trees in the woods/ rather dimly/ attended to as bark/ more familiarly/ identified as the neighbor's dog/ by their house over there/ where the kids walk probably/ flew overhead as ark" (Hoover 381). Questioning the norms of persona-centered expressive poetry it rejects the principle that the poet as subject can represent all the people. Here is a general rejection of the dominant conventional poetry's dependence on a consistent voice as a self-present subject to deliver message or emotion to the reader. But, the rejection of a voice-centered poetry is not the total denial of the voices. The

role of the lyric subject is diminished by the application of a relatively neutral voice or multiple voices. The poetic "I" has just a minor presence in the poem. Thus, it aspires toward a utopia of style-less mode.

Language poets reject the strong presence of voice or subject because it means a participation in totalitarianism. The modernist supremacy of individualism favors an elitist stand that ultimately supports totalitarianism. So language poetry denies this form of totalitarian presence. By refusing the individual subject they seek to eliminate the ego-formation. Like Barthes' theory of the death of the author language writers oppose the notion of personal style widespread in bourgeois literature. "Language poetry, through its radical forms, critiqued the 'naturalness' of narrative and voice that some of its theorists saw as complicit with capitalist ideology..." (124) writes Timothy Yu. Criticizing such personality impulses it goes against the bourgeois-individualistic-Romantic-Subject.

Along with the refusal of a unified voice language poetry advocates the refusal of a normative grammatical or semantic ordering, refusal of the writings organized around certain themes, and refusal of a closure. This way, several mainstream beliefs such as a single idea of art exists, the poem expresses the poet's being, poetry can not change history, meaning should be transparent, voice is the true medium of poetic expression and so on are shattered by the procedural language poems (Watkin 507). Thus acting as oppositional intellectuals, the school primarily has become an oppositional movement. However, language writing has already begun assimilating with the mainstream. In the future it even bears the potential of being one of the theoretical centers of mainstream. Indeed, experimental margins of one time frequently turn into the centers.

Hybridism and Complexity

The poetry of the language writers depends much on their essays. Their prose and poetic works are about similar issues, and they are mostly published within the same book. But, it is obviously not the language poets who first blended poems and essays. As theoretical essays of Pound, Eliot, and Olson are inseparable from their poetry, theoretical prose works of the language poets are also integral to their poetic works. By intertwining poetry with prose, language poets have produced hybrid texts.

Language poets have openly discussed about the problem of the separation of theory and practice. By dissolving the distinction between theory and practice they seek to connect poetry with recent developments in theory and cultural studies. Language writing is, in fact, based on the belief that the distinction between theory and practice is an arbitrary one. As for Olson form is never more than an extension of content, for the language poets theory is never more than the extension of content (Perloff, "Word" 18). They perceive "theoretical" in equivalence to "theory-total." So, language poetry and critical theory are explicitly engaged, if not married. They depolarize theory and practice "by means of a problematization of genre" (Lavender 183). Such depolarization is developed by applying several strategies. They create theoretical poems basically through the insertion of the comments that reflect theoretical ideas. For example, the statement 5 of Silliman's *The Chinese Notebook*, "Language is, first of all, a political question" is straightforward. It also goes hand in hand with deconstruction. As theory and practice are integral, to denounce theory is to denounce practice.

Language poets display a graceful hybridism of genres and rhetorical modes—theory, philosophy, linguistics, practical criticism, verse, talk-performance. Here is a general redrawing

or erasing the boundaries between poetry and prose, creative and critical writing. So, their works belong not to an identifiable genre, but to a contextual space of writing. Destabilizing the well-recognized categories the generic identities are undermined and blurred. So, language writing equally belongs to the history of poetry, prose literature, and literary criticism.

These works extensively use three forms of discourse: traditional lyric, prose, and heavily abbreviated line. Because of all these features sometimes this poetry is paralleled with jazz and rap songs. Hess traces its reception by certain literary circles like the rap music of the ghetto. Both genres seem a noisy and senseless barrage of signifiers sounding all alike. But, it is not convincing to present language poetry and jazz poetry in analogous ways. Jazz poetry does not trust on theory and has no concern with socio-political matters, whereas language poetry has close affinity with both. Thus, the language writing has a radical mixed nature of poetry-prose-theory-philosophy-politics. The multiplicity of these poems comes from the very idea of the multiplicity of language itself. It believes that language is uncompromisingly plural and can not be forced into a unitary meaning. Adopting an assimilative liberal pluralism and multicultural perspectives, it ultimately prospers democratization.

Language poetry owes the concepts of language games to the philosophical works of Wittgenstein. Perloff in "Towards a Wittgensteinian Poetics" argues that his attempt at bringing the words back to the everyday use from the metaphysical one has a big impact on language poetry (Gardner 181). In fact, this is a central tenet of language poetry too. Wittgenstein takes the elements of discourse as building blocks, and the relation existing between these elements makes a logical or discursive world possible.

Language poems are well-recognized for their syntactic and semantic difficulties. Sometimes, they look like riddles. In sum, they assume an academic audience and are mostly indigestible to a mass readership. They require attention and a willingness to believe that there is something of value that will come out of the process of reading. So, the poems are often difficult to understand at initial attempt. In fact, language poets deliberately do this in order to actively involve the reader in creating meanings.

Open Text for Reader Participation

Language poetry is very careful about the mode of writing that would not alienate reader. The idea of active readership is at the center. A theory or scene of reader-writer collaboration is conducted to rescue language from clichés and commodification. The modernism of Eliot focuses on the autonomy of the text. It favors closed text with determinate meaning, and takes readers' participation as irrelevant. But, postmodernism believes in open text with indeterminate meaning, and reader's participation is a must.

In the reading of an open text there is no prior meaning to be discovered, and every new reader becomes the new author of the text. An open text even does not bear a real meaning; the reader comes as the producer of meaning rather than a discoverer. By active participation the reader becomes the very "producer." The text awaits the reader without whom the work is incomplete. Text becomes a common ground of labor between the writer who initiates and the reader who extends it as the second writer. Andrews writes in "Text and Context" that "Reading as a particular reading, an enactment, a co-Production" (*L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Sup. No.1* 23). So, as a letter writer writes what the reader wants to read,

the poet of an open text writes what the readers wish. Thus the language poetry encourages the writers to create “contexts” rather than “texts.”

Earlier, poetry was “I” —written from oneself—and the reader could be anybody. But language poetry gives an honored position to the reader by rescuing the reader from a passive receptor to an active producer who celebrates with the context provided by the poet to create a text. In fact, it is a process of linguistic empowerment of the reader. Instead of making the reader consuming the words passively, language poetry focuses on process by engaging them in the construction of the text. Readers are encouraged to read “writing” rather than “meanings.”

A section of Perelman’s “Chronic Meanings” reads:

A story familiar as a.

Society has broken into bands.

The nineteenth century was sure.

Characters in the withering capital.

The heroic figure straddled the.

The clouds enveloped the tallest.

Tens of thousands of drops.

The monster struggled with Milton. (Hoover 502)

The text does not tell what the heroic figure straddled and which is the tallest thing that is enveloped by the clouds. Using the disconnected fragments and focusing on the reader's role in the making of a work, here is an exchange of meaning. So, rejection of the role of authorial intention in the formulation of meaning is the theoretical politics of language poetry. Language poetry has commitments to the readers' participation and material form of the text because language itself is an open field of human engagement. Because of the violation of the normative frames "the readers of a language oriented poem are theoretically able to construct their own imaginary hypertexts in which they can freely redistribute "meaning" in a personal, "writerly" fashion" (Delville 2003). Language poetry's encouragement to the readers to participate actively in the task of constructing the work can be well observed in a poem "A D" by Coolidge:

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nize (qtd. in Watten, *Total* 93)

In this unusual poem, morphemes have become words. Edwin Morgan reads this text as "Everything/ mineral/ constantly/ fined/ towards/ radical/ recognize." It can also be read as "Everything/ peripheral/ constantly/ lined/ backwards/ cyclical/ colonize." The first half section

of each line has been hidden and the reader is required to fill up the gap. As the poem can be read in other ways too, it becomes a challenge to convention of tracing a single authentic meaning. Thus, a language poem offers an endless play with language.

As in Barthes's "The Death of the Author" meaning becomes a possession of the interpreter. Language poems even resist the conventional normative syntactic links between inter and intra-sentence or phrase in order to invite the reader to rework and complete them into multiple syntactic and narrative interpretations. They do not compel the reader into a limited paradigmatic frame of reference. Readers and poets are, thus, equal agents in the production of the poem. Language poets try to resist the idea of readers' response to the work. Instead, they encourage the readers to develop new methods of reading and criticism to come to terms with a poetry emphasizing the signifier (Lazer, "Opposing" 149). To make the readers attentive to the production of meaning, material signifier is superbly foregrounded and meaningless words are extravagantly used. Thus, by inviting the reader to be a producer of the text instead of remaining just a consumer, language poetry focuses on the empowerment of the reader. Such fusion of reader, writer, and performer is a politics of language poetry.

Verbal indeterminacy and narrative gaps richly used in language poetry also demand the reader's active participation. This is a political as well as a postmodernist strategy. Likewise, by smashing the walls between poetry and prose, literary and everyday language, theory and practice, language movement develops a new relationship with the reader. These oppositional poems have made remarkable contributions to social justice through the reader's emancipation and empowerment.

Along with the reader's empowerment, it overshadows the status of the author. For the language poets, the author is plural instead of singular. The term "signature" more accurately refers to the mark of identity from one another. Signature is their distinctive identifying mark, indication of qualities, and authentication of some document or writing. It identifies a person in relation to one's cultural background, historic period, nationality, gender, and convention. Instead of designing a garden these poets try to make just a path that the readers can go through. The writer only offers a new way for the reader to interact with the text. So, it is a kind of ventriloquism—speaking through other's voice.

Collective Writing

Collective writing in the form of co-and-multi-authorship is a distinguished feature of language poetry. Dual and multiple voice strategies characterize the heroic identity of the group. Bernstein writes about collective life, "I don't believe in group formation, I don't like group formation, but I am constantly finding myself contending with it, living within it, seeing through it" (*L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E No.8* 30). Such multi-authorship is a form of cultural politics and also an aid to defamiliarization. It is also a move towards the utopian form of writing. Such practice of language poetry gets critical terms from Foucault's concept of "discursive formation." Collective writing is dialogic by nature and develops the dialectics of representation too.

Legend (1980) by Andrews, Bernstein, DiPalma, McCaffery, and Silliman is an exemplary collaborative work containing different single and multi-authored pieces with varied techniques. This experimental work everywhere violates the authorial intention which is the textual politics it performs. Such breakthrough of the positing subject promotes negativity, and ultimately forwards the writing to a utopian state. It manifests the intention of equality hidden in the equal

signs too. These writers have experimented with several other collaborative works. A few of such language-centered multi-authored writings are *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* (1981) edited by Andrews, and Bernstein, but works by dozens of writers; "Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto" (1988) by Benson, Harryman, Hejinian, Perelman, Silliman, and Watten; *Leningrad: American Writers in the Soviet Union* (1992) by Davidson, Hejinian, Silliman, and Watten; *The Wide Road* (1989) by Harryman, and Hejinian.

The politics of avant-garde multi-authorship largely contains the revolutionary social motives. In multi-authorship of language writing authorship and genre are united in "suprasubjective forms of discourse" (Watten, "Secret" 623). Watten further presents this poetics of "listserve" as a radical questioning of authorship and community. Listserv as an inter-subjective aesthetic discourse and radical textuality is also an escape from the "theory death" and primarily a homo-social community. Discourse of poetry and poetics, here, is used as a basis for community. Thus, the strategy of multi-authorship is an important asset of avant-garde in favor of the work and its reception by the reader.

Language poets' collective manifesto writings validate and explicate the poetics and positions they advocate. In such works the dominant authorship is taken as a narcissistic flaw. Language poetry's excessive deconstruction of individual identity is honored through the group works (Perloff, "Coming" 568). These poems are against the earlier decades' self-centered poetics of personal sensibility. In multi-authorship of language writing formal experiments are collated via group feedback. They exercise a true spirit of friendship and collaboration. In collaborative works the poets are one another, rather than a particular poet. Collaboration is a social form along with a research strategy. Through collaborative writings "Language poets

might add, at least ‘we’ are something” (Izenberg 159). In addition, these poets are perfectly committed to interactions—learning from, supporting, explaining, and challenging each other.

Communal consciousness is prior to any individual psychology. Among poetic forms too ballads and other choral songs with communal matters are elder than personal lyrics. So, writing poetry with communal consciousness is the true homecoming of this genre. Political poems of labor magazines are obviously of choral nature. Now, language poets have resisted the bourgeois culture with a group identity. In cluster they have worked on little magazines, small presses, alternative anthologies, and co-authorship. Collective enterprise as a reaction against the individualist ethics of bourgeoisie writing is thus a politics of language school.

Utopia

The goals of the language poets regarding language use and the societies they wanted to view seem utopian. A utopia in the form of a desire for a better future has been a distinct feature of language poetry. Bernstein too opines that one value of language poetry is its presentation of utopian content (Nathanson 314). To talk about the failed utopia, Watten borrows Paul Mann’s term theory death. In this context Watten writes, “Locating literature ‘elsewhere’ recasts the negativity of theory of death as a locus of productivity within the utopian/dystopian ‘nowhere’ of language. So a utopian notion of language became an important mode of address of the Language School...” (“Secret” 595). These poets’ desire for change is articulated by means of the system they intend to displace. Indeed, only a few poets these days brave this sort of utopian vision.

Tradition and Counter Tradition: Theoretical Observations

Pound initiated a distinct poetry with ideological convictions from several social and historical areas. Language poetry adds a big block over that foundation. Pound believed in a peaceful and fruitful society guided by a proper universal order. Such provision of order is the manifestation of elitism. But the language poets go for diversity and multiplicity of cultural perspectives that are above the boundaries of order. They reject such coherence and determination which are created by the hierarchy of capitalist society. Language poetry escapes elitist assumptions fertilized by individuality. Such order and coherence, for the language poets, is to be tyrannical and totalitarian. Language poets want to eliminate the notion of subjectivity too because it is ultimately a mode of elitism. This is one of their linguistic arts to challenge capitalism. Bernstein observes, "Pound's ideas about what mediated these different materials are often at odds with how these types of textual practices actually work in *The Cantos*. Pound's fascist ideology insists on the author's having an extraliterary point of "special knowledge" that creates...order" (*A Poetics* 123). Bernstein opines that Pound had to present the different materials not through a single voice. But, Pound deliberately did so because of his belief in fascism. Language poets maintain an ideological difference from Pound in this aspect.

Pound used nostalgia as an evocation of an idealized past. Nostalgia, for him, is not merely a mode of memory but also a mode of history. The memory of a better past is obviously the wish for a better future. The anxiety of a dystopian present heightens the desire of a utopian state. But the utopian world of the language poets is designed in a different method. Language poets share the anti-symbolist mode of Pound that was also practiced by Stein and Williams.

The early 1970s was an appropriate time for an innovative and resistant poetry movement. The ground had been already heated by the challenges to mainstream poetry initiated by Projectivist poetics of Olson and other Black Mountain poets. Language poetry acted upon that ground. Chakroborty observes:

The energy, which Olson talks about in “Projective Verse” now acts in a different way, as in L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poetry the FORM of a ‘Poem’ exposes its artificiality and questions the reader’s experiential insight and his ability to interpret: In dismantling the scaffolding, we create a literature – a record of negative retrieval. (18)

The Black Mountain School, and particularly Olson, fostered creativity, individuality, originality, experimentation, and cross-pollination among various art forms. These writers grew in Pound or Williams vein. Olson’s “Projective Verse” itself is a manifesto in the Pound tradition. In this essay Olson perceives poetry as a process and highlights the humanity and individuality of the poet. He says that the source of a poem is human or physical energy and its discharge. Each perception directly leading to another is what makes poetry projective. The practice of language poetry is similar too.

Olson’s process-oriented poetry has a remarkable influence upon language writing. The Olson tendency rejected traditional poetry, Eliot’s poetics, and New Critical observations. Some remarkable influences of his poetry are popularity of free verse, use of run-on lines and enjambment, use of informal diction, avoidance of traditional poetic forms, quibble from familiar and biblical allusions, minimization of metaphorical statements. Language poets are particularly fascinated by his use of enjambment, stark juxtaposition of observations, minimal

punctuation, innovative word and line spacing. For instance, Silliman's use of Fibonacci series in *Tjanting* seems to have been generated from Olson's geometrical presentation in "The Praises."

As Pound's dictum "make it new" and Williams' highlight "no ideas but in things" are the guidelines, Olson's assertion "history is now" might be the fountainhead of language poetry's conviction that time is always present. Interdisciplinary spirit of his poetry also has a great impact on language writing. But it differs on the level of vocabulary. Olson opines that the major source of poetry is speech instead of the written word whereas language writing goes away from it. In Olson too there are some explorations of subjectivity, but language poets have totally questioned that. Woznicki opines that for Pound and Olson direct perception was to be conveyed from the artist to the reader as the meaning-maker, but language poets deny the role of the creator of meaning. Though Olson did not want an escape from hegemonic voice, the voice he used is unadorned and straightforward.

Language poets obviously belong to the Pound-Olson tradition. Their innovative and often unconventional compositional techniques are creative extensions of this tradition. The play with language and the attempt at legislating the society through language were the programs of the Pound-Olson political tradition. Both Pound and Olson were committed to remove the false valuation of the human—that was made by capitalism—through their linguistic strategies. However, they could not locate and reject the use of capitalism's normative language as done afterwards by the language poets. The campaigns they launched against the cultures of bankers and commercial advertisers seem to have great impacts on language poets. However, in this aspect language poetry goes one step further by examining and questioning the nature of texts. Pound's motivation to act against the social inequalities created by the monetary system instead of human value is a big inspiration for the language poets. He—Olson too—presented

oneself as a spokesperson to change the social conditions. The language poets accept and explicitly practice a similar role needed to obtain the intended social change. The focus indicated by the language poets on the imbalance of power reflected in the use of language by those who are in its control is an extension of Pound's emphasis on economics. Likewise, their attack against capitalist communication is a developed form of Olson's cry against the pejerocracy and commercial sloganeers. Similarly, the commitment to avant-garde poetry and little magazines is a legacy language poetry received from Pound and Olson. So, language writing is the poetry introduced into the American vein by Pound and Olson along with Stein and Williams, and its dominating feature is politics.

Chapter V

Ezra Pound's Poetry: A Diagnosis of Social Cancer

In addition to poetry, Ezra Pound made extensive use of articles, letters, and radio speeches to affect the politics of that time. As a pacifist, he desired to influence the American foreign policy through his scholarly endeavor. He demanded American neutrality in European disputes. His obviously political discourses have made him a literary politician, yet he never desired to get a political office.

Pound was inspired to be a poet by being an avid reader of poetry. As a poet, he advocated for "making it new," that is creating poetry much different from what was in existence. His respect for tradition and his desire for change remained crucial throughout his writing career. Ellmann and O'Clair evaluate Pound's career to be the most extra-ordinary in modern poetry, and he emerges as the most influential person of his time in the writing, publishing, and reading of modern poetry. He has been praised and criticized, followed and shunned. Ellmann and O'Clair further comments, "Though his poetry is imperfect, it suits the present time" (375). Bacigalupo takes Pound for an existential with a love of remote texts (190).

The fragmented world he lived in is partly responsible for his interest in politics which began from childhood as the family background itself was political. His first published poem at the age of 11, a limerick about the defeat of William J. Bryan by William McKinley in 1896 presidential elections, reads:

There was a young man from the West

He did what he could for what he thought best;

But election came round;

He found himself downed,

And the papers will tell you the rest.

(qtd. in Redman 251)

Pound perceives art as the measure of a society's economic and cultural temper.

Towards this end, war and politics cater him a sense of mission, and ultimately enrich his poetry. His political and social views, the basic tools of his good life, are present in his poetic works. He recognizes and exploits both high and low cultures. As a result his poetry and politics are inseparable. In addition, his poetry is largely influenced by economics or "political economy." He inclines to the idea that economics and poetry can go together like love and marriage.

Growth of the Poetic Mind

Pound, born in the period of "art for art's sake," started writing in the period when art was encouraged to serve the social purposes. The role of art was a debatable issue—the question was whether art's commitment was towards aestheticism or towards society. "The early poetry of Ezra Pound," writes Witemeyer, "registers this tension vividly, as it oscillates between the worship of beauty and the reform of culture" (43). In his early writing Pound devoted himself to both—art and society. Later, being impressed by Mathew Arnold's criticism of culture Pound started drifting towards cosmopolitan intellect and culture. As a result, his

works began displaying disillusionments with wars and various forms of social degeneration. A 1913 poem "The Rest" is an exemplary piece of social concern. Addressing the artists, discriminated and enslaved minorities, Pound reveals their pathetic condition and shares his sympathies with them:

O helpless few in my country,

O remnant enslaved!

Artists broken against her,

A-stray, lost in the villages,

Mistrusted, spoken-against,

Lovers of beauty, starved,

Thwarted with systems,

Helpless against the control; (ll. 1-8)

The artist is marginalized from mainstream of society. He is mistrusted and criticized. Economically he is squeezed and therefore "starved." The victimizer is no other than the socio-political system that Pound hates. The poem exhibits the conflict between commercial society and the artists. People of intelligence and wisdom, Pound believes, generally receive abuses from the society.

Hugh Selwyn Mauberley (Life and Contacts), also containing its next part “Mauberley” (1920) projects the decay of western civilization in the post war world. It expresses Pound’s anger with war that disturbed the free exchange of arts and took some of his closest friends away. It also shows the negative effects of the false values of civilization on art and emerging writers. Ronald Duncan takes the poem as a key to contemporary sensibility and a controlled work in excellent form (155). *Mauberley* also contains some indications of the social issues Pound is going to raise in his future poetic works. His convictions and concerns are stated as “All men, in law, are equals” (l. 53); the stupidity of leaders and the people who choose them as “We choose a knave or an eunuch/ To rule over us” (ll. 55-56); and the growing perversion of prostitution as “Dowson found harlots cheaper than hotels” (l. 132).

In the fourth section, he says that people went to war for various reasons—patriotism, love of arms, desire of adventure, fear of critique, love of killing and so on. But those, who returned alive, came back with disillusionments:

walked eye deep in hell
believing in old men’s lies, then unbelieving
came home, home to a lie,
home to many deceits,
home to old lies and new infamy;
usury age-old and age-thick
and liars in public places. (ll. 73-9)

The survivors of the war return from a hell, but to be doomed in another hell. Because of the scattered lies, liars, infamy, and usury their world is no better than hell. The poem also demonstrates the ways the artists responded to such contemporary socio-economic pressures. It is remarkable for its social concern and satirical attitude.

Corresponding to the sense of the poem, its structure is also fragmented, and loosely knitted with sudden shifts of perspective and multi-lingual quotations placed unacknowledged. About the structure of the text Sitwell opines that it records an age broken into distinct fragments and they are “welded” to each other, but not fused as by Eliot in *The Waste Land* (45).

The second part of *Mauberley*, a commentary on the first and its extension, reveals the negative effects of socio-economic perversions in the career of this fictional poet. But, by the end of the poem his poetic quest fails and his dreamed ideal world vanishes. It is an ironic commentary on the poet’s situation and post-war English society. It laments the commercialization and mechanization of the social, political, and aesthetic aspects of the society. In this kind of society, only the “tawdry cheapness” lasts. Thus, it pictures the dark side of a modern poet’s dilemma. It is probably the dilemma of Pound himself. In fact, the poem is often read as an autobiographical account of a semi fictional young poet intending to make a “position.” Pound constantly denied this observation, yet there are some unmistakable resemblances between Mauberley and the poet. Therefore, Rosenthal calls this speaker “Mauberley-Pound” (169). Pound often called the poem as a “farewell to London” as he found this city inappropriate for art and artist because of its several abuses especially the practice of usury. It is also a farewell to his early career. These early poems belong to Pound’s association with Vorticism that carries an antagonistic and elitist viewpoint toward bourgeois

conviction. Vorticism encourages the art to serve society by overthrowing its most cherished beliefs (Witemeyer 49). Accordingly, Pound's early poems satirize decline of the virtues such as beauty, vitality, and desire in the contemporary art and culture. But Pound was now preparing himself for a longer flight. He had, probably, realized that he was required to compose longer and more loaded poems to fight the "old and thick" social vices. The result was the beginning of *The Cantos*, probably the most important poem of his time and of then society.

The Cantos, one of the longest English poems of the twentieth century, is a heroic experiment. It discards the major themes and styles used by the most profound literary works of any period or place. Published in installments, it is a complex poetic work involving a number and variety of motifs, characters, and ideas. Indeed, *The Cantos* is a modern epic-poem including history with divergent contents from world literatures, myths, art, architecture, economics, wars, and historical figures—maintaining loose connections among them. As a result, this cultural poem falls under no known category. However, the three most admired features of *The Cantos* are its use of cultural history, mythopoeia, and paratactic style (Surette 480). The poem reveals Pound's keen interest on Chinese culture, Japanese Noh, Far East, Provencal troubadours, Dante, Ovid, Cavalcanti, Propertius, Sigismundo among others. Through this work Pound brought the Oriental thought into Western poetry. Kenner praises this method of putting the different materials to coexist together as Pound's principal achievement (85).

The Cantos records his quarrels with American policy, culture, and education system. Above all, he quarrels with American economy and banking system, both of which, he believes, are the most corrupt institutions. In Cantos 31-41, Pound starts with the story of the good American presidents like Adams, and Jefferson and goes on to portray their corrupt successors like Clay, Calhoun, Webster who brought in various social abuses like child labor and venality. In

spite of widespread degeneration, Pound gives a glimpse of hope and a vision of paradise with reference to Mussolini's Italy. The poem sweeps across time and space to chart Pound's progress from the local to the depiction of the European malaise and its ultimate resurrection. The movement is from the personal to the political.

Working Principles

The darker aspects of civilization, indeed, torment Pound. The voyage of Odysseus, narrated in *The Cantos*, is analogous to the poet's inner journey into such darker aspects of civilization. One important facet of Pound's growth, his self-exile from America and changing habitation in Europe, itself is often taken as disillusionment with his place and initial search for new that suited his thinking. Though a true "patriot," his rage is directed towards his own nation. "He thought that the United States was," Baym writes, "a culturally backward nation and longed to produce a sophisticated, worldly poetry on behalf of his country" (1233).

Pound does not hesitate to insult the world he is dissatisfied with. As an artist, he thinks that the alienated and degraded status of the artists was caused by the widespread economic corruption. Usury is the chief evil. Pound is critical about Jews and communist too, though he praises some of the communist leaders for their personal skills. His evaluation of the Jew money-lender is, unfortunately, much similar to orthodox Christian theocracy. He often hates communism as "barbarous and Hebrew."

Immense carnage and devastation in war as well as socio-economic problems dissatisfied the masses, including Pound, with the existing political system and leadership. They thought that charismatic dictators could bring order in the world and save the civilization from the pessimistic notion that modern life, in essence, is lifeless. The dissatisfaction with various

contemporary systems, institutions, and culture obliged Pound to come up with his own better propositions. In totality, he desired the cultivation of a “cultural elite.” Restlessly attacking the liberal politics he exhibited totalitarian sympathies. Pound’s views on the society and culture are, thus, influenced by his elitist and totalitarian attractions.

Perpetual tension between chaos and order always bothers him. To attain order by removing chaos, he prefers to make use of some tools. For the same purpose, he maintains openness to non-western cultures. Notably, Pound agrees with the Confucian idea of leadership that a good leader can bring order in society. He believes that the dynamic and insightful leader relies on the Confucian emphasis of duty and social order. For Pound the virtues of the leader are more prominent than their policies and implementation. He thinks that “representative democracy can work well enough, if it has an enlightened elite to run it” (Freind 560). In the following page, some of the most important articles of Pound’s principles will be discussed in more detail.

Pound always takes an advanced position while creating a world of imagination. It is not only his personal imagination, but a fusion of his with those of historic personages. He makes the past more glamorous than it probably was. And the disgust of his own society directs his writing to vision the promising future.

The cardinal cause of inequality and disillusionment is the faulty economic system. He realized that the decay of western civilization was caused by banking and monetary system. He found its solution in the ideas of social economist and a Scottish military engineer Major Charles H. Douglas’ Social Credit Theory. Pound believes that such a system can be eliminated by totalitarian politics. This discovery brought Pound’s poetry and politics together. Consequently,

he dreamed of a society where art would not be disturbed by money, and his search ended in the Italian Fascist regime.

The alternative to capitalist economy that hinders art, Pound discovers, is Social Credit economy which safeguards the arts by issuing a national dividend to all citizens instead of only to the rich. In usury dominated capitalism, art can not survive. As a solution, Pound even proposes a system of art patronage in "Patria Mia." Because of the financial support of the patrons, artists can be independent. But this proposition does not sound convincing. Rather, this old hat is another face of dependence over aristocracy. In fact, Pound, though not a Marxist, has anti-capitalist views (Wolfe 35-36)

Pound is not engaged with systematization and classification of thought. Rather, his philosophy is simply the conviction and the love of wisdom. Such Poundian concern with philosophy "is closely related to the right use of language" (Soper 235). His concern is with what language can do more than with what language can say. Pound is all for language as act which brings tangible results. He uses language to show the abuses of civilization; the display of which can be a way towards their healing. Writing as therapy is what Pound believes and practices. He attempts to educate the public about the wrong things in the society. This commitment impels him to write. Rosenthal says, "...the poet—especially Ezra Pound himself—is a hero bearing the task of cultural salvation on his shoulders. His seriousness is unmistakable; he speaks of "our" problems" (156).

Usury: The Cancer of Society

Though Pound is not the first poet to introduce economics in poetry, he is probably the most remarkable practitioner. For him the most important factor governing politics, arts, and

civilization is the economic system adopted. In general, he favors a socialist type of economy and hates the capitalist where only financiers get profits. He sees no causes of war except the economic ones. All the conflicts and wars are due to international usury. So, he launches a counter-usury revolution in *The Cantos*.

Canto XLV details the evil effects of usury in satiric language. Usury is corrupt though the interest rate may be considerably low. For him money making money is philosophically erroneous and a "sin against nature." Canto LI also projects usury as the cause of poverty, corruption and is a threat to humanity. Usury destroys craft. In such a state, creation of art becomes impossible. It is insulted in canto XLV as:

Usura rusteth the chisel

It rusteth the craft and the craftsman

It gnaweth the thread in the loom

None learneth to weave gold in her pattern;

Azure hath a canker by usura; cramoisy is unbroidered

Emerald findeth no Membling

Usury slayeth the child in the womb

It slayeth the young man's courting

It hath brought palsey to bed, lyeth

between the young bride and her bridegroom

CONTRA NATURAM (II. 37-47)

Usury damages the art, artisan, and the tools. It murders not only the child in the mother's womb, but also damages the youth and the age. Because of all these abuses, this system is against the rule of nature. Pound frankly calls a spade a spade. In general, "The Fifth Decad of Cantos," that says much about usury, writes Bell, "offers a diagnosis of the corruption of western culture by usury and seeks to discover alternatives through resurrecting pre-capitalist systems of exchange, the value of Confucian thought, and ideals of the early American Republic" (92).

Money is meant to be used in exchange with goods, not in exchange with money itself. But in the interest system money creates money and there is no exchange with goods. Such a faulty system results in usury—the most unnatural and the most hated economic phenomena identified by Pound. One should make money by producing worthy goods, beautiful artifacts, or by doing labor. But the contemporary banking practice of making money by manipulating it is simply a corruption, a crime. Money itself is not a commodity but a means to purchase commodity. Conversely, in usury it is practiced as a commodity. This system of signifier functioning as signified is corruption and Pound comes down hard on it. Soper makes Pound's rage with usury clear, "Pound sees USURA introducing mean, niggling, irrelevant considerations to obscure a world of colour, light, pride and self assertion . . ." (242). Therefore, Pound seeks a new monetary system that eschews such unnatural malpractice. Meantime, he comes across the socialist-inclined Douglas' theory, which diagnoses the root problem—inadequate monetization.

The social inequality is caused by the control of credit by private banks having high rate of interest or usury. In order to avoid war, therefore, credit should be nationalized in public advantage. Douglas tried to correct the inequitable distribution of wealth, purchasing power and credit (Nadel 10). Pound agreed with the idea of Douglas that private banks were controlling and exploiting the people with excessive interest rates on credit. So, the crux of the matter would be the government directly issuing the national dividends to the consumers. By adopting this proposed system Pound desired a drastic change in the capitalist system. This finding renewed his understanding of relationship between society and art. As a bad economic system is the cause of many social abuses, art can not be alien from it. Good art can not flourish in economically sick society. He saw a direct relationship of economics with the life of art, culture, and even religion of a time. He clearly focuses on Douglas' proposition of distributing the Social Credit dividends across the board in Canto XXXVIII.

Pound focuses on the never-ending battle between "them" and "us"—those who use usurious corruption and those who try to resist it. Besides, he is ready to accept any form of government for the elimination of usury. Parker comments about Pound's political solution of usury:

Pound reasoned that only a certain kind of government would be able to accomplish such a task, for the Western democracies have shown themselves unable to withstand the temptations of usury, indeed. Pound ultimately concluded that 'USURY' is the cancer of the world which only the surgeon's knife of Fascism can cut out of the life of nations. (109)

Pound, thus, openly advocates for economic fascism based on the progressive prosperity of the people. He eulogizes the nineteenth century American economic history guided by the principles of Adams. For both Adams and Pound, the activity of the swindling banks was engaged in taxing the public for private gain.

In this way, the prime concern of *The Cantos* seems to be the financial policies to be adopted by the state. The creation of money *ex nihilo* by the private banks is the perversion against which Pound's entire effort of economic reform is aimed. His economic propositions are closer to much of the contemporary anti-globalist third world views. Poverty co-exists with great wealth even in an age of immense technological progress. Some people live in luxury whereas others suffer from discomfort and economic insecurity. In a world of surplus, many are going without. It has been so due to the unjust distribution. Domestic loans are responsible for the repression of poor people. Likewise, it is international loan by bankers that is responsible for the exploitation of backward countries by the rich ones.

The Leader as Hero

Pound repeatedly projects some mythical, historical, and contemporary figures as heroes. He is deeply impressed by their philosophy, valor, and acts. He finds the lessons and deeds of such heroes as materials to create the foundation of his ideal society. Confucius, Sigismundo, John Adams, and Mussolini are some of his ideal heroes.

Pound admires the humane civilization and government guided by Confucian ethics. His political views and poetry largely advocate the implementation of Confucian ideals. Pound believes that peace and prosperity resided in ancient China due to the Confucian moral principles. It is the humanity of Confucian philosophy which much attracted Pound. In Canto LIV

Emperor Tai Tsong orders "Take not men from the plough/ Let judges fast for three days before passing capital/ Sentence" (*Cantos* 41).

He took the philosophy of Confucius as the best hope for an enduring and just social order (Redman 258). So he wanted the world to adopt Confucian practice in order to safeguard the social order. In Canto XIII, Confucius speaks about a good leader:

And Kung said, and wrote on the bo leaves:

If a man have not order within him

He can not spread order about him;

And if a man have not order within him

His family will not act with due order;

And if the prince have not order within him

He can not put order in his dominions.

"Anyone can run to excesses,

It is easy to shoot past the mark,

It is hard to stand firm in the middle." (ll. 45-51, 56-8)

Order is the most essential quality for a sound social system. Similarly, he advised to discard extremes of any sort and remain in the middle maintaining a balance like Apollo's "golden

mean.” Pound expresses his belief, ““A good governor is as wind over grass/ A good ruler keeps down the taxes”” (qtd. in Russell 188). As the wind does not affect the core of grass nor shake the root, a ruler should govern the people without giving them any pain. Confucius admired the hero or leader who acted straight from the heart, and Pound obviously admires such leaders.

Pound is an admirer of Sigismundo de Malatesta—a renaissance prince of Italy. He is admired as a warrior, schemer, passionate male, and lover of beauty. The Cantos glorify Sigismundo for two major qualities of this enlightened leader; his support to art and artists, and his attempt to build the Tempio—a church. Based on the concept of Sigismundo as a “manly hero,” Pound has produced a male-centered poetry. The women are all marginalized and they do not speak for themselves and rarely appear in the public.

Similarly, Pound admires Mussolini, the Duce, as “male of the species.” Not only Pound, a large number of American public admired Italy and Mussolini in 1920s and up to mid-30s. He was often celebrated as “Carlylean leader” acting with reason and will-power. Compared to Lincoln he was seen as an answer to growing communism (Thurston 139). Pound celebrates Mussolini, who declared Italy “the only true democratic regime,” and Hitler as a Confucian order-bringer heroes. Pound believed that Mussolini’s fascist regime was on the way towards implementing Social Credit theory (Redman 258). Fascism, for Pound, was the best form of government for Italy and probably not for other countries. However, he expected that the Italian Fascist regime would economically rejuvenate Europe and consequently it would be a model for America to restore the right track (Cockram 544). Liberty being a duty and not a right was a major principle of Mussolini that Pound was impressed with. He also favored the Duce for his notion that poetry was a necessity of the state. He favored Mussolini partly because he was the son of a peasant and the World War II was fought by the capitalists against the

agriculturalists (Tryphonopoulos 23). The China of Confucius and early emperors was also an example of a benevolent hierarchical society founded on agriculture. However, the Poundian admiration of the dictator is quite troublesome to comprehend. Though Pound was a pacifist, and always hated violence, he strangely favored fascism. It happened so, probably because he mistakenly understood fascism or deliberately ignored all other aspects for the sake of order and social credit.

Pound whole-heartedly praises John Adams, the second American President, for his blue blood, skilled leadership and dislike of usury. Adams discouraged the banker-friendly economic policies. He is idolized also because he instructed to keep America neutral from European wars. The Canto LXII celebrates this hero for his fairness, honesty, and statesmanship.

He praises the “decisionism” possessed by heroes like Jefferson and Adams (Nicholls 241). These heroes are the figures who brought ideas into action. By praising the cultural heroes Pound admires the heroic culture. He not only admires his heroes, but equally attacks his villains. Adams’ antagonist Alexander Hamilton who spoke for liberal banking policies is one of such figures ridiculed as a bull in a china shop.

Utopian Ideologies

Being frustrated with the existing culture and system, Pound, in *The Cantos*, imagines of his own utopian world. Willing to bring new sensibility, he dreams of an ideal world like that of Keats’ Grecian Urn and Yeats’ Byzantium. Therefore, the Cantos show his Platonic idealism and intellectual attraction towards the ideal vision. About Pound’s ideal Cranne-Ross writes, “His theme stated at its widest, is a version of the struggle of light and darkness; more specifically, it

is the way in which the Good Life is thwarted or realized" (137). Pound dreams of an "earthly paradise" by getting the gods back to life. Such civilization possesses peace and divine sublimity.

Though Pound dislikes romantic aesthetic, like a visionary neo-romantic he hopes for a cultural renaissance. By ruining the old rocks, he desires to build a new Tempio. His country of utopia especially implements the natural and progressive monetary system. Likewise, as the courtiers and merchants did in the renaissance, in his ideal place the wealthy people will have to subsidize the arts. "One might guess that Gourment and Ovid, more than any other writers," O'Connor states, "satisfy Pound's dream of the world, and help him create his imaginary Great Good Place" (137).

First and the foremost, Pound can not stand usury and therefore banishes it from his ideal society. *The Cantos* continuously broadens the range of readers' consciousness and tries to enable them dislike the corrupt and desire the better. In addition to many other negative effects usury ruins the art. As usury brings death to art, *The Cantos* expects a usury-ridden world by setting against it the ideals of rational thought, and rational economic practice. The poem features usury as the cardinal evil of civilization and, fortunately, it is removable. It is not a permanent evil, and the ideal world is not inaccessible. Added to this, Pound believes that his preferred economic and banking policy can equally work in an empire, in a kingdom, in a dictatorship or in a democracy.

Likewise, for Pound, order and rule of law are highly important phenomena of a good society. Confucius spoke for "law of balance," that is free from any sort of extremes. In the Chinese *Cantos*, as presented by Pound, for Confucius law is not "wanton imagination" nor is it the "temper of individuals," but the preservation of balance. In canto LXVII Pound sees this

Confucian principle implemented by Adams, as he spoke for the “empire of laws not of men.” According to Jameson such a leader has the ideological valorization of the strong personality (qtd. in Bell 105).

Along with the ideal society enriched with order, Pound advocates the government led by good leaders. Redman comments on Pound’s conviction, “No matter what the legal system of government, the ideal government should be one “composed of sincere men willing the national good” (256). Here Pound seems to have believed that the good intention of able leaders is the only factor to determine the fate of a nation. His heroes Jefferson, Adams, Mussolini, and Hitler were good leaders honestly dedicated, for Pound, to Confucian ideal of order. However, he strangely remains silent about various other factors regarding these heroes that could cause bad results.

Poundian virtuous leaders, presented in *The Cantos*, are remarkably humanitarian fellows. In Canto XLIX Pound writes, “Sun up; work/ Sundown; to rest” (ll. 41-42). The leaders are sympathetic towards the workers. In Canto LIV he adores the virtuous rule of a Chinese emperor Hiao Quen Ti who halved the taxes during a famine. Quen Ti orders:

Earth is the nurse of all men

I now cut off one half the taxes

I wish to follow the sages, to honor Chang Ti by my furrow

Let the farm folk have tools for their labor it is

for this I reduce the said taxes (*Cantos* 33)

Similarly, Tai Tsong released the prisoners for farming:

Said: in war time we want men of ability

in peace we want also character

300 were unjailed to do their spring ploughing

.....

If a prince piles up treasure

he shares only his surplus

Lock not up the people's subsistence. Said TAI TSONG. (*Cantos 42*)

Canto LV advocates charity and equity to peasants:

Lend 'em grain in the Spring time

that they can pay back in autumn

.....

That the folk be not

overburdened (*Cantos 53-4*)

Pound wants reasonable release of men from work or pressure, and rest or be creative. Bell writes, "such release is the prime strategy Pound wields against the husbandry of time by the Puritanism he distrusted historically and the industrial capitalism he experienced uncomfortably" (104). This sort of humanitarian attitude is obviously offensive for industrial

capitalism, which perceives time as money and to pass time is to spend money. In the following cantos too the poet puts light on his dreamed order. Adams Cantos (62-71) hold up a vision of ordered government before Europe exploded. *The Thrones* (Cantos 96-109) also advocate the rule of law, good government and order. Pound himself explained that “the Thrones in Dante’s *Paradiso* are for the spirits of the people who have been responsible for good government. The Thrones in the *Cantos* are an attempt to move out from egoism and to establish some definition of an order possible or at any rate conceivable on earth” (Bush 122).

Pound imagines of a totally different place to accommodate his idea of a better society. Somehow similar to Venice, the inhabitants of such place are clever citizens like the epic heroes. They implement an improved justice and economy under a better political and spiritual regime. Some people are not rich at the expense of others. Thus, *The Cantos* has a future-directed nature; future as a rebirth of the heroic past. However, in the manner of distinguished utopian thinkers, he adopts a roundabout way of articulation. Instead of expressing his ideas directly, he postulates the opinions through the voices of thinkers like Confucius and Adams. In order to make his suggestions authentic he selects historical figures, not fictitious characters.

Pound uses a number of myths in *The Cantos* to bring it up to the height of epic. Among them, Fraser thinks, the myths of Adams and Chinese history are properly epic (177). Notably, these myths feature a good society with a noble leader and a stable community, which the wicked people try to destroy. The noble leaders like Adams and a stable society like Confucian China, that Pound desires, respected tradition—skills, insights and wisdom, but not everything from the past. However, such society is not invulnerable. Pound, according to Fraser, has his eyes open to threats against ideal society, “Stability has two enemies besides its own natural tendency to decay. One is the activity of the moneylender, the tax-gatherer, the banker, the

great financial combine; the other is the other-worldliness—like Taoism in China—which treats life as a vain dream” (178). However, Pound’s “idea of stability” is vulnerable. Though stability in society is desirable, human nature wants change too. In reality, none of the societies in history were completely stable. Stability can be measured in quantity, more or less, but no society can be stable in an absolute sense. Society is like personal health; a person lives a healthy life for long time whereas another suffers from various diseases time and again. But, both of them are vulnerable, and must die. In like manner, a social structure can survive for a longer or shorter time, but it is finally replaced by another.

Though Pound’s principle and ideals seem clear, sound and logical, they suffer from a number of questionable premises and controversies. Pound’s imaginative good world can be accepted but his example of fascist Italy as such a world is obviously questionable. In the same way, the ideal world he dreams, usury-less one, does not satisfy the demands of majority of the people. Civilization is suffering from various such problems. The poet remains silent about the issues like unemployment, gender discrimination, crime, and sexual perversions. At the same time, he does not give significant space to women. Despite his avant-gardism, Pound is traditional and even conservative regarding the function of the feminine in his poetics. With much concentration on usury and banking Pound primarily focuses on distribution. But he ignores another equally important aspect of economy for justice and good governance—production. Likewise, in his attempt to remove the evils, he does not give significant space to spiritualism. He abuses the sellers of arms as the enemies of society. But, he does not say anything about them who purchase and use arms.

The Cantos, above all, is a heroic odyssey. Beginning from dark forest (hell), it passes through purgatory and ends in light (glimpse of heaven). About Pound's journey through hell and purgatory to heaven Madge writes:

He decides, first, on a "descent into hell," with the objective, later on, of "rising again," after traversing various hells and purgatories, and perhaps eventually reaching paradise—although to start a poem with a schema whereby final paradise was certain would seem intolerably smug under modern conditions.
(127)

A strongly negative attitude towards Jews is a typical point of cultural politics in *The Cantos*. Pound's anti-Semitism increases in the middle and late cantos than in early ones. In the first thirty cantos, anti-Semitic sentiment is hardly found (Flory 292). On the contrary, in the succeeding cantos the insults to the Jews are scattered. For instance, in Canto LII Pound makes the personae of Benjamin Franklin warn the Christian Americans about the threat of Jews:

Remarked Ben: better keep out the jews

or yr/ grand children will curse you

jews, real jews, chazims, and *neschek*

also super-neschek or the international racket (*Cantos* 11)

Canto LXV reiterates the dislike when Adams is at a church in Brussels:

such wheat crops never saw elsewhere

church music Italian style

a tapestry: number of jews stabbing the wafer

blood gushing from it. (*Cantos* 139)

The reference to Jews has been forced into even when the issue is something else.

Pound's notion seems to be that the future of America will be safe if only the Jews are kept out. Furthermore, lowercase 'j' instead of uppercase 'J' reveals his attitude of underestimation. He uses the terms "usury" and "jew" analogously—"jewsury." And such papers are ridiculed as "jewspapers." He considers any usurer a follower of Judaism even if he is not a Jew—for instance, his anger for President Roosevelt. The Jews threaten the American order and prosperity by accumulating natural and cultural resources. The Jews as agents of usury are, therefore, a threat to the civilized world. He even sees communism as Jewish. Pound dooms the usurers in his "cantonic hell" for their crimes. Thus, by expressing a strong prejudice against the Jews and articulating anti-communist announcements, Pound upholds an orthodox patriotism. It is true that Pound was at times blinded by hate, and he revealed his intellectual inadequacies regarding the Jewish matters (Tryphonopoulos 25). However, his observations of Jews are more theoretical and structural. He rallies more against Jewish-ness than individual Jews.

Language, Style, and Culture

As Pound was unhappy with the poetic themes of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries, he was no less dissatisfied with their language use and styles too. He found poetry lost in romantic smoothness, vagueness, and general insipidity. So, he wanted a period of dry and hard verse. He did not enjoy the poetry of the early 20s that largely bore "vague diction,

twisted syntax, conventional imagery, and clumsy rhythm” (Bornstein 24). Yet, he was impressed by the new style of Yeats with lyrics containing images, natural syntax, and conversational style. By the time he arrived to *The Cantos*, Pound’s style and form seems to have been determined—diverse materials of narrative, informative, and didactic mode in lyrical composition. On the whole, to parallel the height of grand poem he adopted the technique of “grand collage.”

The Cantos written in installments in 54 years is varied, digressive and repetitive. Being guided by the “make it new” motif, it mingles several genres; drama, essay, narration, diary, elegy, hymn, sermon, epigram, catalog among others. A non-sequential collage, it presents a radical break from any organic structure. Presented in poly-vocal style the fragments are charged with excitement.

A uniqueness of *The Cantos* is the use of many languages—nearly about two dozens. Pound’s knowledge and use of multiple languages and cultures, of course, shows that he believed in cross-cultural practice. He assumed that one can understand one’s own culture only by understanding other cultures. Through the use of several languages he has indeed expanded the limited cultural curriculum of English-poetry readers. After all, Pound perceives poetry primarily as an art and craft, and to write crafty poems one needs the knowledge of other languages. For him a poet who knows only the poetry of his language is a very poorly equipped writer (Eliot 35)

The collage of *The Cantos* is made up of the myths, stories, theories, and events of various times and cultures—all knowledge and all traditions in an epic form. Reference, paraphrase, imitation, recommendation or direct translations of earlier works of Pound’s choice

dominate the poem (Heath-Stubbs 250). Apart from this, the poem reveals his sense of past to go together with a new set of principles: Odysseus and Sigismundo with the Social Credit theory.

Pound talks about the people of millennia ago as his contemporaries. The older stories are equally important for him as those at hand. A large number of dead people speak throughout the poem. Furthermore, the poet feels himself free to jump abruptly, analogous to his pursuit of liberty, from civilization to civilization, from one language to another, from past to present or vice versa. Likewise, the message is conveyed through a huge company of voices called personae or mask. The poem too frequently dances with the juxtaposition of passages and scenes. Obviously, this paratactic style reinforces his idea of the coexistence of cultures.

Pound's writing develops with metamorphoses. Starting with one image he moves to another; a mythical character changes into a modern person; a history book results in a contemporary event. As a result, these Cantos do not look like a text created with a plan, but certainly with a strategy—continuously extending, assimilating new materials, like a brain at growth. As the Cantos go ahead they tell new stories as well as interpret and strengthen the previous. So, it sounds something like a radio broadcast heard intermittently because of channel disturbance.

Due to its immensely allusive content one can not understand all the materials in *The Cantos* by reading only what is written there. But, it is possible probably by reading everything that Pound has read and written. Because he has put in *The Cantos* almost everything he read and wrote. He offers quite unfamiliar knowledge, derived from the texts boring to many, with powerful poetic condensation and ideogrammatic language (Drummond 101). From Earnest Fenollosa Pound learned the ideogrammatic method—the use of simple, original pictures

formed by Chinese characters. The poetry then becomes a rich ideogrammatic combination of different ideas, characters, historical events, narratives, and images. Such complex ideograms invite the reader to read and think on their own behalf. Pound's way of writing is a radical reconstruction of the sources. About the direct presence of his prose works in poetry Kenner writes, ". . . there is scarcely a sentence Pound wrote anywhere that has no bearing at all on the poem . . . the poem came to express his whole mind" (229). Pound's method of working is recreation of texts. Bernstein highly admires this originality of Pound. In the essay "Poundian Fascism" he says, "Pound's great achievement was to create a work using ideological swatches from many social and historical sectors of his own society and an immense variety of other cultures" (*A Poetics* 123). Thus, the poems are very rich in allusions, but they appear less interested in factual accuracy and consistency.

Pound's way of seeing is always his own, original. Notably, he sees civilization as a never ending unified whole though with separate fragments. Not only the divergent Cantos have been put together as a whole, at times he indicates even the unseen linkage of those fragments, myths, themes and attitudes. For instance, the first Canto opens with "And then went down to the ship." The initial "And then" seems to be rather unusual opening with many other 'and' and 'then' in the following lines. It means that the story is preceded by another version of Odysseus' voyage. This canto ends with "So that" which indicates its connection and continuation with the tales to be offered. Similarly, the second Canto ends with "And..." showing its linkage with the next.

Pound experimented with various styles. Beginning with imagism he flitted to the tune of vorticism, whereas many of his team members remained with the image. Afterwards, for *The Cantos* he adopted a new style. Almost throughout this epic his style remained consistent even

though he always updated the content. The style itself is a composite of many styles used in different periods and places. Moreover, the methods of condensation, footnote, facts, conversation, ellipses, ironic underestimate, analogy, quotations constantly complicate the poem.

Condensation is a noteworthy style of *The Cantos*. Knowledge of various books and nexus of history are put together in a condensed form. In fact, the technique of condensation works as a major tool to create the poet's ideal society. The poem is engaged with notes and appendices of references used in the text. Kenner calls this technique poetry of the footnote and takes it to be Pound's major discovery (208). Similarly, the poem contains several facts and figure—quite an unfamiliar practice in traditional poetics. Canto XXV, to illustrate, gives chronological history of the delayed construction of a Venetian palace as if the readers are offered a minute book.

Allen Tate finds the poem highly conversational. He states, "The secret of his form is this: conversation. *The Cantos* are talk, talk, talk; not by anyone in particular, they are just rambling talk" (67). These talks generally go around three big subjects; ancient times, Renaissance Italy, and the present. The poetic narration and the ways used by the voices are, of course, closer to speech. The term "canto" itself stresses the mode of oral tradition. This way he has justified the use of idiom in poetry. Likewise, Pound uses ellipses in his poems. Madge takes Pound's intensive exploitation of the ellipse to be his main stylistic device (120). These ellipses offer gaps to be filled up by the imagination of readers. They might also indicate the poet's dilemma of what to say or his unwillingness to say something at that moment. Similarly, ellipses leave the neighboring ideas logically disconnected—a deliberate paratactic purpose of the poet.

Pound also uses ironic understatement in *The Cantos*. Canto LXXXI reads:

Thou art a beaten dog beneath the hail,

A swollen magpie in a fitful sun,

Half black half white

Nor knowst'ou wing from tail

Pull down thy vanity

How mean thy hates

Fostered in falsity,

Pull down thy vanity,

Rathe to destroy, niggard in charity

Pull down thy vanity,

I say pull down. (ll. 152-62)

Pound, thus, skews the human airs and graces. Comparing man to various ugly creatures and presenting him as full of vices he understates man like Jonathan swift did. But, as a preacher he announces that one can be a virtuous person by discarding vanity.

The poem develops a unique analogy among mythical Odysseus, ancient Confucius, Sigismundo of history, President John Adams, and dictator Mussolini. Next to them in analogy there is space for Pound himself. His vision is assimilated with those of his heroes and models.

He also uses innumerable quotations from both authentic and unauthentic sources. Though not the first poet to use quotations in poetry, Pound did immense use of such aggressive quotidian fashion that has been seen by some critics as anti-literary and unconventional notion of poetics (Thurston 137). But, Pound does so with the deliberate purpose of making the language sharp, forceful, and evidenced. Indeed, he has shown what language can do.

The Cantos has a solidly built structure with prolific innovations. Generally, the pattern of each canto is a combination of the praise of an ancient or historic hero, some myth, and some classical quotations followed by a satire on present and all expressed in “telegraphic manner” (Madge 124). For the most part, the way of writing is basically objective. Language immediately expresses objects, actions, and emotions without dull elaboration. Of course, the concrete style mingles with direct lyric or narrative making the presentation of the material objective. Ingham believes that Pound’s poetry maintains a direct relationship with music without causing any grave damage to both arts (236). Lewis praises him as a “prosodic-magician” for his poetry of higher and rarer order, and *The Cantos* as full of quite dense matter like volcanic dust (257). Likewise, it manifests a sculptural sense of poetic form.

Using the mask or personae, as in Browning’s dramatic monologue, Pound tries to keep himself off the matter. The poet’s voice voyages, like Odysseus, from prehistory through past to present without locating on an authentic voice. Doing so Pound probably seeks a strange voice like the thunder of *The Waste Land*.

Disobeying formal consistency and transitions, the poem exults in a discontinuity of structure. There are frequent repetitions of phrases and images—leitmotifs. The refrains occur both inter-cantos and intra-cantos. For instance; “And poor old Homer blind, blind, as a bat,/

Ear, ear for the sea-surge, murmur of old men's voices:" (ll. 11-12) of the second canto recurs in Canto VII opening section spreading in five lines. Certain images are repeated because, Pound thinks, they contain significant truths, and repetitions can make all their implicit meanings revealed. It is in accordance with Pound's poetic principle that "One liberty of the text-book (as a form of writing) is that it permits refrain, repetition" (*ABC* 77). Using odd spelling and unusual capitalization he maintains the typographical oddity. He makes use of technical language from mathematics, physics, and chemistry as well.

Certainly, *The Cantos*, a crafty poem created by "a better craftsman," is a remarkable work to study the art of poetry. It has given different paths to different poets, both stylistic and epistemological. However, the work also contains some handicaps in its style. Eliot thinks that *The Cantos* suffers from complexity and lack of communication:

In *The Cantos* there is an increasing defect of communication, not apparent when he is concerned with Sigismundo Malatesta, or with Chinese dynasties, but for instance: whenever he mentions Martin Van Buren. Such passages are very opaque: they read as if the author was so irritated with his readers for not knowing all about anybody so important as Van Buren that he refused to enlighten them. (34-35)

According to Eliot the failure of comprehension is Pound's deliberate strategy. Anyway, the poem applies the technique of telling the things with "hinted veils." Crane-Ross calls the method of *The Cantos* wrong, basically because of disconnected parts having put together (151). Modern poetry, by mission, is supposed to be obscure, but the obscurity of *The Cantos* reaches its

utmost possibility—above the lay reader’s head. To unknot this obscurity of style and cultural allusions an encyclopedic knowledge is required.

The language of *The Cantos* goes together with Pound’s vision of an ideal world. A society, implementing Social Credit economy, running in complete order governed by able and humane leaders is all what Pound dreams. To remove the powerful existing antagonistic force and establish a new the poem makes the best possible use of language. The loosely knitted grand collage of abundant allusions spoken in poly-vocal method with unusual leaps is a highbrow apparatus along with the techniques of metamorphosis, condensation, conversational style, and quotations enrich the poem with solidity. Thus, Pound has charges with great force to execute his mission of changing the world.

Theorizing Pound

Pound’s poetic works and their mission can be linked with the theory of Bakhtin. Bakhtin believes that every speech act originates from past utterance and expects a response in the future. Such dialogical nature of discourse is obviously visible in *The Cantos*. It has come in response to a number of previous records of myth, history and literature. And, it also offers a fertile ground for a vast range of supportive and opposing discourses.

The Cantos, however, largely escapes Bakhtin’s under-valuation of its genre. He declares that an epic poem lacks the multi-languaged consciousness and suffers from a long epic distance between the epic world and the contemporary world. *The Cantos*, however, is not indifferent to the contemporary issues. Even the references of the past have been contextualized with various present issues. Pound’s poems do not discard the bounded-ness, historicity and social determination that Bakhtin finds in the dialogic language. Similarly, his poems are not un-

purposed as Bakhtin evaluates poetry in general like a painting hanging on the wall. Instead, they are useful like kitchen gadgets. After all, Pound's poetry brings literature closer to life as Bakhtin wishes.

Foucault's "author function" presents the writer as a cluster of selves rather than an individual. And Pound's work contains close connections with the time and place of creation. Certainly, *The Cantos* contains multiple voices of the time Pound witnessed. The history and socio-political picture he offers is the same for all, though the perspectives of seeing might differ. The wars, fascism, and usury are not the experiences of Pound in isolation, but of all. The poem tries to affect the functioning of power by trying to produce truth. It supports power and opposes the other. Like Foucault's intellectual Pound sympathizes with the workers. His praise of Confucian humanitarian ideals and ancient Chinese rulers implementing such practice is an example of Pound's emotional attachment with the poor workers. Above all, his battle with usury is in the side of the proletariat. Its account of the archival documents and textual fragments, fictive and factual images results in Foucault's terminology "heterotopia" (O'Driscoll 173).

Pound's ideal society is analogous to Lukács' principle that a writer should dream. Certainly, Pound keeps up a profound, passionate vision of a future in his poetry, even though it may not be significant in total national politics as Lukács mentions. Like Lukács' model writer Gorky, Pound disregards the inner harmony of man and art, and marches to connect art with life by opposing capitalism. Like Lukács he believes on the immense influence of state power over individual life, and therefore resists it. But, unlike Lukács' insistence on joining the opposition movement he barks up a wrong tree by fighting single-handed and therefore gets doomed in the uneven battle.

Pound's grand poetic task can be paralleled with the ideas of various other theorists. Like Jameson, he gets engaged with a new cultural counter-revolution. He sees all the things having relationship with society and history. In the same manner, Pound seems to be a poet like Adorno's cultural critic. Pound's cultural criticism depends on the economic system. Like Adorno's proposition Pound creates art in terms of its relation with other external factors. On the basis of *The Cantos* it can be said that Pound re-enacts the slide into totalitarianism in the manner Horkheimer and Adorno perceive Enlightenment as totalitarian (O'Driscoll 183). As Benjamin opines Pound has been forced to write about his social surrounding. Also, like a progressive writer Pound escapes from bourgeois entertainment and sympathizes with the workers. Similarly, his way of doing matches Benjamin's principle that a writer who does not teach other writers teaches nobody. This Benjaminian honor of didactic writing goes to Pound.

Chapter VI

The Poetry of Charles Olson: Pollution and Politics

The Postmodern Public Poet

A unique voice in contemporary American poetry Charles Olson is basically an anti-establishment poet. He is also a transition between modern and postmodern American poetry, and a seminal figure in the development of the latter. A central figure in postmodern poetics as a direct influence and an exemplar, Olson has forged a language compatible with modern thought (Altieri 182). He was capable to design poetic and philosophical strategies needed for a trip from modernism to postmodernism.

Olson's personality is often divided into three parts; the poet, the historian, and the cosmographer. In his poetry past has been pulled down to the present. Classical images are woven through contemporary instances. It pays careful attentions to the general conditions like economic, cultural, and geographic which surround the then issues. For instance, *The Maximus Poems* projects the entire historical, social, geological, geographical, and economical details of Gloucester. Maximus poems are all public, not private. Like the works of a poet-historian they illuminate the nexus of past and present. His non-Maximus poems bracket the Maximus poems.

Poetic Connections and Creations

Olson is indebted to various scholars and ideas for their inspirations and influences. The cultural critiques, distraction with peyorocracy, the dream of polis which govern his writing are largely the contributions of the elder poets and his own experiences. Therefore, the politics of his poetry can be properly analyzed only after identifying the influences upon him and knowing

his life's experiences prior to the composition. His family background and work experience also govern his writing. Son of a Swedish immigrant father and a minor postman, Olson rose from a working class background. The family was poor and lived in Worcester's a lower-middle-class neighborhood called Dogtown. Issues of economics and citizenship in his writing are the outcomes of such background. The question in "Letter 3" "who can say who are citizens?" (l. 80) is noteworthy in this context.

In mid-1930s, several organizations and individuals of leftist, communist, socialist, and progressive orientations were united in a forum named the Popular Front. Its major act was the fight against class inequality, racism, and fascism. Olson's social, cultural, and political pronouncements, in a sense, are largely legacies of Popular Front aesthetics and politics. He was a radical anti-fascist basically because of this movement's inspiration. Though Popular Front politics and aesthetics can not be the sole influence on him, certainly it is a significant aspect.

Olson's discussion of political matters is a product of his engagement with Washington politics for some years. His office worked on persuading the new immigrants to support the war. But, soon he got disillusioned with the job. His writing career starts with his departure from this job of organized national politics. While being active in depression era politics, dropping of the atom bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki shocked him deeply as humanity's loss of meaning. Being disillusioned with the vocation of politics, Olson, therefore, committed himself to writing in 1945. The experience of political office, thinks Alan Gilbert, inspired Olson to look for an alternative culture (Gilbert 21). This civil service experience also made him sad for the corporate takeover of the world. Moreover, he learned the art of political propaganda and skill of persuasion.

Frustration with politics carried him to teaching profession at Black Mountain College. It was, then, a center for experimental art and progressive thought. The artists associated with this college viewed innovation basically as a matter of style, not theme. The poets, more or less, composed didactic poems. The college was also an attempt to form a community of active artists and researchers. Olson's beliefs in innovation, purposeful poetry, research, and community became stronger from this experience.

Likewise, his cultural research provided him immense materials from ancient cultures. He explored the Mayan ruins like an anthropologist in the Yucatan of Mexico. The exploration was for the search of primitive energies which were the foundations of ancient cultures. He placed those primitive energies in contemporary society focusing on how they supported modern life.

His dissatisfaction with the present and the immediate past got a breakage when Olson, during his pursuit, met the earliest civilizations. He found a more viable path in pre-Socratic ideas, specifically in the proposition of Heraclitus, that reality is in constant flux and any attempt to systematize or categorize such flux gets doomed from its beginning. Olson quickly adopted the Heraclitian readings of language as commonality, and the pre-Socratic "stance toward reality" that he sometimes called "will to cohere."

He also found some immediate predecessors and contemporaries interesting and resourceful. Keats and Whitman are noteworthy among the immediate predecessors. His thinking about existence and poetry is largely influenced by Keats's explanation of negative capability. Olson's poetry remains in doubt, uncertainties, and mysteries like the concept of negative capability. The epic structure and the ambiguous speaker "I" of Whitman's *Song of*

Myself gave him the idea of a strange speaker. Olson also thought of whether this speaker transcends the individual ego or not.

Among the writers of the twentieth century, Pound and Williams are his poetic mentors whereas Creeley and Duncan his closest associates. He borrowed a remarkable method from Pound—blend of heterogeneous matters, characters, and scenes. And focus on specific place from Williams. Like Pound he decided to “take a big bite” and create a poetic record of human thought. So, in defense of Pound he wrote an essay “This Is Yeats Speaking.” Specifically *The Cantos* and *Paterson* influenced *The Maximus Poems*. However, Olson found Pound’s writing “ego-dominated” and he wanted to throw the ego out. Thus, Olson’s writing escapes the danger of being a mere duplication.

The philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead has a wonderful presence in the works of Olson. In his main book *Process and Reality* and other works Whitehead developed the philosophy of organism—the world or nature as a living organism characterized by interconnectedness. Whitehead gives special emphasis on process. Each actual entity, in his principle, is a process; no two actual entities are unrelated; each actual entity feels every other actual entity. Olson and Whitehead overlap on giving central importance to process. It is often difficult to say what Olson exactly learned from Whitehead but, of course, he shared various ideas with Whitehead. In fact, Olson was practicing Whitehead before he knew this philosopher.

Olson has borrowed some rudimentary ideas from D. H. Lawrence too. The new kind of open form novel developed by Lawrence gave him the idea to think of new type of open form poems. He was also influenced by Lawrence’s criticism of Western civilization. Likewise, he got the idea of making new utterances out of the relics of the earliest human cultures from

Lawrence (Hutchinson 81). Egbert Faas making a linkage between these two writers says, "For to Olson, as to Lawrence before him, the essence of reality is its life force, and poetry as well as the other arts have to partake of this vitality in order to re-enact it" (123). Thus, he has learned and borrowed something from all these past masters and has made use of them in poetry.

Elitist and Public Poetry

A very initial reading of Olson's poetry reveals that he is undoubtedly a well-learned poet. He is also perceived as an intellectual turned poet dealing with a curriculum of the soul (Corrigan, "Materials" 206). His poetry incorporates an encyclopedic, complex, and often idiosyncratic vision of history, myth, poetry, and American culture. Knowledge of science and history has been abundantly used. There is a balanced mixture of modern thought and ancient culture. Indeed, the power of his poetry lies in the knowledge from a wide range of sources to support the liked and resist the disliked.

His poetry provides key insights into intellectual preoccupations. Thinking is more important than feeling; so it rarely displays powerful emotions. In an interview with Gerald Malanga of *The Paris Review* Olson himself admitted that *The Maximus Poems* was written out of consciousness not of emotion (13). His famous quote "It is not the many but the few who care" itself reveals a distinctly elitist view. Such unique academicization of poetry can be taken as his elite alternative.

However, Olson's poetry is basically a public writing that is opposed to self-reflective personal one. His poems never escape the audience and its demands. Like a reactive program against the status-quo, they try to convey energy in public. Likewise, he tries to create a

communal text incorporating marginal voices and narratives as an alternative to the repressive public policies.

Art of inquiry and a stance toward reality go together in his poetry. Involved in the act of seeing Olson's poetry shows a way of knowing rather than announcing a solution. Basically framed in an interrogative mode his poetry takes on the shape of inquiry (Corrigan, "Materials" 207). The poems as tools anatomize the life of the mind. Structurally also most of his poems open and end in the middle of a thought. The primary engagement is with the "real." He gives the reader a direct and sensuous experience of reality like Pound. Duncan mentions in the *Minutes* that as Pound demanded the writers for a reconstitution of art in the name of culture and professional competence, Olson demands it in the name of the stance toward reality and writing with maximum energy.

Olson's poetry performs campaigns of both support and resistance. So, basically, his is a radical poetry with a sense of mission. As Corrigan comments, Olson believed that as a tool language can be used to move things, to transfer energy, and sometimes it can also appear as a weapon ("Poet" 277). He uses language as a tool or weapon, for instance, to support Pound and oppose Melville Society. "Letter for Melville 1951" is a poem in the model of a political pamphlet. Melville society was planning to hold an academic conference to observe the centennial of *Moby Dick* publication. Olson thought the conference was going to exploit Melville and his great novel. The poem condemns the conference and certain participants. However, some persons who did not participate in the conference are praised.

Though not an active member of counter-culture movement his writing helped the efforts of his fellow-poet Allen Ginsberg. However, his poetry is political only in a broad sense,

not in a direct and specific sense. It does not list or exemplify events and ideologies, but tries to shake the total tendency of withdrawing from reality and making the abstract fictions of life. It is a gentle intellectual defense of reality, and offense against some prevailing modes of thought.

Politics of Principles: Projective Verse

Politics of Olson's poetry is not much associated with governing policies or individuals as it is about theories, principles, and values. Indeed, it challenges certain philosophical foundations of the West and seeks to establish a new one. Olson is, particularly, bothered by the philosophical tendency of separating the mind from the body, and categorizing the fundamental wholeness of experience into endless classifications. Because of such tendency people, afterwards, mistook these classifications for life itself. So, he hates the disengagement of people from the direct experience of reality. He frequently quotes Heraclitan declaration "Man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar." He writes in "Maximus, to Himself," "The sea was not, finally, my trade./ But even my trade, at it, I stood estranged/ from that which was most familiar" (ll. 5-7). So he shoulders a mission of restoring human beings to that with which he is most familiar. For this purpose, his poems make several big statements to oppose and support certain principles and values.

Olson is openly opposed to the tendency of separating poetics and human. Therefore, he goes beyond the confines of argument and logic. He attempts to measure the failure of Western history in terms of its connection to logic. He honors only the "poetic logic." In order to propose an alternative he shows the wrong moves made by history—the unthinking acts of man. Such split, according to Olson, can be healed by restoring to humankind the energies of the primordial and the local.

Olson openly criticizes Socrates as a great villain, and the Athenians in general. They developed two means “logic” and “classification” and made abstractions of rationalism. Authorities of Western thoughts favored the Socratic system of logic and classification that debased human life. Olson wants weaken them to support the opposite ideas that challenge such debasement. Thus, he opposes Aristotle and appreciates Apollonius of Tyna. He also makes fun of Plato’s world of ideals. As these Greek philosophers appear very dangerous Olson seeks an alternative to the whole Greek system. The alternative is not something “ready-made.” But it is an opus of process, objectism, attitude towards reality, openness and so on. Objectism intends to develop aesthetic theories in order to challenge the twentieth century scientific thought rather than react against subjectivism and symbolism in theory. Such practice can also bring one back to the notion of polis.

Olson’s principle is considerably distinct from the notions of objectivism, though they sound similar. Objectivists generally view that a production, a poem, after its creation transcends its maker and gains its own independent state of being. But, for Olson activity of making is more important than the production. It does not mean that the product is valueless, but process bears higher priority than what is produced. Stimpson writes about the correlation of these elements, “For Olson, to have one without the others would be neither human nor poetic” (158). True knowledge is active knowledge; opposite to it is passive knowledge that is gained by generalization and analysis as taught by Socrates. Active knowledge is the ideal Olson seeks to achieve.

Sometimes, he directly deals with spatial politics too. Many of the *Maximus Poems* contain explicitly or implicitly some political message, Barse opines, along with a tension between the ideal—city on a hill, and the real—politics and people of Gloucester. This tension

exists in almost all his works. For this sake, the vision of Maximus continuously expands. He takes many identities, speaks many languages, and assimilates himself into various speakers of the poem

Olson's politics is largely of theory. He seeks to replace the existing governing principles with his own creative ones. In Olson's theory of poetry the descriptive function is highly important. He gives much emphasis on the oral aspect of poetry. For him, speech is the "solid," and the "energy" of a poem. His idea of the open or spontaneous process is opposed to the closed verse that has "received line, stanza, and overall form." The major premises of his principles are stated in the famous essay, "Projective Verse."

Initially written to explain the poetic methods used in "The Kingfishers," this essay is a manifesto of open form, of composition by field, of an attitude toward reality. In a sense it is Olson's declaration of creative independence. Arguing a break in all traditional reliance on form, Olson designs a projective revolution in poetics. Three fundamental pillars of this theory are kinesis, principle, and process. First, a poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it to the reader—by way of the poem itself ("Projective" 614). Second, Olson accepts Creeley's evaluation that form is never more than an extension of content. Third, he adopts Dahlberg's observation that one perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception.

In projective poetry the micro-elements like breathing, rhythm, syllable, and line bear cardinal responsibilities. New poetry must be connected with the breathing of the poet and his listener as well. It reorients meter to the breathing of the poet in the act of composition. Poetry is dead, if it is not breathing. Corrigan emphasizes on the significance of breathing as "When Olson talks of *projective verse, kinetics, energy discharge, the law of the line, one perception*

immediately and directly to another, all of which he aligns with the act of breathing, breathing properly, he means to rescue the individual from history" ("Materials" 211). Similarly, Olson turns to rhythm—the most physical aspect of the poem—and redefines it. The syllable—the smallest particle of all—is the king and pin of versification. Syllable is associated with ear, and ear with mind. So, the syllable has the speed of the mind. The next in importance is line. The line comes from the breath. Ear is, thus, the threshold of projective verse.

Olson speaks of an elliptical, open-ended technique of composition by field. Such poetry takes the text as a field and composition as an activity that takes place in it. Field is the page upon which the poet, using his typewriter, frames his poem. His call for composition by field as a counter to closed verse of the mainstream poetic tradition has been considered as a "mantra" for the young poets (Rifkin 140). In this way, projective, open or composition by field is opposed to all the old-base of non-projective poetry.

As an escape from over-subjective poetry Olson focuses on objectism. For him, poet is a mere object, like other objects in nature, needed to write poetry. Instead, he asks for closer contact with the audience, and the narrator takes on the role of a tour guide (Vanderborg 374). In objectism, there is getting rid of the ego of the subject and the poet's soul. Like Pound and other early objectivists he perceives nature as an active field of events showing a plurality of souls in matter.

The corpus of Olson's ideas on poetry and poet presents a projective poet as an interdisciplinary pioneer. He believes that projective poem can carry larger materials than it has carried since the Elizabethan period ("Projective" 620). It means that poetry can be political, didactic, collagist, and intellectual. In sum, through the politics of theory Olson tries to make the

readers aware of the process of investigating on one's own effort rather than obeying an authorized history.

Critique of Modern American Culture

A cultural critic is often identified as the proponent of a new counter-culture. In literature Olson has been a pioneer on the fringe of culture (Nelson, "Dualism" 2). His poetry makes a convincing diagnosis of contemporary culture by showing man's loss of center. It reveals a glamorization of America's past and disappointment with its present. The distraction ultimately sprouts from cognition of the loss of a common consciousness and the distance of human beings from a straight experience of reality. He laments on human beings' fall into individual consciousness and creates a feeling of isolation and alienation. Therefore, he denounces the contemporary American condition.

The major aspects of *The Maximus Poems* are its social criticism, and criticism of easy and generalized understanding. It narrates the phases of Western migration, origin of Gloucester, growth of American culture, and its decay. The poem laments on the loss of traditional local beliefs, values, and practices caused by the growth of materialism. The last poem of this anthology consists of only eight words of gloomy mood; "my wife my car my color and myself." It is a quest to overcome estrangement, and attain wholeness.

His poetry elegizes the on-going death of order and knowledge. "The Kingfishers" itself is a milestone poem of such elegiac tone. For instance, "The pool is slime" (l. 16) indicates immense collapse of aesthetic values. Similarly, the interrogation "The pool the kingfishers' feathers were wealth why/ did the export stop?" (ll. 21-22) presents a cultural puzzle. The query of why the kingfisher feathers have lost their value and the lost 'E' on the stone

demonstrate the immense cultural collapse. The poem further reads “But the E/ cut so rudely on the oldest stone/ sounded otherwise,/ was differently heard/ as, in another time, were treasures used:” (ll. 62-6). The sense of loss and displacement is thus always kept in the center. About such grieving mood Alan Gilbert says, “On a cursory reading, Olson’s poem appears to be a list of possessives. In actuality, it’s a poem about loss and displacement: blank spaces between each of the poem’s units further amplify this sense of loss” (5). In this way, sense and structure are in harmonized state. On the other hand, his exploration and appreciation of Maya is itself a result of his disillusionment with modern western and particularly American civilization.

A number of his poems deal with the issues of decay and disillusionment. “In Cold Hell, In Thicket” presents an analysis of the reasons of decay and distances between thought and action in contemporary Western culture. It laments the unbridgeable gap created between man and nature. Olson declares that he is in cold hell in thicket where “All things are made bitter, words even/ are made to taste like paper” (ll. 8-9). The opening of the poem itself is a statement of dejection. Indeed, Olson/Maximus suffers the isolation and depression in a “rotted place” (l. 111) that is equivalent to hell. The poem notably reveals that hell, the state of isolation, is not exterior but “the coat of your own self” (l. 91). He means that hell is the self’s own making state, it is not something imposed from outside. The poem further asserts:

that a man, men, are now their own wood

and thus their own hell and paradise

that they are, in hell or in happiness, merely

something to be wrought, to be shaped, to be carved, for use, for

others (ll. 118-22)

Human activities, indeed, are responsible for worsening the culture. If our activities can make a place hellish then there might be some ways of healing the disease. But, before this the causes of such sickness should be diagnosed in detail.

One major cause of sickness in American culture, Olson detects, is widespread commercialism. Therefore, he leads all the attacks against commercialism. He even accuses the advertisers for abusing the words cheaply and stimulating the people to be voracious consumers. He also criticizes the wasteful expenditures of post-war American affluence in “The Songs of Maximus.” Likewise, he is much distressed by the misuse of energy and littering of the landscape:

Excessive

energy

anyway—in a society like America energy if it is not moral is only

material. Which cannot be destroyed is never destroyed is only

left all over the place. Junk. (“The Ocean” ll. 15-19)

All such commerce-dominated activities simply distance man from the real. And, obviously, what prevents man from feeling the real is the control of commercialization over modern life. He is bored because the roadsides are full of hoarding-boards, air is filled with electronic commercials, papers littered by advertisements, and the walls of public vehicles are

covered with propagandist pictures and wordings. All these commercials distract man from experiencing the real. He writes in "Song 1:"

colored pictures

of all things to eat: dirty

postcards

And words, words, words

all over everything

No eyes or ears left

to do their own doings (all

invaded, appropriated, outraged, all senses

including the mind, that worker on what is

And that other sense

made to give even the most wretched, or any of us, wretched, (ll. 1-11)

All these obscenities—pictures of exaggerated colors, ugly postcards, and cheap use of words—have been unavoidable in modern culture. Everyday life is badly covered by such pornographies. They litter not only eyes and ears, but also the mind. Therefore, it has been a condition of "living-death."

Modern man is completely surrounded by the trifles of commerce in a cage-like mechanical condition. So, in the present commerce-dominated culture, the owner has defeated the wonder. Referring to such mechanical imprisonment, "Letter 3" of *Maximus* laments; "in the present shame of,/ the wondership stolen by,/ ownership (ll. 20-22). The wonder is gone because all the roadsides are covered with cheap advertisements and valueless goods, "tansy buttons." Similarly, the commercialization has so much dominated the civilization that even a ship's face is made artificial, "While she stares, out of her painted face,/ no matter the deathly mu-sick, the demand/ will arouse/ some of these men and women" ("Maximus, to Gloucester" ll. 91-94). This ship is not of good quality but it has been decorated with much artificiality. So, a lad of Gloucester has been excited to own her one day. This dirt of advertisements is the product of capitalism and ultimately they are the exploiters in pejorocracy. Olson wants to banish them from his ideal polis. In the same poem he asserts:

Let those who use words cheap, who use us cheap

take themselves out of the way

Let them not talk of what is good for the city (ll. 10-2)

Let them cease putting out words in the public print

so that any of us have to leave, so that my Portuguese leave, (ll. 15-6)

He desires to wipe them out also because they have replaced serious music of the universe by low-grade illusionary "mu-sick." These exploiters are corrupting the whole culture as they exist

only for profit. But, he seeks to build a civilization where people count before profit. So, they are antagonistic to all other things that exist for their selves.

In such chaos, Olson wants a cultural recovery, wants to “restate” man. He believes that there has been a breakage or a blockage in Western culture, a fracture between thought and action. Olson is committed to mend this distance. In order to create a balance he returns to the origins of culture. Bertholf opines that mission of Olson’s poetry is “righting the balance,” or getting the pollution out of the land and culture (237).

“The Kingfishers,” as an aid to Olson’s mission, speaks against the pollutants of American culture. It reveals his disgust with European heritage and praises the New World’s Indian cultures and the East. It seeks the revival of native cultures at the end of western colonialism. It presents the West as dominated by the fashion of corporate control, dying civilization, stagnation, and descent. On the other hand the East is rising up with the revolutionary uprising sun. He is impressed by Mao finding sources of new energy in the rising sun, in the East. “The light is in the east. Yes. And we must rise, act” (l. 137). So, the changeless “will to change” is the poet’s recommendation—again focus on the process. The opening also suggests that the cultural consequences are in man’s control. Furthermore, “o kill kill kill kill kill/ those/ who advertise you/ out)” (ll. 94-7) is Olson’s appeal to the people of Gloucester for drastic action against the commercialization and modernization of American culture.

Pejorocracy: The Disease

Olson scorns the fallen world of pejorocracy—totality of the abuses of bad governance, materialism, capitalism, consumerism, dictatorship—for its exploit of knowledge and other perversions. Such a condition of governance is antonymous to aristocracy. He finds the socio-

political system of the West to have been manipulated by pejorocracy; "New England, now/ that pejorocracy is here" ("I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You" ll. 72-3). He is strongly opposed to the fundamental feature of materialism that formulates pejorocracy. He believes that bureaucratic difficulties of a metropolis grow towards pejorocracy. "The Kingfishers" attacks it, "what pudor pejorocracy affronts/ how awe, night-rest and neighborhood can rot/ what breeds where dirtiness is law/ what crawls/ below" (ll. 167-71).

Abuses of pejorocracy are both economic and cultural (Stimpson 162). The growth of capitalism and slave traders bring various social abuses. In "The Librarian" he paints a picture of the abusive vandalistic event, "a gang/ was beating someone to death" (ll.55-6). Dominance of muscular power and lawlessness prevails in a pejorocratic society. On the other hand, serious poetry is replaced by imitative verse, television, and commercial advertisements. In the often-quoted statement from "I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You" "mu-sick, mu-sick, mu-sick" (l. 80) 'mu' refers to mouth in Greek. Mouth is the organ of speech and song, which has become sick. It means the culture is culture is sick. This coinage shows how mass culture threatens life in pejorocracy.

Furthermore, terms like "slime," "fetid nest," "maggots" used in "The Kingfishers" are some of the ready images of pejorocracy. Whatever the cause, the cultural pejorocracy of the West is diagnosed, in the view of Merrill, as "a pool of slime" and a "dripping fetid mass" (518). A prescription is clearly called for and, for the moment, Mao is permitted to supply it. The opening of the poem, a thesis statement, is clearly a meditation upon change. The idea of bird is itself associated with change, and birth. The speaker is very much disturbed by the eroded value of kingfisher feathers in the west as "The kingfishers!/ who cares/ for their feathers/ now?" (ll.

12-15). On the other hand he recalls Mao's remarks on his revolution's success in China. Thus, the poem reveals a contrast between peyorocracy of the West and the rising energy of the East.

Like the incorporation of Mao's quotation Olson at times makes direct comments on contemporary politics. About his political stand Gilbert states, "Hegemony, then, must always account for resistance, and for Olson this resistance flourished as a critically engaged—rather than indiscriminately dismissive—opposition to mainstream politics, culture, and literature" (23). Olson frankly shows his disgust of mainstream politics and politicians in the poem "The Condition of the Light from the Sun" which is dedicated to two political activists who were Olson's fellows in the past. In this poem he insults the mainstream politics for being "power-ambitious." "Anecdote of the Late War" directly addresses political issue of American Civil War. He opines that the Civil War brought pollution and corruption on the land and on national history. This event is condemned as an early act of peyorocracy. He criticizes war as an outcome of peyorocracy:

And all now is war
where so lately there was peace,
and the sweet brotherhood, the use
of tilled fields.

Not one death but many, ("The Kingfishers" ll. 90-4)

He finds the present condition vulnerable because of widespread battles, casualties and destructions. But, the past possessed peace, co-operation and other human virtues.

Similarly, "La Préface" is a graphic anti-war poem composed after watching the

drawings of Nazi concentration camps. To show his condemnation for Nazi German commands he makes a remarkable juxtaposition of Buchenwald, the German concentration camp, with “new Altamira cave,” a site of recently discovered pre-historic cave paintings. Indeed, rediscovery of Altamira and existence of the Nazi death camps took place at the same time. The poem shows similarities between present difficulties and ancient artistic hunts. Likewise, he draws similarities between himself and the martyred Jews of Buchenwald:

“My name is NORACE” address

Buchenwald new Altamira cave

With a nail they drew the object of the hunt.

Put war away with time, come into space. (“La Préface” ll. 8-11)

It is the cry of a person trapped in the camp, who wants an end of all the violent activities and live in a state of restored peace.

The discussion of pejorocracy, after all, is the poet’s refusal to abstract his imagination away from the actual. Olson’s hatred of pejorocracy opens new worlds by denying one single world. His poetry, thus, presents a profound recognition of the crises of modern American man and his city. In such pejorocracy, man is in a total “estrangement of being.” But Olson wants willful and active men to live in a polis. He wants to revolt against such ill-rule through the cry “o kill kill kill kill kill/ those/ who advertise you/ out)” (ll. 94-7) in “I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You.”

Polis: The Ideal State

Olson's poetry thoroughly designs a model for a new participatory polis. In fact, he seeks to re-new the old idea of polis. Having a distrust of large states like the US, he believes that Gloucester and other similar towns bear the potential of being such small just communities. Analogizing Gloucester with the ancient polis, he parallels himself with Maximus. Olson, as Maximus was of Tyre, is Gloucester's sophist, teacher, an enemy of arrogance and exploitation, an advocate of communalism, keeper of the universe's law (Davey 297). The idea of polis is, thus, the motto of his poetic-politics. "Olson took seriously the metaphor of the poet as a polis-tician who could provide a sense of common origins without ignoring the individual or the local allegiances of his audience," opines Vanderborg (378).

In the ancient city states of Greece and Sumer generally there used to be four basic features in a polis—defined location, wall-protected or water-surrounded; looking towards economic self sufficiency; shared language, culture, and history; and an independent self-governed polity. Ancient polis assumed certain responsibilities for the welfare of its members. So, "attention" is an important criterion for citizenship in Olson's polis, that is the state and the people have to be responsible to each other. He also thinks of the ideal man to live in the ideal polis. The people of the polis are just citizens, cultured men. With the line that reads "a mainland now of who?" (l. 79) in "Letter 3" Olson leaves the character of its citizenry in question. As a solution Spanos opines that Olson's ideal man is a renewed man grounded in negative capability (79).

The type of rule Olson desired was like the ancient Sumer civilization (3378-2500 BC) where exercise of power was protective and conservative, but never oppressive and exploitative. There was "lack of hierarchy" there were only "eyes in all heads" (l.), that is equality. This ideal society will be largely different from the modern West that is shrouded by

“apparent darkness” (Merrill 523). He highlights on some of the riches in a polis that are completely absent in the Western peyorocracy.

First and foremost, Olson’s polis will be rich in the historic knowledge. In “The Kingfishers” he is distressed by the missing of the stone-carved letter “E” of the ancient time. There might be various conjectures on what the mysterious “E on the stone” signifies. But, one major possibility is that it indicates the primacy of language—now lost—Olson wants to recapture. It is a valuable knowledge from the ancient times. If that important thing of the past gets restored then it is sure that man again gets assimilated with the most familiar.

Olson wants to re-establish the social order in his polis that was lost due to peyorocracy. He believes that since 1200 BC man has lost the cultural center. Before that the wisdom of Sumerians kept civilization coherent and knowledge welded to culture (McPherson 193). So, literature and institutions of ancient Greece, the foundations of Western culture, are the products of man’s loss of center. As a result, people are cut off from the healing powers of nature. Olson wants to awaken the Gloucester people to the experience of natural life. He desires to regain this coherence. He has a beautiful sense of order, the order of mythic thinking. To regain such proper energies man must be engaged with reality. He finds such energy in Keats’s idea of negative capability. About his determination of establishing order McPherson highlights, “His impulse was to overwhelm nature, his compulsion to establish lordship. This was the new human order that asserted itself with the collapse of the pre-Homeric world. And Ahab, as Olson understands him, is the demonic embodiment of this new order” (192). For him, loss of center is the loss of polis, so man should regain it. Olson makes his mission of regaining the polis clear in the closing lines of “The Kingfishers,”

I pose you your question:

shall you uncover honey/ where maggots are?

I hunt among stones (ll. 188-90)

His determination to uncover honey even by hunting among the stones is the loyalty towards the mission of restoring the polis. The polis is a golden mean between the total individualism and colossal collectivities of metropolism. Because of such readiness for a new active future Ralph Maud calls this poem's tendency an anti-wasteland, that is opposite to Eliot's total pessimism (24).

Likewise, Olson assumes eco-friendly human activities in his polis. He is vexed by the reckless exploitation of nature. Therefore, he firmly stands for the natural conservation. He dreams of an ideal polis implementing eco-friendly policies. In this regard Olson resembles the ideas of the real Maximus of Tyre. Both of them knew that nature feeds man. Life on earth is based on communal sharing of the natural process. They did not want more than the earth readily provided. Man should not be exploitative toward nature. Greed, pride, and ambition in man can disturb the nature's feeding process. Nature is benevolent enough; its rude exploitation is bound to be catastrophic.

Olson keeps poetic activity and economic life interrelated in his polis. Community is not a commodity to be sold and purchased. Ideal life is one that has an active relation with nature and that there can be no gain without honest labor (Dembo 280). Bariş Gümüşbaş opines that Olson's poetry deals with economics on two levels; economic activity of Gloucester, and ideals about the organizations of material reality. Gümüşbaş perceives Olson's reading of economic

activity as political because of its issues of production and distribution (81). Thus, Olson links poetry, economics, politics, and polis. Whatever sort of relationship he frames up, it is to strengthen the idea of polis. "I, Mencius, Pupil of the Master," for example, discusses about the economic forces creating a blockage. Through the persona of Mencius, like Pound did, Olson brings forward the doctrines of benevolent government recorded by this follower of Confucius. Olson agrees with the idea of Mencius that even though a ruler is god's mandate he should be responsible to the people. He must practice equality and goodness.

Though Olson envisions a polis, the exact idea of an open polis in present USA is not fully developed. He knew that establishing a real classical polis in Massachusetts in 1950s was not possible. But what Olson wants is to create a polis of poetry, and a polis of mind, and as far as possible get some features of the ancient polis in the real land. "There is an ethical imperative behind Olson's idea of the polis as well," opines Gilbert, "in fact, it's driven by ethics" (7). His mission is to create a polis through creativity, inquiry, and intuitive sense rather than by external physical movements. So that, more than geography or scenic beauty, the people and experience are more important in his idea of the polis. His polis is simply an open interpretive model community, as he writes in "Letter 3:"

As the people of the earth are now, Gloucester
is heterogeneous, and so can know polis
not as localism, not that mu-sick (the trick
for corporations, newspapers, slick magazines, movie houses,
the ships, even the wharves, absentee-owned (ll. 49-53)

The polis holds tranquility despite the prevailing heterogeneity. It will not be a victim of artificial music and commercialism. It is an elitist idea, too, as he further writes, "Polis now/ is a few, is a coherence..." ("Letter 3," ll. 77-8). His polis is the exact opposite of pejorocracy. Indeed, Olson wants to remove pejorocracy and restore the polis instead. He wants every reader to investigate the pejorocracy of one's time and place, and think of building his own polis. And Olson meditates upon his own Gloucester.

Poetics and Politics of Gloucester

A poetics of place is fundamental to Olson's principle. The canvas of his poetry is the city of Gloucester in Massachusetts. It is a place associated with his notion of the polis. In fact, the qualities he wants to see in Gloucester are the basic requirements of his ideal polis, and the things he hates are the pejorocratic abuses that must be absent there. *Maximus* places this city at the center and examines the origin of American culture, European settlement of America, and contemporary life. In fact, it is a chronicle of life in Gloucester. Olson himself called it a poem of a person and a place. Indeed, he intends to remake the place by exploring it. Gloucester stands as a microcosm of the world.

Gloucester is a magical place with its harbor and fishery, and Olson is very much enchanted by the unfathomable localness of the area (Moebius 17). The city important to Olson is the traditional Gloucester—a town of fishermen, sailors, and their families—people with moods, habits, and eccentric friends. The picture presented depends on actual things and events as the sources of knowledge. Duncan reports that Olson formed a law for himself—nothing should be in *Maximus* that wasn't in Gloucester (Davey 300). Not only each element had to exist there but Olson must have known its existence.

He is happy that the early inhabitants of Gloucester paid sincere attention to the physical nature of man's condition. He admires the fourteen men who initially cultivated Gloucester in the early seventeenth century for their careful participation with nature and reality. They used geography and resources just as needed for safety and sustenance. He also admires the fishermen and sailors for their respect of reality. In his often quoted saying "Polis is/eyes" (l.) there is an equation of the city and the visual sense.

Olson accuses the politicians of Gloucester for damaging the "process" with their ego-related flaws. Furthermore, they represent the common American political actuality. He criticizes the local politicians in "John Burke." These local political activists stand for the national party politicians. The poem's title comes from a local politician, a Gloucester city councilor, who has been insulted for his stupidity. "John Burke" ridicules this politician as, "this politician/ himself a twisted animal/ swelling of mouth, followed/ by squirrels as pilot fish/ himself a shark will not / tolerate /the suave" (ll. 19-25). The poem presents Mr. Burke as a sample politician of peyorocracy. Likewise, he criticizes the policies of the city council too. There were, still, two historic houses of colonial period existing in Gloucester. The town decided to destroy them in order to build a gas station. In distress Olson composed a poem "December 18th" in 1968 that contains "And the rosy red is gone, the/ 2nd-3rd-story of/ the Mansfield house, the darker/ flower of the/ street – oh Gloucester/ has no longer a West/ end" (ll. 17-23). The poem laments the deliberate destruction of historical heritage. It is due to the politicians' stupidity and the long relation between commercialism and peyorocracy. Olson sees man's recklessness toward environment due to the guilt of politicians. Because of their own ego-driven agendas the politicians become adversarial, explains Stormont, and those who live and work side by side

with a supposed shared sense of community or the polis, suffer as a result. Olson writes of abused politics in "Rufus Woodpecker" too.

Olson immensely owes to Pound in the idea of pejorocracy and the polis. Both poets have given due importance to the past. Their ideals are similar too. Above all, the terms "pudor" and "pejorocracy" are derived from Pound's vocabulary. Davenport thinks that Olson's ideal ultimately comes from Pound's Confucian vision of ideal (257). Though Olson has given some new colors in his concept of the ideal place, it is something like the second edition of Pound. But, the most remarkable originality is that Olson exemplifies Gloucester as an ideal polis.

Methods and Techniques

Olson's poetics and poetry are marked with revolutionary and innovative instincts. Indeed, he falls in a tradition of anti-tradition. He not only wants language to look and sound different, but also desires to give it a new order. He is frankly against the accepted and authentic literary speech that is obsolete. Challenging all existing values about form and lyric content he opened the poetry's gates for other disciplines. So, his poetic line is governed by the length of breath, not meter. He advocates for the poetry of great freedom in which form naturally grows from meaning. His poetry is mostly impersonal; uses impersonal "one" or collective "we" as the subject of sentences. It projects through masks or personae placing the poet underwater. Because of such skill Merrill calls him a master of the "marvelous maneuver."

His poetry is largely experimental and fragmentary. It discards the traditional lineation, left side print, and old verse forms. The sentences are long, difficult, and un-ended open strings. He places phrase over the sentence. The word arrangement is so zigzag that it is very difficult to sort out grammatically. The poems are elliptical (for instance, "Maximus, to Gloucester" opens

as “. . . . tell you?”), and fragmented; they juxtapose details without transitions. Length of pause, degree of emphasis, and change of speed indicate the skilful typographical adjustments. *The Maximus Poems* itself is often experimental and fragmentary. Much of it is structured in the form of letters from a fictive persona to an Olson friend Vincent Ferrini, in the surface. But, in reality such series of imaginary letters is addressed not to individuals, but to the people of a city and the general readers. Furthermore, it is an unfinished ever-going mosaic text like *The Cantos* than an ended epic.

The poems are the products of direct perception. Through repetition and parenthesis the message is said over and over but from different vantage points in space, time, and perception. Such skilful play Olson reveals is primarily for a kinesis of eye and mind. With such a play he is determined to getting language back to its feet. Therefore, he tries to create an order in fragmentation too.

Olson's poems rest over the foundation of theory. Prose designs the foundation and verse makes the upward structure. Essays propound the theory of poetry as a casual mythology. In essays, he announces his convictions and demonstrates them in poems. So, the essays are creative extensions of his poetry. Interconnected with a reciprocal relationship, his prose and poetry are, thus, intertwined and inseparable.

Olson's poems are rigidly structured for high speed reading and inter-work continuity. Poems composed in speech patterns easily bear intenseness and spontaneity. There is a remarkable speed of transition from one to another, and a high degree of compression in each unit of thought. Absence of periods and other punctuation marks prove the poem as a high energy construct transferring force from a particular, through a particular (poet) to an object.

“Olson’s mind acts,” Eshleman says, “when it gets excited” (16). He compares it with the act of skipping a stone across a pond—hit, hit, hit and pong. Indeed, the associations come so rapidly that one perception leads to the next.

Olson’s poetry does not sound a passive listening; it demands a participatory and creative reading instead. He makes the facts speak for themselves. He does not offer easy answers or solutions, but encourages the readers to discover for themselves. In the opening of *Maximus* the speaker directly addresses the reader as “I...tell you.” And after sometime he again activates the readers; “o my people, where shall you find it, how, where...” (l. 41). Such practice is guided by his belief in the centrality of process. By using unconventional sentence structure, incomplete statements, obscure references, and new layout techniques, Olson believes, the reader is forced to engage with the text in an attentive, conversational, and dialogical manner.

Readers should maintain an openness and readiness to ignore their pre-conceptions due to the frequent occurrence of unexpected things. The following word may not have been connected by idea to the previous. Readers should be attentive to each word and object. They should be engaged with text with active eyes, ears, breath, and mind. If the readers do not actively participate with the text, the message will be missed. Thus, his poems create a feeling of a distinct contract between author and reader.

Olson’s poems are strangely connected to each other like the flowers of a garland. He abundantly leaves sentences unfinished, which consequently get connected with the next. His skill of linking one detail with another is amusing. *Maximus* looks like without a beginning and without an end; it has essentially a circular construct. Waldrop thinks that the beginning and ending of a single poem is thematically and verbally similar. Likewise, the following poem opens

with what was initiated in the preceding poem (Waldrop 482). For instance, in “I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You” beginning and ending go around the same image “nest.” The second letter ends with reference to “our lady” and the third letter immediately picks it up at the opening. He, thus, believes that all the elements of the world are interconnected.

Through special focus on process, Olson intends the active participation of the readers. Most of the political literary writing, Paul Nelson thinks, is product-oriented and gives less attention to process. He says:

It is also interesting that the content of a lot of political poetry, and poetry in general, stands against oppression, competition, domination and other symptoms of the modernist (mechanistic, Newtonian/Cartesian) paradigm, yet in process continues to be product-oriented, reinforcing the attractor fields (and their by-products) it claims to oppose. (Nelson, “Dualism” 6)

But Olson is not in this mainstream tendency. He focuses on the idea of poem as a celebration of process. The message of many poems is “process is all” itself as product is not the most important aspect of his poetics nor is it the outcome of a process. But what is primary is the heroic act of creativity itself. By creating a space for readers Olson maintains an approach of freedom. In such space readers can join and also can reason together with the poet. Different readers can engage with objects, stories, and conversations of their interest. “Maximus, to Himself” reads:

I have made dialogues,

have discussed ancient texts,

have thrown what light I could, offered

what pleasures

doceat allows (ll. 28-32)

The readers, here, are not only given space but are taken ahead together with the speaker. Instead of telling a story, a piece of history is conveyed. In addition, it is a “concept” of history, than an “objective” history.

Olson’s poetry is often presented as an example of very powerful exploration in form. His poetic form is largely epistolary—poems in the form of letters. There are many unidentified ‘he’s and ‘she’s throughout his poetry. Their actions and statements are more significant than their recognition. He uses quotations of others but not directly. Unlike Pound, he presents quotations indirectly only after reworking on them.

In *The Maximus Poems*, an innovative idea of the speaker is used. The controlling voice of the epic, Maximus of Gloucester, comes from old history—the second century Maximus of Tyre. He was a philosopher and dialectician who wandered about the Mediterranean communities regularly lecturing on Homer’s *Odysseus*. Like Eliot’s Teiresias, the speaker is a figure created to speak poems or write verse letters to the people of Gloucester, and all the readers in extension. He is also an image of Jung’s archetypal “homo maximus” or the greatest man. The speaker, however, sees with Olson’s eyes and experiences, not those of a second-century sophist. Being equivalent to Olson’s height, six feet and eight inches, the speaker is the persona of the poet himself. Maximus, as Olson’s ideal observer, is more interested in

surrounding life than himself. The first letter “I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You” introduces the speaker as:

Off-shore, by islands hidden in the

blood

jewels & miracles, I, Maximus

a metal hot from boiling water, tell you

what is a lance, who obeys the figures of

the present dance (ll. 1-6)

The language of Olson’s poetry is basically elitist. He thinks ordinary language is not appropriate for poetry. Indeed, he wants to reshuffle the poetic language. Like professional essays his poems incorporate thesis statements. The poems are difficult at first reading but a line or two, that is a thesis statement, stand out as entrance to the dark cave of the poem. For example, “The Kingfishers” opens with the thesis statement “What does not change / is the will to change,” and “Maximus, to Himself” again opens with its thesis “I have had to learn the simplest things/ last.”

The poems are immeasurably dense and confusing. They are packed with a variety of obscurities. The difficulty basically comes from the problems of methodology or the way the ideas are presented. The formal difficulty of Olson’s poetry originates also from his principle of art as “enactment” that is composed of incomplete syntax, abstract terms, notations, and disjunctive forward motion. As a result, full understanding of his poetry is equivalent to learning

a new language. Indeed, no other poet requires such endeavor from the reader. Yet, though much of his poetry is difficult, there is enough which is not opaque to understand.

Olson has a strong distaste for and distrust of metaphor and symbol. Finding metaphor as mechanical in mind and speech, he belittles it. For him metaphor looks like a later reconstruction. Metaphor makes easy poetry, which is equivalent to easy gain and that is nothing more than a pejorocracy. Obviously, for the eye nothing can be like anything else. For him poetry is the relationship of things and uses, not of metaphoric images and dramatic subjects (Altieri 183). But, despite his distaste for metaphor, some metaphoric devices can be detected in his poems. Really, nobody can write entirely without metaphors and analogies.

His poetry replaces the musical smoothness and abstraction with pictorial projection and typographical oddity. He attempts to clean the language of the abstract pollutants. In fact, when existing literary taste was tuned to delicacy, the approach to directness used in "The Kingfishers" itself came as a circuit breaker. As an attempt to recover language from such abstract shape Olson returns to glyphic writing. Like Pound got in the Chinese Written character, Olson believed that pictographic languages are closer to nature than the modern western languages which are highly abstract and egocentric. His poems often appear in unusual typography. For the possibility of typographical oddities he gives due to the device of typewriter. But, it is amusing to think that what he would do if he had got to use a pc.

The Terminal Moraine

Olson's poetic technique is collagist. Because of the heavily derivative construction sometimes the structure looks chaotic too. Every poem is a piece of connective tissues, not a complete tissue. The technique of collage is in agreement with his principle of one perception

directly leading to a further perception. However, one perception leading to a further perception does not mean the association of ideas, but it is the opening of new perception. The text does not have a closure, but goes on forever. When a poem ends, it is just a temporary ending in truth. For example, *The Maximus Poems* goes forever ending only with the poet's death. The ideas and images refer to the scattered events that bear little relation to each other. His poems arrange and organize the unconnected fragments of history, myth, and culture to form a grand cosmic design. Indeed, his poetry creates a world out of bits and pieces; issues, moods, incidents.

The poems are written with an elegant grasp of a variety of myths in everyday life—Norse, Greek, Egyptian. Other contributing fragments come from anthropology, language, cultural history and so on. His poetry is a montage of the formation and decay of early civilizations (Sumer, Egypt, Greece, Aztec, Maya), the pre-Socratics, Tarot, numerology, non-Euclidean geometry, philosophy of Whitehead, history of human migration, development of fishery industry in Gloucester, history of Mexico, records of the European settlements in Massachusetts, Hopi language, Melville's fiction, naval and economic history among others. It particularly centers on the climax of Sumerian civilization (3378-2500 BC), the earliest center of culture from where myth, art, and various social organizations spread throughout the Western world.

Indeed, the range of his poetry is very wide. There are, therefore, several Olsons; mythologist, philosopher, architect, socialist, formalist, lyricist. Wild calls Olson's approach a terminal moraine. Like the geological deposits gathered by a glacier contain everything consumed on the way, *Maximus* looks like a terminal moraine gathered by a glacier of human mind. Davenport comments on the collagist projection of the poem "The Kingfishers" as a

projection “of intersecting events which would never otherwise have come into relation to each other except for the poet’s imagining them in this conjunction” (262). Indeed, just in a cursory reading the poem seems to have contained the allusions of the Fisher King of Eliot’s, several references to Pound and *Cantos*, revision of Heraclitus, Joseph Albers (rector of Black Mountain College), Mayan-Aztech culture, Mao, Norbert Wiener and his book *Cybernetics*, Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, and Shakespeare among others. A collagist poet, thus, becomes an inter-disciplinary expert. The contributories of his collage reveal that Olson finds an alternative to Western humanism and the ego-position in the ancient Mayan, Sumerian, and Pleistocene cultures (Hutchinson 91). The collage is made finally for strengthening his idea of a utopian city.

Visionary and Didactic

As modern poetry gives much emphasis on visual image, the idea of the poet as a bard or seer has been almost forgotten. The apparent and visual things are discussed whereas the hidden and intuited ones are neglected. The present time wants the poets to create like painters, not like “seers.” In such inhospitable context, too, Olson ventures to be prophetic, and encourages the people, through his poems, to activate their souls. Aiken expresses in this context, “The evidence that he thought of himself as an American poet-prophet is everywhere in his work” (37). With such effort he has become a great prophet of revolution. Indeed, he associates poetry to visionary than to visual. Olson’s prophesying is for nothing than for his mission—the change he desires to see.

Like the works of a public moralist, both his poetry and prose deliberately instruct the readers. Olson holds the view that a person can not teach another how to live. However, one can give advice to others. So, his poems gently offer advices. Modern man is seen as very secular

and isolated, suffering from inaction. So, man has to harmonize thought and action. Olson always conveys the message that “elemental reality is worth care, dedication, and attention” (Davey 303). But, sometimes, like Shelley’s proposition, Olson acts as a lawgiver. In “A Newly Discovered ‘Homeric’ Hymn” he orders the audience, “Beware the dead. And hail them. They teach you drunkenness./ You have your own place to drink. Hail and beware them, when they come” (ll. 40-41). Continuing and connecting past and present Olson hopes that his readers will gain knowledge and improve their future. Specifically, in the opening of “I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You” the term “Lance” refers to a fishing-spear using which Maximus tries to capture “jewels and miracles” (knowledge) for the advantage of readers and the people of Gloucester. It is again a search for a vision of the ideal. And Olson is dedicated to catch that invaluable knowledge and share it with the people.

To recapitulate, Olson’s poetry is fundamentally governed by his mission and desire for change. The project is conducted to expel the pollution out of the culture. In order to reinforce such thematic aim he does immense attempt in methods and technique too. On the basis of the wide ranging coverage of his poetry he clearly appears to be an interdisciplinary pioneer as he wanted the poets to be. His poems, indeed, carry large materials with them. He has very skillfully academized American poetry. Olson’s poetry seeks to activate the readers than give them some capsules to remedy the cultural sickness. Therefore, his narrator works just like a tour guide; the readers observe the world themselves. To make the readers active he has widely used an interrogative mode.

In order to wipe out the existing cultural sickness, obviously, it is necessary to make the discourse bold and innovative. So, he uses language as a tool or weapon. Various experimental features, direct perception, open verse, high speed text, the unusual speaker, and collage structure make his writing innovative enough. Likewise, uses of history and myth, prose-poetry intertwining, elitist language, dense writing, derivative tendency make his poetry bold and enriched with ammunitions. Indeed, his poetry is like a perfect preparation to enter the battlefield.

Theorizing Olson

Olson, like Bakhtin's obligation, refuses to follow the official culture in his poetry. His method of inter-connecting the works follows Bakhtin's principle that every speech act springs from some previous utterance and it comes with expectations of response in the future. His poems are mostly formed over some myth, history, or event. And, as they end without giving any final solution or answer, the responses are expected from the readers. Though his language is not totally novelistic, it bears immense features of dialogism. The epic poem *Maximus* does not maintain an epic distance with the present. It talks about the problems of current time, the city of Gloucester in Massachusetts, not an alien place in an uncertain time. It is so much connected with the real life that it keeps all the potentials open like a dialogic discourse. The mission and method undertaken obviously try to keep literature closer to human surrounding as Bakhtin proposed.

Olson's writing incorporates comparatively free, hetero-generic, and multiple styles as Bakhtin wished. There is due orientation toward the listener. His writing properly takes the reader into account. By keeping the works incomplete and handing over the homework to the

audience, his poetry maintains centrifugal tendency. As in a monologic work the author does not control the discourse. Instead, tries to activate the reader. The work is no more under the domination of the poet. Thus, Olson does not give importance to author like Foucault. In his conviction the time and place of the author do not play any significant role in the making of a literary work. But, in practice it seems somehow deviated. The idea of 'Maximus of Gloucester' as the speaker, persona of the author, is given a big emphasis. The second century Maximus of Tyre is brought down to the personality of a twentieth century Gloucester citizen that is Olson himself. The author's presence as a Gloucester man is remarkable in the Maximus poems. The knowledge of Gloucester's history, geography, habitation, economy, and politics largely come from the author's individual mind and experience. Thus, reader and author function as the two wheels of a chariot in his poetry.

Olson's poetry almost reaches the height of novelistic heteroglossia, a quality in literary discourse Bakhtin praises. For instance, *The Maximus Poems* establishes relationship and network with numerous other ideas and works. As a response to Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Pound's *The Cantos*, it projects a new sense of history. Formally modeled on *The Cantos*, it is a mosaic of disjoint and recurrent images. Likewise, it follows various techniques used in *The Leaves of Grass*, and *Paterson*. The opening refers to Stevens's "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" whereas it closes with a paraphrase of Rimbaud's line, that is, a prophetic declaration committed to self-exploration "I hunt among stones." Thus, though a poetic discourse, *Maximus* is not monologic.

Olson's poems take side with some ideas and people on one hand, and on the other they oppose the system of peyorocracy and intend to remove some sick cultural traits. They function as a vehicle for the functioning of power. By opposing the existing rule and cultural

power his poetry meets the Foucauldian criteria for literature. In addition, like Jameson's proposition, Olson's poetry favors a counter-culture. It performs various duties at the same time. It tries to convey the message of myth and history to modern people, make them aware of the poverty of modern Western culture, and encourage the writers to think of innovative creations.

The idea of the polis is analogous to Lukács's emphasis on the writer's required duty of dreaming. By dreaming of an ideal polis, where there will be no abuses of pejorocracy, he has made a profound and passionate vision of the future. Though, Olson's dream might not be very significant, as the establishment of such city state in the present time does not sound much logical, it affirms the progressive acts. Though his mere individual attempt is bound to be doomed, he constantly makes efforts for the goal. After all, Olson's dream of the polis approximates Lukács's expectation from the writers.

Like Adorno's cultural critic Olson is dissatisfied with modern American civilization. Though Olson's discussion of economic factors is not as heavy as that of Pound, he does not overlook them. Moreover, the politics of his poetry is basically theoretical. His poetry criticizes some poetic principles and strengthens the alternative ones. His method of linking the text's internal issues and elements with the external things and life process is in agreement with Adorno's position. Olson's writing does not incline towards any class interest. However, he does not avoid various cultural problems prevailing in the society. His dislike of commercialism is his disagreement of unbound capitalism. His poetry intends to convey some strong message to the reader and in this sense Olson can be placed within Benjamin's frame of a didactic writer.

Chapter VII

Ron Silliman's Politics of Parataxis: Poetry and Revolution

Background

Ron Silliman's poetry fully adopts the avant-garde tendency of questioning rule-governance. Being dissatisfied with the rigid control of rules he has produced poetry of ease and freedom. Such rejection of rule-governance is a risky task from conventional perspective. Still, he takes the risk of using non-traditional forms that could alienate him from the readers and dismiss from the establishment.

Some critics have insulted his works as mere typing, not writing. Though this can be no more than a thoughtless blame, it is obvious that his poems are not too open to critical judgments. The value of Silliman's writing lies on his completely new kind of creation that resists any type of established generic classification. His working is truly in the mode of Pound's "make it new" guideline. Such distance and rejection of the institutionalized academia is undoubtedly a politically-motivated act.

Silliman is impressed by Pound and Olson who raised difficult questions, and hesitated to accept the mainstream tendency. As Pound constantly looked for alternative poetics with changing propositions like imagism, vorticism, and other alternatives, Silliman too has struggled to find appropriate alternative modes. Indeed, he admires the writers who struggled that way and takes their avant-garde trend as a point of departure.

The New Sentence Parataxis

Silliman's proposition of the new sentence resists easy definition. However, the idea came as his dissatisfaction with literary history's failure to discuss about the appropriate form of sentence. The "new sentence" idea naturally implies that there is an old sentence. The old sentence for Silliman was hypotactic, opposite to paratactic, and a failure to hold the attention of the reader. But, the new sentence as opposed to the old or traditional grammatical sentence is engaged with parataxis.

The new sentence is a term coined by Silliman to recognize certain prose poems by various language writers along with him. It has been associated with a number of cultural-literary terms: narrative, totality, the subject, presence, depth, affect, simulacra, fragmentation, schizophrenia, surface, pastiche and so on (Perelman 314). Its multiple shifts make the reader more attentive towards the act of writing and the writer's position in the larger social conditions. These sentences are ambitiously contextualized though the fragments are scattered. At the same time, they frame a coherent and wide-ranging political analysis. Even the brief narratives are directed toward the overall message.

Poetic form made up of new sentence moves into the interiors of prose. It makes extensive use of prose poem as a trademark. Such prose-poetry merging is done in order to offer social criticism. For Silliman, social critique and new sentence are parallel and analogous. The roots of social criticism through prose poetry were initially visible in the works of Stein and Pound. Silliman believes Stein's *Tender Buttons* to be an early example of new sentence text. Zukofsky, O'Hara, MacLow, Olson, Creeley, Ashbery, and Ginsberg too employed some of the new sentence principles. Moreover, Ginsberg's "Howl" is a landmark of such experimental writing. The new sentence proposes to end the distinction between critical and poetic genres.

In the essay “The New Sentence” Silliman lists its qualities:

- 1) The paragraph organizes the sentences;
- 2) The paragraph is a unity of quantity, not logic or argument;
- 3) Sentence length is a unit of measure;
- 4) Sentence structure is altered for torque, or increased polysemy/ ambiguity;
- 5) Syllogistic movement is: (a) limited; (b) controlled;
- 6) Primary syllogistic movement is between the preceding and following sentences;
- 7) Secondary syllogistic movement is toward the paragraph as a whole, or the total work;
- 8) The limiting of syllogistic movement keeps the reader’s attention at or very close to the level of language, that is, most often at the sentence level or below.

(New 91)

He believes that all of these features exist in Harryman’s poem “For She.” Out of the given eight qualities the first four emphasize the importance of sentence, and talk about its relationship to the paragraph. Number five has to do with the role of the poet more than that of the reader. The next two qualities emphasize different syllogistic movements among sentences. And the final quality reasserts the primacy of language—both the writer and reader should consider the materiality of words themselves. In aid to this, Karla Kelsey details the initial qualities of the new sentence as:

1. I want the line to be a unit of measure.
2. I want the line to launch possibility into blank space, rendering a singular meaning impossible.
3. I want linebreaks to both join and break free of connections.
4. I want the line to draw the reader's attention to language, lest the poem be read as a transparent window.
5. I want the silence and pause of space that the line breaks in to. (94)

On the basis of the given points George Hartley pin points the main features of Silliman's new sentence as intensity, power, a charged use of linguistic units, recurrence, parallel structures, a common image bank, secondary syllogistic movement, the systematic blocking of primary syllogistic movement, varied tenses, ambiguity, importance, tension, and parataxis. Indeed, Silliman's poetic works are created in terms of such criterion. Silliman thinks of a paragraph that organizes sentences like a stanza does lines. In addition, words integrating into phrases and the phrases integrating into sentences are similar to that of the sentences integrating into a larger work. These sentences do not contain heavy modifiers and participles. Most of them are not like the fragments of grammarians, though some look like so. There is a severe lack of old grammatical rules like subject-verb-object. Instead, they are like compositional building blocks. So, readers should pay sincere attention to the surrounding words.

The new sentence makes extensive use of the strategies of parataxis, a typically postmodern mark. The fundamental strategy of parataxis is the use of independent units having no relation to preceding and following sentences. A sentence or phrase may maintain an affinity

with the preceding or succeeding unit, but the thread does not continue longer. The sentence gets its strength by being put next to another sentence with which it has changing relevance. New sentences are not subordinated to a bigger narrative frame. The independent meaning of a sentence is uplifted, questioned, and altered by the degree of separation or connection in relation to the neighboring sentences (Perelman 313). The practice of sentence as the basic unit of composition rather than the line ultimately guides the writing towards the ordinary use of language. The sentences follow continuity and discontinuity, and therefore sound rather unpoetic.

Emphasizing space or distance between sentences, Silliman highlights the artifactual nature of sentences. As the poet himself exemplifies, a hammer is made up of parts like a face, a handle, and a peen, and works only when all are combined (*New* 78). Similarly, sentences are related to their subunits. Without the completed form there is no exchange value. Analyzing the part-whole relation Silliman further says, "Larger productions, such as poems, are like completed machines. Any individual sentence might be a piston. It will not get you down the road by itself, but you cannot move the vehicle without it" (*New* 78). Thus, his sentences are open to manipulation. They look like following a "grafting method" of writing as a paratactic strategy.

The form, vocabulary, and content of the new sentence have strong engagements with society and various social strata too. The form of new sentence itself engenders the points of social criticism. Silliman tries to substitute the writing vocabulary from the vocabulary of socio-political contents. He opines that the sentence represents the horizon between linguistic and social meaning. Discarding the fictional totality, it represents the social milieu. Likewise, the practice of pure poetic composition and prose poetry are associated with the class variations

too. The former is a mark of bourgeois culture whereas the latter is associated with the working class. Prose-poetry written in paratactic form eliminates the relations of hierarchy and dominance, and insists upon certain political possibilities of a libertarian kind (Munton 23). About the prose language and the concept of social class Silliman mentions, “‘Educated’ speech imitates writing: the more ‘refined’ the individual, the more likely their utterances will possess the characteristics of expository prose. The sentence, hypotactic and complete, was and still is an index of class in society” (*New* 79). The well-made sentence is a mark of bourgeois class whereas the opposite represents the working class. The new sentence is closer to the latter class.

The new sentence is recognized with some other innovative techniques. For instance, removal of context characterizes the new sentence—referential, acontextual. Likewise, it adopts syllogistic movement—a mode of critical thinking referring to an argument based on two resembling premises—as an essential characteristic. In fact, the double relation of syllogistic movement is a base of the new sentence. Pause is used as a limited or controlled syllogistic movement. Such strategy encourages the readers to build narratives syllogistically. So, how readers work on text becomes more important than what the text does.

Using the new sentence strategies, Silliman’s poetry formulates an experience of language that is distant from meaning as in music. So, the readers feel difficulty in following a “thread of meaning” among the sentences of the same paragraph too. It looks that some sentences have fleeting referential relation to each other, and it also appears that the linkage may have happened by chance. For instance, in *Tjanting* he writes:

Detonates denotation. For an instant I was unable to remember how to get the change back into my pocket & pick the bag up off the counter. Not-not not-not not-not this. Crystals hung in the window to refract the sun. It began to set in the north. Ploughshares turned into gongs may be played without actually being touched. Trace of red blue contained within the reddest. Each day's first cigarette tastes stale. Metazoans united. (21)

Each sentence is left hanging open as if it is asking a question from the next sentence—basic syllogistic movement between neighboring sentences. The movement of sentences is not restricted to a particular path. The emotion lies on the level of paragraph or the work between sentences rather than on the sentence in isolation. Sentence sequence of his writing engenders meaning. The subject is mostly changed with every sentence, though at times they resemble in sound. The first sentence may have some relation with the second, and second may have some relation with the third. But the first and third sentences are things apart. *Ketjak* contains:

Vandalism is folk art. As a result a
mistake becomes something forbidden. Portrait of the best worker.
in Auto Plant 7. absence of doubt belongs to the essence of the language
game. Flowering milkweed through the cracks in the sidewalk,
around which to draw stars in colored chalk. Knowledge in
the end is based on acknowledgement. (59)

The sentence strategy resembles the recent developments in academia and specialization in the professional sector. In the past, there used to be just the teachers, the gurus. But, now there are separate teachers for innumerable disciplines. A teacher of arithmetic does not deal with algebra; a cardiologist does not deal with liver or intestines. As the professional sectors and the whole world in large are atomized the sentences can not be alien. Each sentence of Silliman's writing has equal weight, and independence as a part of his politics of principle.

Silliman believes that speech is a much wider field than the literary representation it has got so far. So, his poetry makes a transformation of speech by writing. In this regard Silliman and his fellows write, "In order to lay bare language's inherent capacity to construct belief, it is necessary at times to disrupt its convention as communicative transparency. Writing transforms speech toward these ends; this has been a fundamental constructive principle of our work" ("Aesthetic" 268). Delville examines this way of writing in connection with that of Stein, "Like many other language poets, Ron Silliman shares Stein's skepticism about the 'naturalness' of descriptive and argumentative syntax and of the implicit relationship of language to reference sustained by the simple, seemingly obvious concept that words should derive from speech and refer things" (196). Thus, Silliman's writing exploits the strengths of speech too.

The devices of writing like pun, quotation, repetition are used to make the text dense. He is very careful on selecting the words that have two or more obvious meanings basically in order to create ambiguity. For example his catch word "sentence" means a meaningful grammatical unit of words, and also punishment. There is an abundant use of homophones like weight-wait, plane-plain. Use of quotations is noticeable here and there. They make extensive

use of the repetition of sentences. As a result, while reading his poem one feels as if caught in a web of words.

The manipulation of grammar and syntax, strange punctuation and spelling, dependence on indexing further Silliman's emphasis on parataxis. As a form of grammatical manipulation readers are required to complete the incomplete sentences. The poems rely heavily on parenthesis and commas, which describe or put light upon the preceding idea. Parataxis is reinforced in terms of colons, semicolons, dashes too. Parenthetical entries often lead to unexpected meanings, and also work as bridges. They sometimes explain other times deceive. He gives just the names of objects, places, people, or ideas as if sentences are developing a technique of indexing. The indexes are to be completed by the reader again which is a strategy of activating the reader. Thus, act of reading becomes a means of fulfilling expectations.

Silliman's works are varied and rich offering multiple reading paths as a challenge to the traditional idea that poetry is a fixed entity and requires conventional poetic images. It is almost impossible to predict what may come next while reading his poem. The prior indications are not given in order to intensify the indeterminacy. So, the connections within, between, and among sentences, paragraphs, and the entire work has to be noticed. For example, the opening conditional sentence of "Albany" reads as "If the function of writing is 'to express the world'." This incomplete conditional statement lacking a predicate enhances the idea of possibility or beginning. The reader is free to carry this open-ended proposition further and provide a meaning to it. The reader has to complete the sentence after reading the rest of the work. Thus, the propositions and practice of the new sentence parataxis serve Silliman's political purpose.

Politics of Form and Techniques

Silliman's interest on form begins with the meta-poetic quality of his writing. He constantly makes commentary on the nature of poetry. In *Paradise* he writes, "I was working in a different poem. Descriptions of daily life decay. The idea of long works.... So writing a poem is different from kissing a baby's tush" (Hoover 494). Because of an interest in meta-poetic feature his works perpetually display the experiments with poetic forms. For example, *Sunset Debris* is a thirty-page text made up entirely of questions—about three thousand in quantity. So many questions in a single paragraph result in a solid construction of words. Questions are arranged randomly in a queue and it is called a poem. Statement turned into question is the main rhetorical device that develops a verbal vortex. Questioning as a form of expression is Silliman's innovation and an act of politics with form. Furthermore, a number of questions are about the definition, nature, and manipulation of form itself. Some such questions are:

When is form not a distortion? (*Sunset* 4)

Is not chaos also a form? (5)

Why is this not form, but a process? (10)

Are you loyal to a form? (14)

What if form itself proved to be a blockage? (17)

What do you mean when you say you will never find a form? (21)

Thus, he is commenting on form to intensify his political engagement with this aspect of writing.

These unanswered interrogative sentences are similar to Wittgenstein's *Philosophical*

Investigations. The questions are never contextualized. Waltuch and Allen Davies have written different texts answering all the questions. Indeed, the real poem is made when all the questions are answered.

Non displays Silliman's disagreement with conventional poetic forms, and his alternatives to them. It opens as, "So then go back/ to the old forms/ as if they were forms at all/ wood frame/ of a new structure, a theatre/ soon to be covered by stucco/ sort of a foam cement" (ll. 1-7). The passage shows his desire of reexamining those old forms. The third line "as if they were forms at all" is a powerful attack on mainstream poetry. The "sort of a foam cement" is a critique of the old cemented type of poetic form. Thus, he isolates himself from conventional poetics.

"Engines" too is in a relationship of interplay with the sonnet form. The poem is built of fourteen paragraphs each containing fourteen sentences. It interrogates an established, esteemed form of poetry. "BART" is a twelve-page single sentence poem with commas separating the clauses and delimiting the view. It is not about any important thing, but just the report of a day's traveling by the trains of Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) in San Francisco. It is again an innovation—writing of a poem in real time. Everything presented is a direct observation of events from the train with each sentence in now structure. The development in the poem sounds as if the speaker is traveling in the subway, like an archeologist, with a webcam attached on his forehead. The work carries the reader together towards where the narrative is going. As much the speaker goes ahead the reader feels an increase in both internal and external perceptions.

Mostly, Silliman works with eccentric forms of his own creation. Most of his poems demonstrate innovation through repetition. A highly developed structure of repetition is noticeable especially in *Ketjak* and *Tjanting*. They have got series of expanding paragraphs, but the reappearance of the sentences is in a different context resulting in a variant meaning. The distance between reappearing sentences continuously expands with the insertion of more different sentences. For example, in the eighth paragraph of *Tjanting* the sentences read as, “Analogies to quicksand. Nor that either. Burglar’s book” (15). The reference recurs in the tenth paragraph as, “Analogy to “quick” sand. Mute pleonasm. Nor that either. Planarians, trematodes. Booked burglar” (16). In the first reference as there was only one sentence between “quicksand” and “burglar’s book” items, the number becomes three in the next. Likewise, the number of inserted sentences increases to seven in paragraph twelve, fourteen in paragraph fourteen, and thirty in paragraph sixteen. The recurrence takes place only in even paragraphs. This strategy creates a unique narrative effect. The sentence reappearing is like the characters in a novel reappearing after some pages. Van Elburg sees the sentences of *Tjanting* as the bus passengers getting on and off with varied duration of stay. Some of these passengers enter the bus day after day whereas others never appear again.

For Silliman, form is an equally primary element as the content. His works urge the readers to analyze the relation between form and content. Indeed, the true pleasure from reading Silliman works comes by making a link between form and content. The play with the form is a deliberate politically-motivated act. He believes that a new poem can be composed only by discarding the major conventions of form. In *The Chinese Notebook* he writes, “66. Under certain conditions any language event can be poetry. The question thus becomes one of what are these conditions” (11). He further asserts, “138. If poetry is to be perfect, it cannot be

all-knowing. If it is to be all-knowing, it cannot be perfect” (19). He believes that a poem should not tell many things as its job is just to offer some peepholes through which the readers can see or imagine. The form is constantly experimented to meet such goal. Furthermore, he wants to keep up the form open to accommodate socio-political matters. In “Wild Form” he opines that form is of interest only because it empowers liberation. The liberation does not only indicate aesthetic practice, but also political contents.

His poems abundantly make repeated use of choppy sentences. “Silliman places broken down, peripheral, alienated language from any number of sources,” Watten evaluates, “at the heart of his writing procedure” (*Total* 59). This is not just an attempt at being new or dissatisfaction with the old form. It has strong connections with the socio-political business he is determined to deal with, namely the contemporary television-dominated culture. The unconnected new sentences reflect the very capitalism-dominated life style and culture. As there are a number of 15-second or so advertisements constantly appearing on television screen with some of them repeated after some time, the sentences appear in a text fragmented, unconnected, and some of them repeated. The television commercials move so rapidly that the sentences do the same. The sentences and images clatter at high speed like the speed of modern life. The fragmentation of the poem fits the fragmented nature of society which is an outcome of capitalist materialistic society. Thus, “medium is the message” or form itself is the content appears to be his strategic politics.

Silliman is engaged with the reconstruction of poetic form because he is disgusted with the old forms. Such forms for him are chores of verse as he writes in *Ketjak*, “A deliberate refusal to perform the normal chores of verse” (12). The statement is repeated about half a dozen times. Indeed, the refusal to imitate the normal chores of verse is the bedrock of his poetics. His

rejection of old form and attraction towards new experimental ones are basically because of two purposes. Firstly, the old forms fail to accommodate socio-political contents. Secondly, they make the readers passive and establish authorial supremacy. So, Silliman looks for a new form that can fulfill his purpose.

Mathematical Manipulations

The interior body of a poetic text being manipulated by the standard ideas, principles, formula, and series of mathematics is itself a part of the politics of form. Almost all of Silliman's poems have engagements with some mathematical equations. *Tjanting* utilizes the geometrical shape based on the Fibonacci number sequence—the number of sentence in each paragraph equals the number of sentences in the previous two paragraphs. Each item in the sequence is the sum of the two previous numbers as: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, 233, 377, 610, 987, 1597, 2584, and 4181. Fibonacci series—a program mathematically built on the past—is named after the mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci (c. 1170 – c. 1250), who discovered the series in 1202 AD. Following the progression of the Fibonacci number system the number of sentences in the paragraphs of *Tjanting* is equal to the additions of immediately preceding two units.

It is a 19-paragraph work spanning over 213 pages with 10945 sentences. The first page contains the first 8 paragraphs whereas the last paragraph spreads over 79 pages. The last paragraph of 4181 sentences is more than a third of the total sentences. If another paragraph is written, it would be 6765 sentences in about 130 pages. The last two paragraphs—nearly 10 % of the text—run for 135 pages. This is similar to 10 percent people holding almost two third of resources. The proportion is similar to class concept or international politics where a handful of

the first world countries hold the maximum resources and the majority third world people have access to scanty resources. The poem is formal device to echo the interaction between socio-economic of the people, and international politics of imbalance. The sentences generally recur in each alternate paragraph which devour themselves like the system of economic exploitation. Structured in the increasing paragraphs and the sentence as the basic unit, *Tjanting* is an example of his wild form. Thus, the form itself features the political message.

Ketjak is also designed in series of expanding paragraphs. Every paragraph has twice as many sentences as the previous paragraph, with the sentences repeating in the same order. But the following paragraph does not contain too many from the immediately preceding. The sentences are met afterwards in a changed form, like a person meeting an old friend who has undergone a lot of changes after a considerable time. The sentences of one paragraph reappear in the next paragraphs with additional sentences inserted between them in a different contextualization. These insertions appearing as mistakes are not mistakes in reality. Silliman has inserted "mistakes" in the poem as a part of his strategy. It gives the message that one has to be habituated to encountering the unexpected things. Life goes ahead not like the movement of a train, but it is something like exploring a new landscape or a jungle. Thus, the poem forces the readers to conceive their own recognition of each sentence and the interconnected relations among the sentences.

The Chinese Notebook is composed of a sequence of 223 aphoristic passages of varied length and number of sentences. Most of the passages, often echoing, are on the questions of language and poetics. The format of the poem is recognized with the numbering of passages, sentence-by-sentence progression, self-referring content, and axiomatic presentation. Using writing as the object of inquiry the poem is axiomatic and philosophically interrogative. An

unusual and provocative work with all these features of mathematics the poem performs a resistance to normative poetic device.

“Albany” (1983) is a long prose paragraph of 100 new sentences, mostly normal declarative sentences or parts of sentences. *Under Albany* (2004) explicates and enriches the 100 sentences of “Albany.” Each sentence of “Albany” works as a topic sentence for a section of *Under Albany*. The work has got a series of autobiographical prose pieces which are frank and honest presentation through an identifiable voice—an exceptional work. It is a personal history that can be read politically.

“Blue” also adheres to numeric value. It is composed of fourteen short paragraphs which represent or elaborate the fourteen lines of sonnet form that he distrusts. Such attack on conventional poetic form is Silliman’s politics of form. As a play with the number seven, the poem “Carbon” has seven sections. The first three sections contain seven paragraphs each, the fourth section has three paragraphs with seven sentences in each, there are fourteen paragraphs (double seven) in the fifth section, section six is made up of seven numbered sentences, and the last section is composed of seven paragraphs each again having seven sentences. Likewise, structured in twelve Roman-numbered sections *Lit* has many repetitions of the number twelve. Twelve is the cardinal numeric entry of the poem. The first letter of the title “l” is itself the twelfth letter of the alphabet.

In addition to enriching the experimental form, this kind of mathematical manipulation is a distinguished example of interdisciplinary poetics. In sum, the interdisciplinary composition is structured to serve Silliman’s political position on form.

Interdisciplinary Method: Art Representing Class

Silliman seems very careful on creating the works using interdisciplinary ideas and discourses. Like the use of mathematical equation, in his writing poetry and theory are combined in a symbiotic relationship. He believes that poetry without theory is a mere concealment, and theory causes the poem to appear (Lavender 198). Such breaking down of the boundaries between theory and practice is indeed a postmodern contribution. By refusing to separate the critical from the creative, he looks for analogies between language structure and social reality. In addition, the poems constantly offer a theoretical basis of what he has previously written and what he is going to write next.

The use of theory in poetry obviously enriches the realms of poetry with multi-dimensional materials from other intellectual discourses. About the insertion of theory into practice the manifesto declares that such task has “connected writing with broader realms of intellectual discourse and has staked out a space for creative writers as equals with serious thinkers in other areas—to the advantage of the poet” (Silliman, “Aesthetic” 269). Likewise, it opens the world of poetry to explicit social and political issues. *The Chinese Notebook*, as many of his works, projects poetry as philosophy. As Wittgenstein opined, Silliman is testing whether it is possible to do poetry in the mode of philosophy. So, the poem makes an extensive use of propositions. The merging of philosophy and poetry despite their heterogeneity is highlighted as:

7. This is not philosophy, it's poetry. And if I say so, then it becomes painting, music or sculpture, judged as such. If there are variables to consider, they are at least partly economic—the question of distribution, etc. Also differing critical traditions. Could this be good Poetry, yet bad music? But yet I do not believe I would, except in jest, posit this as dance or urban planning. (4)

The passage at first indicates the different natures of the discourses in poetry and philosophy. Yet, these discourses at times cross their traditional boundaries and get mixed with one another.

Silliman makes his poems interdisciplinary by borrowing abundant vocabulary, matters, and techniques from other fields. This strategy of borrowing has to do with the social function of art. In “Wild Form” he mentions that a poem is an act and the goal of the poem is to convert the world. Imitating Marx, Silliman proposes the function of poetry to be a commitment for changing the world. Calling for a social rather than an aesthetic concept, he presents the poet as an agent of social change. Focusing on the social role of poetry he intends to frame a strong tie between art and politics. Thus, he is interested in interdisciplinary works to further the mission of changing the world by combining art and politics.

Tjanting is a demonstration of how an aesthetic form might look like a text. The poem explores the correlation between aesthetic form and political content. It also imitates the structure that occurs in nature like rising waves, plants, and sunflower heads. So, *Tjanting* combines the systems of geometry, natural science, and visual arts. Silliman’s proposition that contemporary poetry should use the ideas from other areas of knowledge has been well-demonstrated here. His experiment meets Watten’s notion that the “appeal to science extends the boundaries of the literary act” (*Total* 37). The number of sentences in the developing paragraphs, if arranged for visual pleasure, would something look like:

s

s

171). Thus, Silliman's work is science in the form of poetry where meanings are not automatically found out but by connecting the words and sentences (Prevallet, "Age" 334). The principle of fine arts and designing applied in poetry is a unique interdisciplinary property of the poem.

The aesthetic form of *Tjanting* projects a particular political issue—class struggle. It is shaped dialectically as a sequence of alternating and opposed paragraphs in order to develop a sense of opposition. The structure has a sort of dialectic between alternate paragraphs, dividing the text into two parts. By increasing the numbers asymmetrically, here is a parallel articulation of two sequences of paragraphs. Like the general theory of class struggle, the development has been uneven. Thus, the poem features the correlation between art of science (Fibonacci) and politics (class struggle). The even numbered paragraphs represent one class whereas the odd number paragraphs stand for another.

The poem constantly develops two sections, in which a paragraph is an antithesis of the previous paragraph. As antithesis reflects the previous thesis there appears two different strands. Each new number (antithesis) is formed only by deriving the last number from each of the opposing strands imitating a dialectic process. Likewise, the new number swallows up two smaller ones as a conquest in the notion of Van Elburg. Each new antithesis of a synthesis is always a temporary unit, because the series is open-ended. The ending at the nineteenth paragraph is just due to physical difficulties, but the series is infinite. And, finally, the whole text functions as synthesis.

Silliman's adaptations of Marxist-Hegelian structures sound "quasi-dialectical" if not totally dialectical. According to Silliman himself the poem is not much about class struggle as it is

structured that way. Obviously, beginning with a parallel structure (1, 1) and going towards the doubling of previous two is analogous to struggle and dialectics.

Silliman is disgusted with mainstream poetry because of its narrow world, and disregard for other disciplines. He believes that the mainstream writing provides an ideology of no ideology, and exclusion of explicit agendas. Such writing, especially of the twentieth century, “completely ignored developments and insights accessible in other arts” (Silliman, “Aesthetic” 264). Opposed to this stale and dull mainstream presentation, the combinations of linguistics, psychoanalysis, philosophy and social theory with humanities and arts, “paradigm shift” in the naming by Thomas Kuhn, are inserted into his poetry. Such insertion is, indeed, changing the notion of what literature is. Thus, his poetry is cross-disciplinary and experimental. This innovation, on the one hand, enriches poetry with the substances of other disciplines, and on the other enables it to accommodate socio-political elements both through form and content.

Play of Title

The titles of his works generally invite multiple interpretations, and also offer ways to approach the poems. They are often taken from other branches of knowledge and discourses. For instance, “tjanting,” is “a small pen-like instrument used to apply wax designs” (*Tjanting* 19). It is a writing implement in batik, despite what it sounds aurally. The title is read as an idiosyncratic way of spelling “chanting.” In the introduction, Watten says this pun follows its predecessor *Ketjak* as an oral form (*Tjanting* 7).

The title term “Ketjak” refers to a religious ceremonial dance from Bali of Indonesia, in which the dancers attempt to produce the orchestra rhythms and texture of the instruments of the *gamelan* with their voices. The poem refers to this information as “A drawing of a Balinese spirit with its face in its stomach” (*Ketjak* 7). Such references are repeated about half a dozen times. The music of cumulative effort and ordered repetition is associated with the Indonesian version of the *Ramayana* story. The musical form is essentially a choral chant performed by a circle of as many as two hundred men reenacting a battle from the ancient Sanskrit epic. The sound is something similar to the accumulation of a million birds beating their wings. The sound-effect “tjak-a-tjak-a-tjak,” is also interpreted as replicating the chatter of monkeys. The poem hints at this layer of meaning as “The monkey hordes come to the aid of Prince Rama” (63). The title and the chaotic text indicate that it is worthless to seek a unified coherence in this work as it is essentially the sound of many voices, that is, any clear meaning is insignificant.

The title of *Xing* also has multi-layered meanings. The term “Xing” can be read in different ways: Chinese “Jhing,” exing/cutting, and crossing. The title itself is an example of parataxis with a struggle between three ways of reading and interpreting. In Chinese language the word “Xing” has about thirty meanings of different grammatical parts of speech (Boon 88). The second possible reading “X” or cutting indicates rejection, a fresh start again. Likewise, crossing means a meeting point. Such indeterminate title means that the solutions are not going to appear as problems themselves are not determined.

The works *Ink* and *Lit* openly criticize academic conventions of poetic writing. The titles too indicate the practice of writing, printing, and publishing. The poet is dissatisfied with the market-driven aspects of academia poetry. Another title term “Non” has to do with a “neither...nor...” structure. It is a refusal of both opposites—an open

defiance making use of negative energy. The title of *Paradise* indicates the desire to be in a utopian place (paradise) that is not contaminated by market and class strife. It shows that in America everyday life and society is controlled and distorted by market culture. So, he looks for the alternatives of market-dominated culture and reading practices.

Grand Collage Poetry

His poetry is made up of multiple collage formation techniques. The contents, styles, structures, images, and methods are so varied that each of his works looks like a type of melting pot. For example, *Ketjak* incorporates the ideas of philosophers and poets like Barthes (36, and 70), Olson (38 and 73), Laura Riding (52), Heisenberg (54), Zukofsky (82), Wittgenstein (99) and so on. His total body of writing is shaped in a grand poem tendency or an epic journey of writing. The poems are arranged in a unifying system of making a whole out of the parts like an extension of the techniques applied by Pound and Olson. There are announcements, puns, pictures of daily lives, allusions from philosophy to sports. The poems widely present the collaged cinematic shots of data, appropriation, and cutups. So, there is the usual difficulty in categorizing his works within a tradition: prose narrative or poetry, journalistic or prose-poetry, or something else. Likewise, he shows a personal bias for poetry over poems. The form of his writing, also, is always of combined nature. Out of his four major poetic works three are constructed of multiple combinations: *The Age of Huts* (1974-80), *The Alphabet* (1979-2004), and *The Universe* (2005 onwards). In sum, his writing is a grand collage of many themes, many forms, and many structures.

Rejection of Voice for a Democratic Readership

In the manifesto Silliman, Watten, and other language poets declare that they are committed to extend poetry into areas that were previously closed to it. A prominent example of such experiment is a search of the aesthetically possible poetry that has political implications. So, their poems are “written without a stable authorial center or perceptible narrative ‘voice’ in an anonymous, collective environment” (Silliman “Aesthetic” 263). They keep the individual under attack, and explode the tendency of placing the self as the central and final term of creative practice. Their poems maintain openness to the world by presenting “I” as “not-I.” In this regard the manifesto clarifies, “The narrowness and provincialism of mainstream literary norms have been maintained over the last twenty years in a stultifyingly steady state in which the personal, ‘expressive’ lyric has been held up as the canonical poetic form” (262).

For Silliman the use of authorial voice is the presence of dominant capitalism and imperialism. Such logocentric voice ultimately enhances the totalitarian system by excluding socio-political elements in poetry and obstructs the democratic norms. In *The Chinese Notebook* he writes, “137. The concept that the poem ‘expresses’ the poet, vocally or otherwise, is at one with the whole body of thought identified as Capitalist Imperialism” (19). The indeterminacy of agent and referent appears as his trademark and signature. The pronouns like I, you, we, he, she of his writing are not clearly identifiable. The identity of addressee “you” is ever shifting; sometimes it is the speaker himself, at times it is a lover or friend or reader. Avoidance of voice, thus, is not only his intention but obligation as it is a hindrance to democratic norms and a promoter of capitalist hegemony. About the necessity of dismissing the poetic voice Watkin observes, “He didn’t want to kill the voice—society made him do it” (510).

By delegitimizing the idea of subjective authenticity he focuses on language instead of the writer’s voice, and demands the readers’ interaction with the text. Meaning can be

produced only through a negotiation or shared experience between author and reader. So, such procedural poem is something made, not expressed, and its function is to reveal their “madness” not to communicate the truth (Watkin 507). In this method, though the poet manufactures energetically, no sooner than something is created it becomes the property of reader. As a result, for the reader, something never-before-seen immediately becomes recognizable like a small miracle (Rodefer 54). To create such environment the poet notices more than he writes.

The poems involve many explicit references to the act of writing which make the readers feel that the poem is being written with them as witness. Such reader-potential sentences draw the reader’s attention to the act of creation itself. To illustrate, in *The Chinese Notebook* he writes, “130. Content is only an excuse, something to permit the writing to occur, to trigger it. Would a historian looking for information about Massachusetts fishing colonies have much use for *Maximus*? To say yes is to concede that in order to like, say, Pound, you’d have to agree with him, no?” (18). The passage features the content just as a minor aspect of writing and asks the readers to come up with their answers. Readers’ coming up with answers of their interest is the actual reading of the poem. Similarly, referring to his predecessors Pound and Olson the passage invites the readers to read the text in connection with the earlier writers. In *Sunset Debris* he again interrogates, “What of a poem that told you what it did, casual-like, with no evident respect for your condition as reader? Isn’t it true that you’re a victim here?” (22-3). The passage not only announces the supreme status of the reader but also explains his poetics. Thus, the readers are urged to make sense of a text by measuring their own associative and interpretive competence.

As Silliman himself has said, the poem *Sunset Debris* explores the social contract between writer and reader. The author solely does the talking; the reader may shut the book or refuse to respond. It is something like advertising, where only the advertiser disseminates the message no matter what the receiver is reacting. But the completion comes only after the response of the receiver. The work makes use of the qualities of language, namely ambiguity and multiplicity, up to the apex. The questions rarely indicate one possible sense. They refer to several possibilities on the one hand, and on the other the indication of several words are unclear. For example, the inaugural question "Can you feel it?" sounds referring to a sensation like can you feel the cold? The pain? The touch of something? The second question, "Does it hurt?" sounds supporting that view. But it is difficult to trace what "it" is or whom the poet is addressing as "you." Sometimes, this strategy of syntactic indeterminacy tricks upon the reader's expectation and prepares the reader for submission. But, mostly it makes the reader imaginative. Thus, the readers are fully engaged in the construction of narratives. The fragmented images presented together inspire the reader rather than offer a mood. To simplify, it is not like Wordsworth's heart jumping with joy seeing a rainbow in the sky or beginning to dance by seeing the daffodils. It is just that there is a rainbow and a viewer or the moving daffodils are viewed by a person. Thus, the new sentences make the readers attentive. In the process of understanding and interpreting the meanings of a poem, the reader, therefore, feels suffocation. Indeed, his poems may not stand on their own without the active engagement of the reader. However, such participatory reader needs to be cognizant of society and politics. With some hints of the criticism of dominant cultural and economic system, the readers are encouraged to go further along the critical paths of their own choice. By such attempt he

inspires the readers to articulate their impulses of social and political critiques. Readers are required to examine the issues according to own criteria of objectivity.

The Chinese Notebook like many other poems makes an extensive use of conceptualist technique in order to activate the reader. In this technique the readers have to make logical assumptions as the poem hides the major information for some time. The poem reads, “2. Each time I pass the garage of a certain yellow house, I am greeted with barking. The first time this occurred, an instinctive fear seemed to run through me. I have never been attacked. Yet I firmly believe that if I opened the door to the garage I should confront a dog” (4). Clearly the passage from the very beginning is talking about the speaker’s encounter with a dog, but the very word appears only at last. By delaying the major information reader’s active involvement is appealed.

In the poem “Demo” the ambiguous opening “This is a Test” (l. 1) itself urges the readers to read the rest of the poem. Though the opening is grammatically complete its semantic incompleteness urges the readers to make sense on their own behalf. For that they have to read the rest of the poem. “This” means what?: the name of small press magazine which published language poems, his way of writing (is a test), it is referring to the sentence itself (a new sentence), referring to the poem “Demo” (demo the short form of demonstration or democracy, then, is a test) is a strong point to stop and think on.

The opening interrogative sentence of *Paradise* “Is this form?” (l. 1) too engages the reader as in “Demo.” Again “this” is an indeterminate signifier. Obviously the speaker’s uncertainty or silence results in the reader’s activity and empowerment. In *Non* just the dots are given and readers have to make connections among them. They are required to be more active and imaginative as negativity is found in both form and

content. Negativity created by the tools like indeterminacy, pathlessness, and lawlessness prepares foundation for social resistance too.

The ideological message of *Tjanting* lies less in its form and content, but much in its openness to offer space to the reader. The reader as a self motivated agent gets a number of dots given in a page with varied placements. Now, it is the reader's job to connect them, criss-cross the lines, and fill with the appropriate colors. Writer-reader relation and the request for reader's participation can be obviously gauged in the sentences like, "The purpose of this writing is your arrival to read it ... You understand this, but not as I meant it" (*Tjanting* 113), "Your function here is collaboration." (118), "You are implicated, responsible, for anything you read" (160). The pleasure of reading this text increases while making the necessary connection.

The term "this" of the opening "Not this" indicates something near, something familiar. As "not" is a vehement rejection of what "this" indicates, Silliman is rejecting the classical idea of writing itself as a part of his politics of principle (Chakroborty 17). As a rule of grammar "this" should refer to something immediately preceding. But, before this statement there is about a quarter page left blank. So, now, it is the reader's duty and freedom to imagine what was there. The second sentence "What then" is the desire to know what is the next if it is "not this." The rejection "Not this" is the signboard of several rejections in the text: narrative, context, structure found in conventional poetry. Watten calls "Not this. What then?" as the origins of a meta-language, not just the reciprocal canceling of proposition and context (*Tjanting* 11). The strategy ultimately enhances the method of multiple readings and encourages the readers to be active, to enter a running automobile, take the driver's seat and drive it to the wished direction.

Silliman's open-text and the high-ranking status given to the reader serve his political intentions. His diversity of style and images is a pro-democratic challenge to mainstream poetic

tendency that he names “School of Quietude” in his official blog. If the readers read a text in several different ways by contextualizing it from their own experience, identity, and culture, the act becomes representative and inclusive, that is a true form of pluralistic democratic system. This strategy of providing enough space to the readers ultimately opposes totalitarian authority and promotes democratic multiplicity. Indeed, the mission of his works is to foster democracy and civil supremacy.

Politics of Content: The Cultural Commentary

Silliman’s works openly respond to socio-political policies and practices. To promote the progressive social understanding, his works show the abusive nature of power in various state apparatus: army, police, and the market. By showing a dismal picture of the American social institutions they try to raise public awareness.

He criticizes the mainstream American poetry denouncing it as the “School of Quietude” (SoQ). For him, it is the dominant-network of university-based poets, workshops, prizes, magazines and presses. Silliman is disgusted with SoQ poetry because its lines are much self-reflective and devoid of social commentary. Such poetry fails to make claims outside the text regarding society and politics. He criticizes SoQ more for what it fails to do than for what it does. He intends to connect poetry with society and politics. Having a suspicion toward the SoQ or the “official verse culture,” he opines that poetry and progressive politics have much to tell one another.

Silliman’s poetry richly reveals his concerns with socio-political factors. He believes that “Poetry is never separate from the social and historical circumstances in which it was written and read” ([http://www. poetrysociety.org/silliman.html](http://www.poetrysociety.org/silliman.html)). Obviously, innovative form alone can

not make a poem social, it should address such content or should be an outcome of such. So, his poetry interacts with the real world at large which is obviously social. Insistently an urban poet, Silliman's writing presents a guide to the phenomenology of contemporary city life. It narrates the tales of people rather than present a literary story. His works are the sites of critique, confrontation, and resistance. The focus is on social criticism against the late-twentieth-century American culture. They contain some recognizable social themes like violence in American culture.

Cultural matters of metropolitan American society have always occupied a prominent position in Silliman's writing. *Tjanting* looks like a realistic picture of what the Americans experienced in the seventies. On the basis of the references to Jimmy Carter, brain of JFK, the murder of San Francisco officials, the unexpected death of Pope John Paul I, and other similar news items and images which were the hot cakes of the seventies, it is easy to understand that the poet is aware of the contemporary major public events. Using a numerous icons of Americanness the poem has become a semiotic enquiry into contemporary urban American life. One of the cardinal aspects of urban American life he portrays is the prevalent horror people are encountering. Taking a scene of aircraft disaster he imagines a horrible hellish landscape. *Tjanting* contains several of such scenes in different contexts:

In paradise plane wrecks are distributed evenly throughout the desert. (16)

In paradise plain rocks are distributed evenly throughout the desert. (17)

In paradise desert rocks are distributed evenly throughout the plain. (20)

Impaired eyes, desert rocks are attributed evenly throughout the plain. (31)

The entries develop a sense of paradise plains being turned into a hell with plane wrecks covering the deserts. Likewise, he mentions the crash of helicopters, “Helicopters hover down into the dust” (17), and projecting the accident the poem mentions, “Dust hovers down into the helicopter” (*Tjanting* 32).

The poem also pictures the horror of war created by the bombardments from the fighter planes. “Jets swoop low over the destroyer amid bursts of anti-aircraft fire, dozens of bombs going off in the water, then rise up again & the audience cheers” (24). After some time the narration of the assault is repeated. At first it seems to be a broadcast or telecast of a battle, but “& the audience cheers” indicates that it might be a movie or a video game. So, it is a critique of modern films and video games that exploit the children’s minds. Clearly, it is a critique of contemporary culture and specifically of video culture which is an important part of American life. Furthermore, whatever it may be the scene is horrible.

The horror of war and aircraft disasters is used in *Ketjak* too. “We are, each of us, somehow given to a realization of the possibility of disaster, but when the slowed traffic took us around the curve into view of the scattered remains of the helicopter, engine at the road’s edge, amid a crowd of soldiers, police, hearses, pushing us immediately onward, away, it was an image we saw, no more” (*Ketjak* 70). Beginning with a realistic portrayal of the chopper’s accident the sentence ends with an indication that the event is on the screen— “an image.” It is a critique of illusion created in Hollywood movies. As only the final part discloses that it is a movie the technique applied is a conceptualist one. Such technique activates the reader. The poem contains several other pictures of helicopter explosions as “A slope filled with soldiers sifting through the large charred green debris, explosion of a helicopter” (36).

Terror is more elaborately shown in *2197*. The poem repeatedly pictures a scene of armed insurgents coming onto the roads.

Incoming insurgents stood on sidewalks. (18)

Insurgents stood on sidewalks. (38)

Insurgents who incoming to waving the black-clad tend to stood on the people.

(63)

People stood on the sidewalks waving to the incoming, black-clad insurgents.

(76)

The term “insurgent” itself gives a feeling of terror. The sight of armed and rebellious militants appearing on the sidewalks is certainly a scene of horror. The insurgents in black dress are approaching the people and also gaining power as the term “incoming” suggests. The poem creates a picture of horror through the power gaining of Khmer Rouge insurgents in Cambodia too. “The/ morning Phnom Penh falls, the Khmer Rouge merely/ walk into the city” (93) and “The morning Phnom Penh fog, the Khmer/ Rouge merely steams into the field” (99). Early in a foggy morning, after the offense of the whole night, the control of Cambodian capital falls on the hands of Khmer Rouge rebels. Soon, they keep control over the whole city area. It is a scene of horrible assault.

The poem creates another picture of horror through the description of death and destruction in San Francisco. *2197* reads:

Death and destruction/ have been the fate of San Francisco. (21)

San Francisco destruction the fate of death. (24)

San Francisco was a maze of death, canvas, destruction and fate. (35)

If the fate becomes destruction, San Francisco becomes death. (61)

Fate went destruction through San Francisco. (78)

Nearly a dozen times *2197* talks about the horror in San Francisco—death and destruction being the town’s fate. Through the possible devastation and large-scale deaths in San Francisco, Silliman presents the vulnerability of the western civilization. This condition is the outcome of political perversion.

Working Class and Other Social Issues

One of Silliman’s important political engagements is his widespread regard of the class concept and sympathy for the workers. *Tjanting* has got several class indicators, and references to socio-economic status of the people. For example, the statements “A way of rolling sleeves up indicates class” (35), and the repeat “A way of rolling class up indicates sleeves” (*Tjanting* 67) can be presented. The sentences indicate the possibility of showing and hiding one’s class by arranging the sleeves. Likewise, “Reading is always an act of war (between classes, over consciousness),” and “Your consciousness is first of all the consciousness of your class, & this is never more clear than in the sudden flowering of the emotions, the waves of anger that on occasion sweep ‘inexplicably’ through you, flash floods of being” (138) refer to class issues in society.

The poem *Ketjak* too contains numerous references to the sufferings of working class poor people. It reads, “Fountains of the financial district sprout. She was a unit in a bum space,

she was a damaged child" (*Ketjak* 3). In a simple reading, the child and the fountains do not occur in the same physical space. But, if seen in an extended context they share the same social location. The idea of the damaged child and the corporate fountains both are connected to wider socio-economic realities. The "damage" done to the child is an outcome of a larger economic context. Likewise, description of nursing home abuses (186) is another of such references. The word "bus" is used several dozen times. It is an integral part of urban experience among working class, and lower middle class people. It has been often presented as a difficult and boring means of transportation. Bus is also presented as a democratic social space as "a great leveler" (125). By bringing a variety of people together the bus becomes a collage in itself.

The poem frequently talks about both the dominant and dominated classes. "History is not a good bourgeois" (*Ketjak* 41), and "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle" (64) are a few of such statements. It also incorporates the accidental deaths of the workers in the big industries. "Industrial accident orphan" (17), "Refusal of personal death is not uncommon amid cannery workers" (18), "Cannery workers commonly refuse personal death" (26) are some such references. The poem, thus, clearly shows sympathies to the workers who have got their untimely casualties in the working places. It also indicates the hazardous industrial works and exploitation of the workers. The poem in the context of exploitation asserts, "Their first goal was to separate the workers from their means of production" (5). Separating the workers from their means of production is an optimum form of exploitation. Obviously, the pronoun "their" refers to the employers who also are the oppressors. Indeed, the poem serves the political intention of highlighting class exploitation. Silliman himself has declared, "The community that I'm a part of and interested in is an audience with very distinct social characteristics: overeducated, underemployed people in major urban areas" ("A 1982 Interview").

Sunset Debris also exposes Silliman's engagements with the matters of class, class struggle, bourgeois hegemony, capitalism, and so on. He questions:

Will it further class struggle? Is it legible? (1)

Is the concept of love a bourgeois trap? (8)

What is the true process of capital accumulation? (10)

Are his teeth an indication of class struggle? (10)

Is not the set of so-called adult values merely applied capitalism? (11)

Are you subject to bourgeois frenzy? (14)

The questions create juxtaposition between the bourgeois and the working class. They are designed to develop distaste for capitalism and promote a class struggle. In the XXVII section of "You" he shows the pathetic condition of unemployed slum-dwellers trying to earn a living by wiping the passing cars.

They wait

for cars to get caught by the red light in the left turn lane, then

spread out with buckets and old rags washing their windows

rapidly, knowing just how long they have to coax a tip from each

involuntary customer. (ll. 31-5)

At roadsides there are workless city people as if they are attempting to beg. When cars stop for a short moment at the red light, the poor people waiting on the footpath go to the cars and clean the dirt with water and ugly-looking cloth-pieces. For this service they expect some tips

from the car owners. But, that too is not sure because the owners are “involuntary.” By showing the gloomy picture of proletariats and the attitudes of the bourgeoisie Silliman intends to promote the repressed group in the class struggle.

In addition to the frank dealing with class concept and support of the struggle, Silliman’s poems display other social issues that are related to various forms of exploitation and poverty. “BART” is obviously a social poem about “work.” It highlights the value of work. It offers several pictures related to work as commodity, and labor as a form of struggle. The poem was composed on the Labor Day, on which the train ride was put on offer. The activities featured in the poem are mostly the working class activities. The poem raises questions about the nature of work—paid and unpaid. The Labor Day is a holiday; the workers do not have to work. But the poet alone is working, that is, he is writing on the train. Probably writing or art is not like other productive or physical works but he has been engaged with the politics of definition, that is, status of art and poetry. Silliman seems to be convinced that poetry is also a kind of work, and therefore it is a subject to commodification, though it is somehow different from other works associated with the objects of physical existence.

Considerably content centered *Ketjak* is thoroughly involved with street language. As a part of the description of socio-economically marginalized people the poem highlights their suffering from starvation and other abuses, “Thousands lavishing, thousands starving, intrigues, wars, flatteries, envyings, hypocrisies, lying vanities, hollow amusements, exhaustion, dissipation, death” (*Ketjak* 50). The poor people have been victimized through a number of urban perversions. Such condition is a result of contemporary commercial culture fueled by capitalism.

Social matters are revealed in *Sunset Debris* too. The poem raises a question about the destiny of poor urban domestic women workers, “What do those women dream of, who each morning go by bus to clean the homes of the rich?” (*Sunset* 10). The concern towards these workers are featured in *Tjanting* too, “The old woman on the bench dozes, waiting for her bus” (43) and “Where poor people go to spend money” (43). The extracts reveal the poet’s especial concern with the conditions of old and poor women trying to make a living by working as domestic servants.

“Albany” begins as “If the function of writing is to ‘express the world.’ My father withheld child support, forcing my mother to live with her parents, my brother and I to be raised together in a small room. Grandfather called them niggers. I can’t afford an automobile” (ll. 1-3). The description is an autobiography of a poor and repressed citizen. These sentences are both personal and political which is, obviously, Silliman’s intention. The opening sentence itself is a conditional clause, having a result clause absent. This technique clearly urges the reader to be active and imaginative. The next long sentence reveals the working class destiny of poverty and suffering. “Grandfather called them niggers” demonstrates the prejudice of racial politics.

“Albany” also incorporates many references to the speaker’s engagement as a political activist: participation in demonstrations, going to jail, cops wearing shields like masks and so on. The references to rape, miscarriage, abortion add up to the widespread social perversions. The picture created makes the poem an autobiography of a working-class, street-dweller, self-made man. The short use Ron in lieu of Ronald also indicates his poor background. Perloff writes, “Pain, violence, and injustice are the facts of his life; sentence after sentence refers to murders, shoot-outs, abortions, riots, asbestos poisoning, and the like” (“Subject” 417). Thus, the major premise of this poem is to focus on things that are both personal and political. Though an

autobiographical work, readers fail to know much about the particulars of the personal life, people and places of the poet's past and present life. It is so because the prime concern of the poet is to socialize the personal pain in the manner of confessional poets.

Though not so well-integrated as his other poems, *Jones* too offers social and political critique. This poem offers an ecological protest in the mode of Olson. It shows the injustice over earth by human beings and machines. The earth has been made ugly, displaced, and damaged. By developing the interplay of natural and mechanical images, the poem indicates the forthcoming collision between them. It opens as:

Socks on the floor by the door. After the rain the sidewalk dries unevenly.
Pyramid of cans in the corner of the yard, waiting to be crushed by a
hammer, then piled into a plastic bag (bags of cans stacked high against
the fence). Yellow thorny weed that rises between the cracks in the
cement. Small grey dead bird, crushed, feathers matted, nearly
unidentifiable in the rain beside the sturdy motorcycle chained to the
phone pole, glistening. (*Jones* 1)

All the goods presented are worthless, waste, and debris. The description attracts the reader's attention towards almost unnoticed things. Indeed, it is a lament upon the damage of urban American landscapes.

"Jones" is an area and name of a street in San Francisco. The title of the poem *Jones* takes its name from this very derelict street in San Francisco's Tenderloin. In the poem he shows the widespread environmental crisis without using a journalistic urgency that is mostly used on such states like Bernstein's poem "Mr. Fanelli" does. Silliman's poem does not make a direct call for

action, but a roundabout critique of the social and political agencies that are blind to ecological hazards. It is so because of the domination of the market. A few people who make their presence in the poem are all ugly, twisted, beggars, homeless, broken, prostitutes, and dead. These people are presented in their ugly form because it is the human beings who have made the earth dirty. On the other hand such ugly people and ugly habitations have not come into the notice of the busy American city-dwellers. The poem is a plea to the readers to be aware of such perversions, and the causing factors of the capitalist market system.

“Engines” deals with the causes and violent consequences of globalization. It critiques militarism by talking about how violence affects human life. The poem pictures the usual aerial bombardments the US does in several battles. American television channels present such scenes as the manifestation of patriotism and victory. But, this poem does not glorify war as many other war-poems or television shows do. Instead, like Watten’s *Bad History* it connects war with the victims’ experience.

Ink is a critique of society and politics in plain terms. It has got statements of social criticism regarding the immigrants’ problem and their exploitation by big business houses. “Lines of seniors (tiny filipino women) queued up outside the storefront travel agent’s office, waiting for the bus to Reno. Skimming Crusoe (144).” The word “seniors” refers just to their age, not to their socio-economic status as they are waiting on queue for the bus. Furthermore, these under-privileged people are the women immigrants from the Philippines. But, their cultural and national identity is given in lower case. They do not deserve capitalization because they are the workers from the margin. The bus they will ride is expected to go to Reno, a big business center and gambling office. Their skimming

of the novel *Robinson Crusoe* indicates their optimum struggle to live in a metropolis as lonely Robison did in the desert island.

Critique of Market

Silliman uses literary work for social activism as a means to combat the capitalist establishment that is largely market-driven. Like the works of Olson, almost all of his works bear resistance to the market forces. As an alternative, he highlights the community-based notion of writing and publishing.

The Alphabet is a loud cry against the market culture. It talks about the decaying conditions of life created by the market culture. For Silliman, market culture inherently bears decay in its womb. It presents critiques of imperialism and its historical patterns, both local and global. To illustrate a few works, *Jones* deals with environmental degradation, *Engines* with militarism, *Force* features corporate violence. Showing the effect of market exploitation, on the other hand, *Sunset Debris* inquires, "Do you know that the true structure of a prison is built around its illegal commodities market?" (3). For Silliman, all such abuses are the outcomes of market-domination over the total system.

The poem [®] indicates the contemporary commercial tendency of reduction. Consumer goods to art works, political agendas to social norms, culture to individuals everything is abbreviated to slogans. People have been forced to accept the shorter registered trade marks. In addition, the poem contains several commercial slogans like "I love what you do to me, Toyota!" where a high-ranking human feeling has been reduced to monetary item, a mere car brand. All these slogans are oppressing life in late-twentieth-century America. On the other hand the poem indicates another utopian society, "I don't think we're in Leningrad anymore,

Toto.” It is a dream of being in a utopian socialist regime with non-commercial humanitarian culture. On the whole, the poem is an attempt to make readers aware of trade-dominated mechanical life.

Ketjak demonstrates the misuse of the image of a revolutionary leader Che Guevara for commercial purpose. It contains, “Display of the corpse of Che Guevara as bourgeois sculpture” (50). The statement opposes the market’s practice of presenting the image of Che in commercial advertisements. The person who strongly opposed commodification under capitalism has been ironically used to advertise the commodities.

Paradise is a critique of a violent and oppressive governing power of American society—the idea that time is money. Criticizing the ever-busy American life style it opposes the market culture. The poet is saddened that life of the people is controlled by the market mechanism. It talks about the social garbage produced by the market system:

Words slip, does type, hand around the pen a clamp, a clip. Visible breath
against constructivist past. The shed crowded, write in a sweat. We
celebrate the agreement of a new year, the head shrouded, bright in a knit
suit. Loop conceived in a line, the spine with its regions, reasons. On
another, sweaters hang by the wrist to dry. The list is sweet. You lie. The
eye is met by the season. (*Paradise* 9)

The first sentence presents the mysterious aspect of the writing process as the sentence itself possesses mystery due to its strange syntax and punctuation. “Words slip” indicates the indeterminate nature of speech or language. The human (hand, breath, sweat, eye) and machines (clamp, clip, loop) have been combined together but against each other. Human

culture has been set against the mechanical inhuman world. Furthermore, the poem is featured with dense pages with very little empty white space which indicates the suffocation in breathing because of the lack of time and control of the market.

Tjanting talks about the forthcoming horrible fate of the nation due to economic crisis. Because of a big investment on warfare America is sure to face an economy crisis.

Debt drives the nation. These houses shall not survive another quake. A wooden fence that leans in all directions. Each siren marks the tragic. Dandelions & ivy. A desert by the sea is a sight to see. A missile rose quickly from the ocean's surface. A parabola spelled his mind. He set down, he said, his Harley at sixty. It is not easy to be a narcissist. (19)

After a few pages a similar description recurs. Because of the mistaken government policies on budget allocation the nation is going to suffer from heavy debt. The families (house) are already in burden and they are able to bear no more crises. The conditions of the nation and the people are vulnerable like a wooden fence leaning towards all directions which may instantly fall. Any time the siren announcing the danger can be heard. The situation is horrible like that of a desert where a missile is being launched from the nearby sea. Amid such horrible state a sensible person can not shut his eyes and remain a narcissistic idiot. This section of the poem openly criticizes the market-dominated government policies that are inviting economic and physical ruins.

Ink offers a critique of the capitalist market-dominated publishing culture of the academia. The title itself, on the one hand, refers to the printing/publishing industry, and on the other it echoes inc. or incorporation. In combination it means the publishing incorporation. The opening paragraph reads:

[Ink] spreads, content centered, then sinks into the fibrous mesh that forms the page. Each strand close up a cylinder, rough about the edges, wrapped in its own web, coated with pigment. Not to defy silence, but to define it.

Thus letters shadow space. An invisible barrier is called a margin. (143)

The passage begins with the description of the publishing/printing process, ink spreading over the page. The second sentence elaborates the process. The third “Not to defy silence, but to define it” is a move from printing to publishing strategy by questioning the political motives of the publishing industry. It makes sense that the big publishing houses are functioning not to provide voice to the oppressed and weaker people (defy silence), but ultimately to serve the ruling class elites as they define the silence from their own perspectives. While defining silence the printed words just shadow the space. In the attempt “to define,” the reality is distorted, aestheticized, and standardized.

Non shows the negative effect of market culture on individual lives. It comments, “man in a three-piece suit/ with a buttoned-down shirt/ but the striped tie/ hangs loose in two strands/ holds his briefcase in his lap/ open, a kind of desk” (10). Beginning with observation the narration shifts to commentary. It shows the busy schedule of mid-career office workers. The man has returned tired from the office, but it is not the end of work for the day. He is carrying more works in his notebook that are to be accomplished at home. The briefcase opens like an office desk with many incomplete files that need his several hours of private life. Similarly, in *Paradise* he mentions a resembling experience, “Sometimes I come home from work so tired that I don’t know whether to cry or throw up or lie on the floor, shaking” (Hoover 494). This is the trend how urban workers are manipulated by the capitalist market. Such critique of social life and labor system is meant to encourage social resistance.

Theorizing Silliman

Silliman formulates his pro-Marxist analysis of capitalism, bourgeoisie, and literary writing fundamentally in his manifesto-essay "Disappearance of the Word, Appearance of the World." It discusses how the focus of capitalist inspired writing moves away from the words themselves toward the Gestalt of the writing. It equates the rise of capitalism with the rise of referentiality in language, and criticizes the devolution of language from reference to referentiality, from gestural expression to narrative and critical description. About such devastating effects of capitalism he states:

What happens when a language moves toward and passes into a capitalist stage of development is an anaesthetic transformation of the perceived tangibility of the word, with corresponding increases in its descriptive and narrative capacities, preconditions for the invention of "realism," the illusion of reality in capitalist thought. These developments are tied directly to the function of reference in language, which under capitalism is transformed, narrowed into referentiality. (*New 10*)

Silliman frankly formulates Marxist assessments of the commodification of language and literature in capitalist society. He believes that the reification or fetishization of language into a commodity is both a political and linguistic issue. His Marxist theory of language discusses how capitalism changes it from reference (social) to referentiality (alienation from user and use-function). He discusses the connection between capitalism and artistic genres. Discussing how capitalism profited by the rise of the novel, Silliman believes that novel creates an optical illusion of reality by repressing the reader's freedom.

His "The Politics of Poetry" published in the October 1979 issue of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* calls for a poetry that could undermine the bourgeoisie. The poems elaborate such theoretical foundations formulated in the essay. For instance, *Ketjak* highlights the problems of urban poor and necessity of a proletariat revolution:

The Popular Resistance Movement is organized into clandestine groups, based among workers, peasants, students, pobledores (the urban poor), women, soldiers, and sectors of the small bourgeoisie, who, because of the oppressive regime, must work and meet secretly, whose tasks include preparing the conditions for a long and difficult people's war, giving it a social base as extensive as possible among the people, a struggle against the dictatorship on all levels, a struggle for proletarian revolution. (88-9)

He places not only marginalized and obviously repressed groups as the elements of popular resistance movements but also the soldiers and minor bourgeois class. They need to make a coalition for a people's war against the oppressive regime. This revolution is to restore the proletariat supremacy by defeating the dictatorship backed by the market.

Silliman's poetry vigorously tries to make connections between art and the external world. His writings are very watchful on the relationship between work and society, creation and ideology. They openly refute the inner harmony of man and art which is no more than bourgeoisie aesthetics as with Lukács. As his writing strengthens the connection of man with society's struggle and reality, it meets Lukács' premises of maintaining the relationship between art and life. Silliman's writing, though not directly political, is never alien from politics. As a cultural critic Silliman deals with the cultural degradation and the economic factors responsible.

Silliman offers special privileges to poetry. His opinions and practices are opposed to that of Bakhtin in regard to the oppositional positions of prose and poetry. For Bakhtin, the ideological and dialogical features are more present in prose than in poetry. But, Silliman just reverses this idea. He achieves the goal by mixing these two ways of writing. Just opposite to Bakhtin, he banishes the novel as a bourgeois form and praises poetry for its engagement with the proletariat (New12). For Silliman, poetry neither lacks multi-dimensional consciousness nor keeps an epic distance between the worlds of writing and reality. By discarding voice, poetry discards the close tie with the author, which does not happen in the novel. Silliman uses poetry as a form of proletariat expression, not as a high-genre that loses connection with the real life as seen by Bakhtin. He believes that capitalism seeks to repress dialectical consciousness, but poetry is required to resist such repression (New 17).

As Jameson shows the possibility, Silliman's poetry carries the ideological debates and postmodernist issues together. They both share the idea of the possibility of a new cultural counter revolution. Silliman's poetry performs various duties at the same time; from empowering the workers to the experiments with forms. Both Jameson and Silliman meet on the ground of the heightened social function of art. Silliman seems closer with Marxism, but with a small "m" like Bakhtin. Both perceive language always to be ideological and dialogical. Bakhtin sees the presence of such features both in content and structure. Ideological presence in content has been easily found in the works of several writers. The matters and methods used in Silliman's poetry largely contain ideological and dialogical features. His poems not only advocate in favor of the class struggle but also reveal its nature through the form and outlook.

Silliman's affinity with the proletariat is harmonious with Foucault's interpretations. Being under the strong pressure of the capitalist market system and multinational corporations

Silliman has recognized him as the proletariat, and has spoken against the exploitation. In this regard, borrowing the definition of Lukács, Silliman can be called a left-wing writer who exposes the horror created by the destruction and degradation of capitalism. And also his writing resists such damage. Furthermore, Silliman resists this hegemony not with individual effort that is subject to be doomed, but by joining hands with a movement in the name of Language group. Such alignment is the essential necessity of a resistant writer according to Lukács. As Benjamin believes, the social surrounding of Silliman has forced him to write in favor of the working class. Instead of escaping this choice as a bourgeois entertainment writer does, Silliman opts to write in favor of proletariats like a progressive writer. His writing obviously falls in the category of politically correct literature.

Silliman's poetry and poetics are largely opposite of Foucault's emphasis on author function. His writing does not give authenticity to the author; rather the reader is put in an authentic status. However, it does not mean that a work of art has nothing to do with the time and place of the creation.

Silliman also departs from Benjamin regarding the writer as teacher. He does not believe on didactic literature. Rather, he believes on the heuristic learning of the reader which automatically happens in the process of reading. Yet, as Silliman strongly advocates this sort of writing he is indeed teaching other writers by offering models of writing. Benjamin and Silliman also meet at the point of avoiding a sharp distinction between writer and reader. Both of them resemble each other on the issue that the distinctions of writer and reader are fleeing.

Silliman's utopian visions about the system and writing are in accordance to Lukács' proposition that writers should dream. Having a strong distaste for the prevailing socio-political

system, market-dominated culture, and worn-out writing trend, Silliman imagines of a profound and passionate future where there will be a progressive system, and a new writing.

Furthermore, he sees the necessity of a revolution to attain this dream. He looks at the future with strong expectations. His dreamed future clearly contains a lot of changes from the existing context. His writing is directed towards fulfilling this dream-mission. The way Silliman has advocated for poetry and the pictures he has created through his poems does not bear any resemblance with Bakhtin's evaluation of poetry like a painting on the wall. Instead, his poetry is highly purposive and mission-oriented, never a show-piece. One important point where Bakhtin and Silliman seem united is their attempts at bringing literature closer to human vicinity.

Silliman perceives power as an ever-repressing factor, and Foucault believes that discourse plays the role of a vehicle for the functioning of power. Silliman's writing goes against the bourgeois power and promotes the workers. But, Silliman is not convinced with Foucault's claim that power can be exercised by exercising the truth. For him, there is no such thing as the final truth; it is determined by the activities of reading by multiple readers in their own different ways. Silliman, however, seems in agreement with Foucault's idea that power is never alien, and it always exists in relationships with others. Silliman's poetry presents the state power having an affirmative relationship with the bourgeoisie and the market system, and he emphasizes his resistance to it.

Silliman's socio-political concerns can be noticed in his various activities and engagements with other writing-related matters too. He is exclusively associated with small presses which always suffer from a lack of fund and staff. Publications of such presses are

distributed more or less literally by hand. He has mostly got his works published from small presses. He believes that small presses play vital roles in bringing new poetry into the front. He also edited and managed small magazines that gave ample space to the new writers and experimental writing. Likewise, he is one of the pioneer bloggers among the American poets. His blog obviously has a socio-political dimension in it. Through it he wants to create a space for poets—the poets of his kind and others—in order to discuss about their writings seriously. Very few poets among the several hundreds listed in his blog belong to large publishing house. So the blog is a medium for the poets at the margin to be revealed and heard. It is an alternative to capitalist-dominated publication's hegemony. Added to this, Silliman and some other significant language writers ventured to travel to USSR during the peak of the cold war, and have a series of interactions with socialist writers. The event discloses his political awareness and risk-facing attitude. It is also an attempt at initiating dialogue and form a community along with the search for experimental writing that addressed socio-political matters. In sum, all these involvements and activities are for community-based notion of writing and publishing as an alternative of market-dominated big publishing of academia writing.

On the basis of Silliman's quarrel with the existing nature of social system and form, it is easy to assume that he is looking for alternatives—his utopian vision. And, by evaluating what he has created and how the works are made his utopian alternative becomes visible. It contains two significant aspects: system, and writing. So far the system is concerned, the bourgeoisie is undermined. Workers will gain the empowered positions and there will be due honor for work. The hegemony of the market will be repressed. In a real and fully democratic system there will

be inclusive participation and the voiceless will get voice. The system will firmly stand against the totalitarian authorities. And, such utopian state will be created through class struggle.

This sort of political system will go hand-in-hand with an ideal approach to writing. Such writing rejects the water-tight forms, and eschews rule-governance. Instead of generic distinctions like poetry, philosophy, criticism, theory, and prose there is just writing. In such games of writing the real players are the readers. The writing is essentially progressive with the due inclusion of socio-political matters. It is in the trend of collage composition with the substances and methods borrowed from interdisciplinary sources. The writing is not just writing, but life.

Chapter VIII

Barrett Watten's Poetics: A Sensitized Eye in Society

The New Poetic Method

Barrett Watten's poetry has a wide array of thematic and social subjects. There is detailed account of the spiritual poverty of contemporary society. His works are watchful social discourses contextualized by the emergence of global horizons. His writing is bothered by the prevailing "monotony of terror." However, despite the indication of gloom and pessimism, his poetry shows just a mild urgency. Furthermore, reconciling social agency with radical form is his way of the avant-garde.

Watten presents instances from the world outside the text. Mainly, he includes history and politics in his poetry as did Pound and Olson. He demonstrates the belief that a poem can not project the history of the present by avoiding narrative. His poem not only contains history but runs with it, and argues for a cultural poetics. Indeed, he wants to reread the social reflexivity of the poetic texts. Like poetry-history combination there is togetherness of narration and non-narration.

As an attempt at expanding the very definition of poetry, his writing opens the genre along with history to philosophy, theory, and politics too. It constructs a horizon of language at the boundary between politics and art. He likes to compose trans-generic works. Watten's writing connects poetry with all the other activities that bring it into the public sphere. He has written a poetry that incorporates focused critical thought and is concerned with its own production. Thus, he is seeking a reformulated poetics.

Negativity and critique simultaneously come with the project of language poetry and that of Watten too. The by-products of capitalism like alienation, fragmentation, atomization, reification, and violence that Watten's poetry deals with can be presented certainly not through traditional poetic forms. So he goes for a general negativity, sacrifice of the authorial dominance, and negation in the place of mimesis. Instead of being nihilistic Watten maintains a utopian gaze as Beckett and Creeley did to some degree. Indeed, Watten's deep interest in cultural elements has inspired him to expand the boundary of poetic discourse and the methods of presentation.

Watten whole-heartedly seeks and uses language to fit the contemporary experience of alienation. So, he focuses on the experiences of rupture and refusal as the fundamental

necessity. He is fond of using the discourse of dialectical process. But, as nothing can ever be totally dialectical his writing is also considerably dialectical. For Prevallet, Watten's syntactical ruptures try to free poetry from the illusion machine of meta-narrative, meaning, and depth. Indeed, he breathlessly looks for appropriate forms and techniques to fit the radical subject matter.

His poems extensively exploit linguistic disruptions. The defamiliarization tools are put together with a radical voice. They constantly feature indeterminacy and abstractions. Indeterminacy is focused because there is no determinacy in the system of a capitalist society, and his poems themselves are composed of allegory and collage structures. Watten's extravagant negativity develops the allegorical pathways; the allegories work as the natural mirrors of ideology and indicate the hidden meanings. Unlike metaphor, allegory moves from universal to particular. As metaphor has to do with totality; allegory focuses on disjunction. The poems often maintain a monotonous paratactic order of sentences and jigsaw puzzles of fragments. As opacity is a characteristic of his writing, the reader has to sweat for understanding.

Watten has experimented with the new forms of co- and multi-authorship. Centering the works on the expansive potential of nonidentity, he presents collaborative writing as a form of liberation from the cage of individualism. *The Grand Piano* is a unique project of collaborative writing. Minimization of authorial control and use of open form distinctly stand out in this method. The early poems included in *Frame* possess neither an identifiable personality nor an emotive voice. But, it is present to some extent in the later work, *Bad History*. However, there is neither a strong expression nor a significant attempt to avoid expression, resulting in a kind of paralyzed state. In *Progress* the self disappears into the words, and the meditating persona is

gone. Though it inhabits no identifiable self, a mind is working like a paradoxically deaestheticized canvas. Watten favors the “open form” in the mode of anti-expressivism. From the defining usage in Olson’s essay “Projective Verse,” open form has been temporalized, and embodied in Watten’s poetry, which is both oppositional and positive.

Watten in the article “Transposing the Limits of Open Form” admits that his writing fully maintains the conviction that in the development of the language school the notion of open form survives as an aesthetic politics, though in a textualized form. The use of new sentence is Watten’s poetry is one of the major ways of creating the open form. The new sentence for him is an element of information more than a formal device or a vehicle for expression. This privileged term for him is equivalent to a unit of “complete thought.” The new sentence leads to a complex open form that is grounded in a radical self-reflexivity of language. Form is used as a politics of rejection, and nonstandard writing is meant to struggle against the standard usage. By using language against confining rules and traditions, he is looking for a utopian state.

Hess traces certain resemblances of Watten’s writing to the poetry, drama, and novel of Creeley, Beckett, and blank generation fiction respectively. He is like Creeley in the use of several poetic methods like the portrayal of the monotony of terror. His writing makes violence of speech like that of Beckett’s “literature of the unword.” Words and phrases are mostly irrelevant of the context. Speechlessness itself is used as a form of speech. For instance, every stanza of *Progress* and *Under Erasure* ends with ellipses. His poetry shares some similarities with the so-called blank generation fiction, especially the cultivation of gloomy perspectives towards contemporary culture. Discovery of new ways of writing or “making it new” has thus been Watten’s poetic investigation.

Poetics of Social Engagement

A major emphasis of Watten's poetics is the enrichment of poetry by placing it together with the outside world. Therefore, poetry is expected always to go beyond the narrow boundary conventionally allotted to it. It closely articulates the "progression of thought in and of the words" (*Total* 189). In *The Constructivist Moment* he offers a series of theoretically informed and textually sensitive readings that focus on a revisionist account of the avant-garde by using the methodologies of cultural studies. His analyses of the interplay between the social forces and aesthetic forms, and the fusion of theory and practice create a bridge between art and cultural studies. Through this exploratory work he tries to fill-up the ditch between cultural poetics and constructivist aesthetics. By constructivist aesthetics, he means the imperatives in radical art and literature to foreground their formal construction, whereas the reflexive relation of artistic form and cultural context is understood as cultural poetics. Watten attempts at going beyond the boundaries that are disciplinary, historical, and generic.

The Constructivist Moment also gives strength to a generic hybrid of poetry and prose. Like critical writing, poetry includes social and historical reflexivity. Like poetry, critical writing is influenced by social and historical factors. It means that both of them reflect and are under the control of society and history. Watten asserts, "If poetry and poetics are to survive in a cultural environment that is dominated by institutions, they must show themselves capable of addressing more than their own orders" (*Constructivist "Introduction"* xix). New writing should, therefore, cross the ditch existing between literary art and historical/cultural ground. Watten notices several moments of the heroic combination of aesthetic and socio-politically engaged instances of the avant-garde. He thinks that McGann's "The Alternate Route," and Cary Nelson's

Repression and Recovery are typical examples of the constructivist moment. Language poetry is also one of such moment. Watten's works obviously add a brick to this trend of writing.

The Constructivist Moment intends to promote the perception of an ongoing avant-garde, and it promotes a rupture of the social fabric. Instances of negation and disruption are focused. The work equally contains poetry, other art forms, theory, and history. The extended discussions in this work concerning cultural studies, comparative literature, theory, music, and visual arts establish connections among disciplines. Constructivist moment requires theoretical engagement in order to promote negativity. Such wide-ranging theoretical and sophisticated discussions of poetry and poetics perform an acrobatics of knowledge.

In *Total Syntax* Watten proposes his version of the theoretical foundation of language writing. He believes that writing can reach, reevaluate, and transform any frame of reference. He advocates placing the writing in a wider context as much as possible. As the core of the relation between total syntax and art he writes, "I would like to propose a more total syntax for the statement that is a work of art. And I want an art that reflects that total syntax" (*Total* 68). His notion of total syntax regards both the interior and the exterior of the work—a conscious dialectic between inside and outside. Watten's idea of "...total syntax demands that 'the observer, rather than being ironic, is responsible to the contingencies of any *thing* that might compel him or her. The situation as a whole must be taken in" (Arnold 152). Containing a wide range of materials it addresses the larger issues, and Watten appreciates poet Clark Coolidge for such a model of writing. For Coolidge language is not a philosopher's stone, but his writing constantly foregrounds language (*Total* 103). Coolidge uses words not only in their possible arrangements but in other contexts of mind and society. With such methods Coolidge, Watten believes, is trying to beat the American cultural desert into life.

Though Watten refuses to be labeled as a mere surrealist as surrealism accepts a masculinist authorship and its critiques depend on conservative cultural institutions (“Secret” 585), he is largely engaged with surrealism which aims to re-integrate the self at a higher level. Surreal ideas largely exist in *Complete Thought*. This work again urges for social engagements beyond the aesthetic work. His poetics accepts that the seeds of progress lie in the “real.” Arnold clarifies Watten’s poetics as “... the poem gains social and political purchase only when it includes in its meditation the material realities that it shares with the rest of the world” (148). The incomplete individual text serves as a synthetic stage of the total syntax incorporating spatial, temporal, and social relations.

One of the political strategies the language writers like Watten advocate and use is the production of multi-authored works. *The Grand Piano* is one of the outstanding adventures of multi-authorship. This critical project attempts to secure a place for radical art and its extensions into the larger culture, history, and criticism. It is also an attempt against the risk of being entirely displaced by official criticism. In the essay “How *The Grand Piano* Is Being Written” Watten explains that in this collaborative attempt the radical language and standard usage of communication are opened up and criticized from within the very forms they utilize. These writers have primarily written for one another as well as the larger literary field.

Watten likes to foreground the formal construction of art. Engaging the writing with social matters he intends to bring both poetry and culture together. His analyses of the intersections among social forces and aesthetic forms, the fusion of theory and practice create a bridge between cultural studies and poetics. Thus, poetry can maintain an on-going avant-garde.

Disagreement as the Way of Poetry

Speech is both a matter of pride and shame for a capitalist democracy. It is encouraged, as well as strategically controlled in this system. Public speech is largely manipulated by the mass media—especially the television networks. They decide whom to give the voice. The hegemony of giant trade companies like Wal Mart and Best Buy, tenant rights, real state companies, factories polluting small towns are some of the burning socio-political issues in American society. But, large scale media rarely feature these matters. The only freedom American citizens have got absolutely is the freedom to purchase. They are encouraged to buy, buy, and buy. Those who buy more are honored people in the consumer culture. People want to see that America is the world superpower, and the state has to assure this at any cost. Watten's poetry is born from the gaps among such state policies, market system, and public expectations. He embraces a poetics of alienation matching the rupture between speech and society that he witnessed during the Free Speech Movement and the Vietnam War. Through writing he seeks to reveal the material power of language, Prevallet thinks, in order to expose the real divisions between oppressive structures and the language used to maintain such structure. The relationship existing between language and power is sought through the techniques of collaboration, linguistic rupture, and complex syntax.

Progress (1985) features the state of American society in the Regan era. Its non-narrative form is enriched with linguistic innovations, emotional projections, and cultural reflections. The publication of this poem, indeed, roused a high literary tension amid the American readership. Its offense against the iron fences of cultural gatekeepers ultimately enhanced the new poetic forms. By foregrounding the formal construction of art form, it advocates and exemplifies a contextual and constructivist mode of poetry. It resembles the cultural concerns of the modern epic poem rather than the subject-centered lyric.

Progress is a meditation on awareness—the terrible experience of contemporary life. As far as the thematic coverage, density, and overall sensitivity are concerned, the poem looks like a next generation descendant of Ginsberg's "Wichita Vortex Sutra." It is not just a critique of a consumer culture, but also offers some romantic introspection. "I am otherwise" (*Progress* 134) is the poet's general evaluative expression of his isolation and disagreement from the society and system. Such interrogations and search have placed him in disagreement with the social system. The language serves to manifest his quarrelsome attitude with the social system. For instance, "I want to solve an equation./ Iron filing spiral into/ A subject,/ open to debate" (*Progress* 42) reflects his mission of seeking the solution to social problems. The poem envisions an ideal state—that has overcome the social problems—in the name of "progress." But, the dream has been obstructed by innumerable social perversions.

Where progress has been barred

By numberless bars,

caught

In the act of claustrophobia

Imitating open space in a fear.... (185)

Using different types of rupture it reveals his dreams, fantasies, and poetics. Diary-like entries spread over 600 five-line haiku-like stanzas that are largely segregated from one another. They look like 600 different poems without a general merge. Each stanza (un)ending with ellipses might be signaling a continuation. But, the possibility of such connection is sometimes dimly visible and most of the times absurd. The method of code-switching has been

extensively applied. The stanzas display a random incoherent arrangement. So, Blazer calls it a poem of abstracted and fragmented discursive vignettes. These techniques rely upon an attentive readership and urge them to be active and imaginative. Consequently, maximum effort on the reader's side is necessary.

Progress is largely about the poet himself. The poet seems within a grip of the power that has controlled his soul, so that the poem displays a realm of disparate and opposing discourses. Though the poem goes around his own experience, it does not share his daily activities and emotions. In this sense, his attempt at being romantic has tragically failed. The poem offers a new paradigm of poetic form by breaking the cultural walls. It contains several stylistic features along with a radical turn to the politics of poetry. The poem not only refuses the current conventions, but also is apart from other oppositional poetic discourses. It shows what a long poem might include and address.

It regularly moves forward by undermining the contexts. Watten presents its radical form as an ethical necessity. Regular occurrence of the speaker "I" does not construct a subject, and Watten does not take it to be a thematic response to contemporary social and political retrenchment of failed utopia (*Progress*, "Preface" 7). The poem does not remain stable during its reading, but it offers an openness of interpretations. Like a typical postmodern text, the eventual meaning is constantly deferred and engages the historicity of its interpretations.

The fragmentary sentences do not bear connection with the neighboring units. They move like independent automobiles during the traffic-rush. But, when a loose logic that threads the sentences is met the story begins to appear dimly. The method of presentation, Blazer

observes, is something like a sudden leap from one train of thought to another conceptualization resulting in a derailment of language. The poem opens as:

Relax,

Stand at attention, and.

Purple snake stands out on

Porcelain tiles. The idea

Is the thing. Skewed by design... (21)

As a model, the four sentences of the opening stanza refer to four different concepts. However, they bear some dim connecting ideas. Use of the word “and” at the end of the first sentence resembles the use of this term in Pound’s *Cantos*. In both cases the term is no more than a foundational demand for further reading. The opening sentence itself makes the reader aware of his or her presence and participation.

The poem follows a tendency of resistance and epic strength. In a review of the poem Silliman indicates at its militant resistance of fictional devices that can not be summed up in a single quotation or paraphrase. Though *Progress* is a poem of resistance on the thematic level, it is composed of regular five line stanza patterns. This pattern is maintained not to honor the conventions of academia, but in order to reveal the fact that language and form are highly constraining. One has to be engaged with this “prison house” of language even without having a trust with it. The poem seeks to make the reader aware of this caged-state each resistant writer suffers within.

Another poetic work *Under Erasure* (1991) records the state of American society during the end of the Cold War. It offers an ongoing argument and constantly looks back to erase the past. In this work a prevalent amnesia or historical degradation of memory is shown. The poem “carries with it the seeds of its own forgetting—just as all utopian imaginings that drive history onward end up crashing in a form of cultural forgetfulness” (*Progress* “Preface” 13). It echoes the very nature of forgetting the contexts and experience found in the language system and the possibility of recovery. Representation is forcefully deferred in the poem. The most visible thematic issue of *Under Erasure* is “amnesia.” It presents the gradual process of forgetting the past—but leaving a record—as a solution to several social, cultural, and political problems. Showing the erasure of a moment by the next it reads, “*In the hysteria each present is/ Of our future,/ inscribing its past...*” (229). The poem further focuses on the necessary erasure of agony, “I remember a pain that must be continually erased...” (242).

The poem returns the cultural crisis to its past and present elements. End of the Cold War, Tiananmen massacre in China, fall of Berlin wall are indicted at several places. It demands a historical account of the events and reveals an impossibility of finding it. As the future always replaces the present, and the future too will be replaced by the next future, an epoch is erased by the next just keeping a record of the past.

Bad History (1998), another magisterial long poem, attempts to grasp the reality of the Gulf War 1991 against Iraq by tracing the cultural milieu that frequently causes the war. Begun on May 1, 1991—on the first anniversary of the Gulf War—this is one of the most important poetic works to have emerged out of the war. The poem is an example of how an experimental work of art can be founded over a social context. It shows that the formal innovations and the

models of cultural studies are reconcilable. Illustrating this particular war it traces the history of colonialism and empire in the Middle East.

The poem uses the media reporting of the war as a point of departure. CNN and other media, during the war, basically acted as extension of the military efforts. Being annoyed with those entire versions poet Jed Rasula declared that the only way to resist war was to abandon watching television. However, the Americans could not reach any consensus whether war could be resisted or not, and if yes in what ways. Using Rasula's demand of resisting war but refusing her only alternative, Watten has produced a remarkable poetic discourse from that war. Its resistance of war is so wide-ranging that Watten demands a direct and effective act of resistance, "Here an online editor objects that imitation of war in rapid displacement of incommensurate remarks is not an argument against war—It could likewise be a form of participation" (*Bad* 19). It means that just to feature war or talk about it is a form of support, not resistance.

Traditionally epic form was used to glorify the war and warriors, but Watten has just reversed it by writing a counter epic. Here, war has paralyzed the poet and the work wrestles against the war-mentality. Though *Bad History* is a poem about the Gulf War, it is not only that. The poem addresses several other aspects associated with the idea of war in general. The poem contains 30 individual prose units spanning 128 pages with 21 pages of endnotes. The first seven pieces in total 27 pages directly deal with the events of the war. Framed by an art review of "Philip Johnson's postmodern office building" and a financial prospectus this experimental prose poem is a genre-defying text. It is often read as a "Ba(r)d History" or a counter-epic of American trauma.

Bad History is not only a war resistant poem but also an experimental model of war resistant poetry. Presenting war as something more than war, it contains the entire historical and social conditions. It is not only about the Gulf War, but the difficulty of narrating war history. Through this particular war Watten brings all America-involved wars together; the WW II to Vietnam and Cold War. It resists war with the thesis that the state of preparedness for war in reality constitutes the war. As a counter-epic it maintains the Poundian idea that an epic is a poem containing history. But it is also a history that includes poem. Indeed, the poem performs a job of containing history and resisting war.

Bad History avoids the image-economy and lyrical lineation found in mainstream poetry. Instead of space-time miniaturization found in lyrical poetry this work spreads over extended time and space as found in epics. The epics sing of victory and patriotism; it deals with the war commanders and weapons. Like *Cantos* and *Maximus* it contains a collage of different texts, voices, and narratives. After all it is a work of art, not a factual truth. It urges the Americans to think of war from the other's perspective too.

It also stands against the lyrical aestheticization of horror that serves the purpose of bourgeois consumption. Countering the war both in form and content, in extension, the poem indicates the global financial war which is the real cause of all wars. To resist war this poem engages in some irrationals too. Though it resists war in an innovative way, it does not offer an alternative history. Using poetry as a mode of theoretical inquiry it articulates a productive negativity.

Watten explores the concept of "poet-critic" and puts forward his own career and creative work as examples. Indeed, his poetry is frankly engaged with politics and several socio-

cultural issues of contemporary living. It is in agreement with his evaluation of the relationship of poetry and politics that “Poetry extends itself by its own means, in the act of writing, in public readings, and as a published text, into the political context” (*Total* 106). The politics of his poetry is, thus, obvious on both levels—content and form.

Negativity to Constructivism and Utopia

Watten’s avant-garde is fully associated with negativity as an element of literary and cultural production. It emerges from a negative moment of refusal of the culture. Explicitly oppositional politics, self negativity by withdrawal from society and radical reconstructions of the generic formalities are significant features of such an avant-garde negativity. At times, the forms of negativity are unpredictable and creative. However, Watten is not the first writer to make use of negativity in poetry. Yet, Watten has experimented with the trend on some new levels.

One of the significant aspects of negativity in his writing is developed through non-narrative. He believes that non-narrative as a moment of negativity can undermine a species of ideology (“Nonnarrative” 210). In such writing the self-canceling subjectivity is crucial. It is not simply an undoing, interruption, or denial of narrative. Instead, it compromises a discursive mode discarding a single form of discourse. In this method, dissociation of thematization and technique is central (“Nonnarrative” 212). Pound’s *Cantos*, allegorized history in Olson’s *The Maximus Poems*, and Zukofsky’s “A” are typical pioneer examples of non-narrative poetic works. The language school’s new sentence applies non-narrative to undermine narrative.

The strong presence of negativity in *Bad History* can be noticed in its oppositional politics. It loudly resists the state policy of being prepared for war and the offensive attacks.

Similarly, its trend of genre-defy resulting in a counter epic reinforces the negativity from the perspective of form.

Progress reveals negativity in its stated disagreements with the entire system. The use of a radical open form as an aesthetic of interruption marks its methodical negativity. It also concentrates on the negative determination of cultural crisis. Watten opines in the preface “...the poem imagines its social position and literary perspective in a form of *negative* determination” (6). As futurity is its guiding principle, by projecting the negative he wishes to attain a progressive and affirmative state. A better future has been imagined over the foundation of negativity.

The theme of negativity is abundantly used in *Under Erasure* too. The poem begins with negation itself, “*Against a sum already divided/ A chain of events,/ as on a screen...*” (225). What the poem is going to show is “against.” It is against something that is already fragmented. Afterwards, it is mentioned that the chain of events in history and in the present resists totality that too is already fragmented. Negativity appears through the process of forgetting the past, “*In a process we remember to forget...*” (225).

Watten’s negativity, to some degree, is aesthetics of interruption or the open form. They have to go together because “... it would not be possible to envisage an open work without negativity.” (*Constructivist*, “Introduction” xxiii). Negativity is used in order to promote a revolutionary change, as he says “... I identify the constructivist moment at the site of a stabilized negativity, whose values range from revolution to social alienation” (“Introduction” xxx). Such shift or negativity is a move from art to social discourse.

The radical aesthetic form of negativity serves revolutionary utopianism. It is a point of convergence and also an enactment of negativity. The constructivist moment is, thus, identified with a social negativity through the experience of rupture and an act of refusal. At the same time it invokes a promising future with a horizon of possibility and an imagination of participation. Constructivism stabilizes crisis as it puts art into production toward imaginary ends. It asks to think of the world in impossible ways. Such foregrounding of negativity peeps for a society with new perceptions and models for a positive future. “The constructivist moment is thus a confrontation of aesthetic form with social negativity,” Watten puts light on this aspect of utopia, “both to disclose the nature of the system and to develop an imagined alternative” (“Introduction” xxii). Thus, radical literature intends to give a glimpse of order by focusing on the moments of disclosure.

The total discussion, references, language techniques, and the method of presentation lead *Progress* towards the imagination of a utopian state. In a context of Ireland the poem imagines a perfect place as:

In Ireland,

a cubist utopia on

Perfect tracks and wheels

Where weather is spring like

Nine-tenths of the year.... (*Progress* 152)

The perfection of tracks and wheels indicate the ongoing social system. The beauty of the spring season—peace, progress, equality, and harmony in the social system— almost throughout the

year is what he intends to experience in his ideal state. The poet is aware that such condition might not be within the range of possibility, yet he keeps the belief, "The imagination is my wound,/ I/ Shall only want impossible" (*Progress* 173).

Bad History is a combination of a radical art and utopian visions. Its refusal of the journalistic bad history is to enhance the formation of a good history. Though the imagined alternative is not directly present, there is a hint of a utopian instinct.

War, Horror, and Resistance: Politics of "Able to Be All"

Watten believes that every time is always an era between two wars, and his poetry demonstrates a formal resistance of war. To develop a distrust of it he explains the horrible scenes of the battlefield, air attacks, and explosions. War is abused by showing several types of devastations it invites. As a pacifist, he imagines a state without battles.

Progress makes frequent direct comments on several political issues. The matters of war and horror, governance system of state, performance of great political figures, issues of class conflict, international politics, and human rights issues are elaborately discussed. The poem whole-heartedly opposes the idea of war. In order to eliminate destructive wars it is engaged in revealing the abuses of battling.

I undelimit knife of the times.

War is resident vocabulary.

The academics are pigeons

With recessive traits,

Breeders.... (*Progress 56*)

It is suggested that the development of history is not under control; every phase of history is under the domination of war. The academics who oppose war are helpless like pigeons. This has remained a tendency from the past to the present.

Watten believes that over engagement with war has not only weakened the ideals of the state but it has also seriously damaged the ideals.

And doubt it, to control by dis-

Orientation.

Eisenhower

Did not come to power.

Terms for the period, state....

Figure. State is served from

States of affairs? You

Speak for themselves,

Materials,

the voice comes out.... (23)

He opines that political power is gained by disorienting the people and he raises a doubt whether political power honestly serves the nation, and also urges to give voice to the voiceless. Watten seems to believe that if the real conditions of the people at the margins are spoken, they will automatically get their voice. Because of the repression of public voice the state mechanism has been weakened.

Progress is full of sights and sounds of terror. The assaults in the battlefield, massacre, aircraft bombing and crashes are accidents are scattered throughout:

Equals high hurdles analogy.

Thou shalt give first aid

To victims.

A mile away,

A helicopter down in a hedge.... (43)

The stanza pictures a horrible scene of war. In the assault area people are being killed and injured. Some volunteers are providing the first aid treatment to the injured people in an area, whereas in a nearby section the bomb-dropping helicopter has been destroyed by a launcher. In the next section of that area:

The sky retaliates by expansion.

The other end of a mirror,

At solstice,

a rifle range.

Speak now! In fifteen minutes.... (45)

It is again a scene during the aerial attack. The sky is showing the forthcoming distress; it is repaying the injury by expanding. The next sight is of the sun at the furthest equator (21 June, and 22 December). The enemy is near the range. So the speaker urges to make an urgent speech because it is uncertain what happens after fifteen minutes. Repeatedly the poem indicates the factors responsible for such destruction and horror:

Collapse to shoot.

Followed by

Growth of finance capital

Turning on to blow air jets

In straight up and down lines.... (71)

Along with the display of the horror of bullets and fighter planes this stanza indicates the market system as responsible for all the damage and destruction. Instantly, the poem predicts devastating attacks on the centers of contemporary civilization.

Red, white, and blue in French.

The Empire State Building

In a bottle of glue.

To be

A city destroyed by potential...

Where life ends in an equation. (72)

Watten opines that the great building is vulnerable and can be a spot of massacre. Indeed, the attack on the WTC twin towers in 2001 is a case in point and testifies to Watten's point. The possibility of urban destruction is shown in the latter part too.

Progress talks about the horror felt by the offending party too. Regarding the dropping down of the fighter aircraft it states, "I is an other/ In accumulations of clouds / To make an ambush for pilots.... / By operator seated at controls" (167). The poem, indeed, extensively projects the horror of attack, counter-attack, aircraft explosion, and accidents. Some other instances of such description are, "While a bomb goes off in bed." (35), "A target to be aimed at/ Is the object of his attack." (36), "Such sunlight the enemy thrills." (37), "Soldiers leave trenches,/ advance.../ On a memorable fancy, to desert." (38-9), "Sound is to territory,/ as/ Firing weapons is to talk," (43) "A version of every missile/ That sent up,/ must come down." (200), "23 of 114 men have to be shot/ To make a point" (204), and so on.

The horrible consequences of war are touchingly shown in *Under Erasure* too. In this poem Watten sees the innocent African kids as the victims of war. About their helplessness because of the parents' murder, the poem reads, "*And the lost Children of Ethiopia/ Can phone home,/ but no one to answer...*" (280). The devastation of war is not limited merely to death and destruction, but a long term corruption of humanity itself.

As a counter epic *Bad History* defies the nationalist narrative and presents the war history as bad. As the poem is not based on witness, it enjoys the ease to defy the tradition of anti-war poetry. So, it begins another tradition in war resistance poetry that is written from the home-front, far away from the warfront. Traditional anti-war poems used to respond only the event itself, and ignored the conditions that caused the war. But, *Bad History* defies the conventional subjective position of the nationalist epic.

The poem's inaugural Part A "The 1980s"—Philip Johnson's "postmodern office building"—does not have much connection with war. The building stands for the postmodern cultural spirit. Discussion of the war is suspended. The description is rather critical. The use of references like "ironic control," "disavowal of any consequences," "little tomb," "prison bars" (*Bad 1*) develop a feeling of gloom and hopelessness. The observation "cynically juxtaposing corporate-induced localism" (*Bad 1*) is a critique of market. Likewise, "the artificer has reduced all construction" (*Bad 1*) makes fun of the architecture that anticipates the war. The opening establishes an epic-like impersonal communal voice.

Following the Part A, "The 1980s," the first section bears the book title "Bad History." This section not only enters the issue of war but also goes into its philosophical interpretations. At this moment the poet makes his presence but without violating the objective supremacy.

A bad event happened to me, but its having occurred became even more complicated in my thinking about it.... Take the War, for example; I no longer know for certain which war is meant.... It is always "the era between two wars." So there was a very long war before a period of time in which that war had just been over for a very long time--even though it

took its place as immediately preceding that time. Then a very short war called that very long time to question. (*Bad* 5-6)

The observation comes from an indeterminate worried voice, and the locus of discussion (war) too is indeterminate. No specific war is mentioned to develop a sense of an ongoing permanent war without an ending. It also reveals the confusion of conscious Americans who are living at the empire's center without opposing the war. The poem, afterwards, exposes a saddening truth of the war campaign as, "Only later did we find out that the success rate for Patriot missiles was only 6 percent. How can we be so thoroughly trained to disbelieve the evidence of our senses?" (9). It is a betrayal by the state and the media.

Another section "Iraqi" traces the differences between the Arab and non-Arab civilians entangled in the crossfire. It features several examples of inhuman assaults against the civilians and their massacre. Not only the ordinary people of Iraq but the citizens of other neighboring countries are murdered in the attacks. At one point Watten defines the Iraqi identity as, "Iraqi: various scenarios for wearers of a mark of distinction and/or shame" (15). Afterwards, he opines that identification is a risky job mentioning an illustration of a murder. It is the story of a Jordanian woman whose husband, driving a cab to Amman, was killed by an American machine-gun because he looked like an Iraqi. It is an instance of the repression of identity and atrocity.

In the fourth section "Museum of War," Watten criticizes the ever-going preparation for war. Here, Watten is talking not about a physical museum but a kind of virtual museum. He also mentions several heartbreaking scenes where the innocent people met their untimely deaths. In a mistaken bombing at a public shelter "at least 300 children and parents were incinerated in a structure we knew had been built for civilians..." (19). After a next attack, "...a flatbed truck

containing nine bodies, their hair and clothes burned off, skin incinerated by heat so intense it melted the windshield” (20). These are, indeed, horrible scenes of human atrocity.

The poem mixes Marxism and romantic lyricism particularly in section V, “Intellectuals.” At this moment there is a shift from war picture to meditations on resistance and irresponsibility. Watten opines that it is the duty of intellectuals to save the masses from destruction, but ironically they are busy finding their stability on the instability of the common people.

The sixth section, “Against All,” again presents the agony of war in a philosophical way. “Always already, all wars are ready. But this is the war of all against all. The war has begun again, the war to renew all wars. Everywhere is war. Echoes answer war already—echoes always answering war. ‘War is not the answer.’ We need to escalate!” (25). Indeed, the wars are scattered everywhere. The weapons do not fight themselves, but the war comes from the human mind. No war is fought against a particular enemy; any war brings disasters to all either directly or indirectly. A war is initiated by another previous war, and war can never be an answer to war. So, the resistance to war ought to be practiced. Indeed, this poem is a war of words against war.

American poets have played a unique role in shaping and representing war resistance and the contemporary American peace movement during a period of imperial power exercise. Poetry, and its counterpart song, has been a very popular and successful medium of war resistance and peace movements in the American society. Watten’s poetry too is a significant contribution to the peace movement which is obviously an essential aspect of a healthy democratic society. Though the war resistance poetry bears a permanent oppositional status, its

immediate effect falls as a barricade upon the next “necessary war.” Obviously, the measurement of the peace movement’s success should not be based on to what extent it helped avoiding war, but it should be based on its consistent efforts of revealing the warfare evils, and the abuses of imperial military culture. As far as the role of poetry as a component of war resistance and peace movement is concerned, the evaluation ought to be made on the basis of how much it has contributed to consciousness-raising against war. By arguing against the mythologies of pro-war discourse these poems encourage the citizens to distrust their own deeply-held knowledge about war. Watten’s poems convincingly perform this job.

In Watten’s war resistance poetry, language is a symbolic action with poetic implications. Here, poetry is used as a medium and a tradition of the imagination of conscience. Poetry’s capacity of attending language and rhetorical possibilities makes it successful to inspire peace activism and interrogate war resistance. These poems can be equally celebrated by both the groups standing for and against war. Particularly, they encourage the readers to listen to the other. They open the door to experiencing the other as Watten writes in *Progress* “I am able to be all” (152).

Class Issue and Social Commentary

Watten’s deep interest in class, contempt of capitalism, and pro-proletariat attitudes can be observed in his poetic works. The early map of such business appears in “Writing and Capitalism” included in the 1979 issue of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*. The whole text is:

What is that question doing? Do I get credit? 

I have many ideas about my work and capitalism. 

When first I opened my eyes, I saw. Before that I had structure. 7

Yes, writing is social. I am immortal because middle class. 7

I don't want to perpetrate bad ideas.

1 Form is identical to content.

2 So does everyone.

3 Words work.

4. The petit-bourgeois has no class interest of his own.

5 Editing is act. (50)

This unique piece of writing hints at several issues and ideas related to class politics. The work published after a half decade, *Progress*, shows sympathies with the working class people.

Likewise, it reveals a general distrust of the elites and the middle class people. About the middle class bourgeoisie it comments, "And nothing is more wretched.../ Than articles of middle class" (*Progress* 114). These articles are abused to the uttermost possible degree. In addition, the term "articles" is used as a pun to mean the "goods," as well as the "writing". Whatever may be the indication, it is antagonistic to the workers. As an instance of the dominant class's mockery of the workers, the poem reveals:

Rule Britannia playing off set

As Kissinger's hat trick

To the ruling class,

trash

To appear as John Foster Dulles....

And they have to do their work

In order to be punished.

I react,

Wrongly construed

As parts scattered on ground.... (130)

The first person speaker "I" stands for the working class, which is a disunited and fragmented force. Therefore, this class is unable to resist the pro-elite programs and activities. The state policies are for the dominants, not for the proletariats. In addition, the terms "off set" and "hat trick" are used with the intention of punning. Borrowing the very terms from economic philosophy the poem further reads, "Girders/ Built by aggressive superstructure a base...." (215). And also indicates at the inevitability of class struggle to eliminate the bias and exploitation, "Do not stop./ Up to the level / Of victory in the struggle/ For representation on TV" (117).

Under Erasure too makes frequent queries and comments on class issues. In the overall discussion the poet inclines towards the proletariats and makes fun of the bourgeois. The observations like, "While bourgeois tabloids are produced at a rate" (242) show the meanness of this class. In the same context the poem further mentions, "A tortured, desolate landscape

suffused with power/ They make more memory in continuing to travel along/ Bourgeois guilt in every object of ambiguous scale..." (249). It is not only the landscape but the society and culture are also being damaged by the bourgeois domination. The memory of such degradation has been a common feeling among the bourgeois people. The achievement of bourgeois and big capitalists has always been opposed to the workers. The poem shows such opposition as "Here is a blank circle that can stand for anything/ The world upside down being the bosses' revolution/ In a contradictory production to be unmade again..." (268). Thus, opposing the worker's gain the dominants head for regression and restoration of the exploitative system.

Progress deals with the issues of workers; *Under Erasure* is engaged with different forms of exploitation and segregation of the lower strata people. It constantly keeps the owners and workers in antagonistic relationship. The pathetic condition of the inferior workers unbearable even to survive is shown with a direct approach.

The message in headlines you could not accept

They think antagonism to see workers on strike

History strung like beads it counts to replace

In an uncertain diagnosis the prognosis repeats

Family of tombstone carvers' motto: "We survive!" (235)

When the workers go on strike, it becomes unbearable to the industrialists. They try to oppress the struggles so rudely that the news is itself difficult to believe. It also reveals the dismissal of

the factory mishap that caused the labor casualty as “*Publicity,/ as if each were unaware/ Of an industrial accident in 1946...*” (239).

Like the direct treatment of class variation, *Progress* extensively deals with various social issues related to class concept. At the front of such concerns the problems of workers, labor exploitation, abuses of market system, and stock market appear. The statement “Giants of labor hold up chains” (*Progress* 58) itself indicates that the poem is going to elaborately discuss that the labor sector is under the strict control of corporate tycoons. The poem further equates labor with total production. Indeed, any production without labor is unimaginable. Therefore, the ideas which favor this means of production will defeat the opponent. There is also an indication of the labor’s devaluation in the market system despite the fact that labor is equal to the product. As Marx said the workers are going to win the world, Watten reinforces such possibility. The capitalists—who trade up on labor and the workers—are going to lose the world.

The poem also features the problems of factory workers and their exploitations:

A temporary advance

As current automation plan

Expels workers from factory....

The factory moves to Oklahoma,

An open-air fire obscured

Against dark green trees,

Brown dirt. (132)

The entry of any automatic machines in the factories is sure to replace the human hands. As a result, the workers become unemployed and the owners restore their control over the system. In addition to being a critique of capitalist hegemony and sympathy for the unemployed workers, the passage shows concern for environmental degradation and the assault of factory pollution over nature too. Watten is also bothered by the underpayment to factory workers.

Salary \$750 with no benefits,

Rent \$460 with no lease.

In Cuba the rent is cheap,

Especially in the army,

but...

\$50 a day would raise my joy

To an ecstatic peak. (156)

Using factual data the passage shows that nearly two third of their income goes just on shelter. Watten compares the expense of an American worker with that of a Cuban. He also suggests doubling their salary which will enable them to get \$50 per day. After some more discussions, he jumps to a radical solution that will end up all forms of exploitations and poverty. "Here is private property,/ to be/ Expropriated for public use" (168). If the private property hoarded by the capitalists is spent on public interests several social problems get automatically eliminated.

The poem also indicates the causes of workers' problems. These solely come from capitalism that is manipulated by the market system and the share market.

Because I am in prison.

Wheels

Under rollicking madhouses

Dance to commodity market

In search of feedback element.... (107)

The producers (workers) and the lower strata consumers are in the prison of the market system. The big business houses are totally focused on commodity market. They run on the basis of the feedbacks received from the market without any regard to the workers and the consumers too. The poem further illustrates their tendency through the very jargons of the share market. Here, Watten is trying to reveal the fact that the vulnerability of society is also the vulnerability of the share market system and capitalism.

In addition to general class contradictions in society *Under Erasure* also regards the abuses of the market system.

Spiraling up toward corporate life

A reflex of nature,

the power of loss...

In democratic lines,

protected speech

Specifying rights to their property... (267)

Like the rule of nature capitalist market culture encourages the uplift of financial position. It looks only on capital accumulation keeping the eyes closed to social and cultural matters. Such financial upgrading in reality is not a progress but a loss. The capitalist culture in the name of democracy just battens the capital hoarding principle.

Progress talks about human dignity and rights as a part of social commentary. The poem raises the issues of freedom, identity, and voice. For Watten freedom is the fundamental form of human rights. The freedom of man should not be violated at any cost. He writes, "One man in a cage/ Equal to a thousand birds/ Not to be free in nature.../ Soldiers fire cannons to scare/ Birds" (138-9). The stanza declares the superiority of human beings and the necessity of liberty and dignity. The "man in a cage" is the projection of political imprisonment. Such practice of control is bad; the birds in cage and not free in nature is an evil act from the perspective of ecology. The soldiers' scaring the birds with cannons suggests terror both in politics and ecology. Watten also reveals his concern for what the immigrants from weaker countries are getting in America. "Peasants from Uruguay on super-/ Human express trains wait/ For underwear to be checked" (200). The extract shows the violation even of fundamental rights.

Another significant feature of human rights is getting voice or to be heard. The hindrances to expression always deprive the people of their inalienable rights. The poem unfolds, "While a voice fills the room,/ The speech stands alone" (33). When an authoritative

voice dominates then the speech of ordinary people gets paralyzed. In poetry it happens, and also in politics.

As an extension of social commentary, *Progress* at times features the hopeless and dull life in the metropolitan centers. "I live in New York./ Nonsense/ Neither hopes nor fears" (63). Indeed, the city life has lost its charm because of several disturbing factors. One of them is the widespread pollution as the poem names, "Traffic and noise of equipment" (74). Likewise, life is bothered there by different cultural disturbances. About marriage it mentions, "A story of deaths at weddings" (66). The expression raises a series of complex questions; Death of what? The people attending the wedding? Death of the people who are getting married, or the death of marriage itself in divorce? Anyway Watten is criticizing the vulnerability of cultural practices in urbanized American society.

International Affairs

In addition to the concerns with US politics and the universal issues of class opposition, *Progress* contains observations of international politics. The pictures projected talk about the crises in different nations on the one hand, and on the other American interference there. The poem reads, "In Peru/ A romantic can have visions,/ Limited by money and food" (32). Peru during that time was under the whirl of Shining Path insurgency. The insurgents have a utopian vision in the mind like the romantics do. Their ideal is opposed to, bothered by, and also promoted by the existing starvation in the nation. The word "limited" again is a pun, meaning "insufficiency" and "company."

The poem further mentions, "Leveling any message to be / / As an equivalent to state./ The revenge of the weak" (127). To offer a critique of the misuse of power the autocracy of an

individual in the name of democracy has been insulted. The italic '*I*' stands for American government and in specific the powerful President. In the surrounding lines it is shown that the weaker nations like Panama are under the political oppression of powerful nations like the USA. The poem shows Watten's distress at the nations being split and suffering from civil war, particularly the division of Germany. Opposing the American policy of international interference he desires the unification of Germany. The German people's wish for and necessity of unification is being disturbed by the national and international vested political interests. People want unification but the governments are acting like cruel monsters. The split of the nation is absurd here; two bodies and one head.

Politics is observed also through the angle of international hegemonic influence of capitalism and imperialism. In the context of Taiwan the poem reads:

An angry farmer carrying a book

And a stick,

to learn what

An imperialist in Taiwan is,

Why not remember the lesson.... (146)

The farmers get the lessons about nationality throughout life. But, amid those lessons they suffer from the hegemony of capitalist and imperialist market system. The "book" indicates the attempt at knowing whereas the opposite idea "stick" reflects anger, and struggle. The political concerns of Taiwan with China and America have placed this nation in difficulty.

The poem contains the names of about two dozen different nations of the world. These names are taken in reference to various political issues, events, discourses, and times. Some such nations are Mexico, Canada (24), Korea (26), Peru (32), England (46, 106), Vietnam (53), South Africa (56), Tunisia (65), Ethiopia, Hong Kong (67), Morocco (69), Japan (76), Spain (92), Mongolia (93), Ireland (152), Cuba (156), France (164), Uruguay (200), Singapore (206), Afghanistan (209), Burma (212) and so on.

Under Erasure too explores several domestic and international political issues. Focusing the “necessity of forgetting” the poem reads, “We stormed the citadel under banner of amnesia/ Winning absolute victory over the Germans in 1943/ Fantasy that could leave nothing out but the pain...” (226). The battle against Germany was begun with an expectation that it will be forgotten soon. But, even the victory did not bring any joy. It just left sorrow. In addition to the inclusion of international issues the stanza opposes the very idea of war. The world political matters are more openly discussed in the context of Soviet leader V. I. Lenin.

His center of power locates our dispersed parents

Leading family members toward empire after defenses

Became promotional leaflets to be bombarded by mail...

Splits concept from state,

Regulating

Trains to a military perfection... (278)

The rising power of the USSR initially directed America to become an imperial power. But, eventually the military power exercise invited quarrels and devastations to both sides. The poem also combines the political pollution with the decay of nature, "Because we destroyed environs of Leningrad in 1942...."(166). The politics-guided change of the city of Leningrad affected not only the cultural scene but also the ecological elements. The poem's engagement with international political issues can be gauged in terms of the inclusion of several other places like England (227), Beirut (239), Nicaragua (270), Ethiopia (280), Berlin (280), Deutschland (282).

Likewise, *Bad History* is an obvious example of American invasion of Iraq and interference in the politics of the Middle East. Indeed, speaking against inhuman war and oppressors, capitalism and imperialism, and sympathizing with the repressed and working class, Watten has been "able to be all" as declared in *Progress*:

I am able to be all.

Progress?

To identify a body by pain

Of cultural space inscribed

In habits of comportment.... (152)

Politics of Form and Techniques

Watten's poetry is rich and innovative enough to collaborate with its thematic resistance. The collage structure composed of ideas taken from other disciplines, philosophies, and leaderships present a grand challenge against what the writing is directed. Critical attitudes

and metaphoric commentaries are simultaneously used there. Mathematical formations and philosophically thoughtful assertions appear as Watten signature. All these tools and techniques make the readers active.

Progress at places makes use of the italic font. The italic is often put together with the concepts of other disciplines, “*Walk I one mile @ 45° angle...*” (*Progress* 37). Ideas from mathematics and science are abundantly used; “Nine minus seven equals two” (78). After sometime the poem reads, “I get an A minus,/ typical/ Of men of educated class/ Residing in Southern England...” (106). Amid the straightforward discussion of examination results the pun of the term “class” is emphasized. It may mean the educational grade as well as the economic status. Thus, pun appears as a major tool of language manipulation.

The higher forms of mathematical propositions are used to talk about dialectics, struggles, and utopian changes.

(+) where a plus sign indicates

(—) a minus sign in reverse,

Each unit a multiplicity

Of events,

counted on a line.... (*Progress* 186)

The socio-political events take place not only in addition and subtraction form but also in multiplication. The poem further reads, “Substituting graduate students/ For revolutionaries,/ the Y/ Of Xs becoming an X of Ys” (189). The late-teen and post-teen university students are the

most potential components of revolutionary changes. In fact, they work as the true vehicles of revolution like the very common sign $X = Y$.

In order to make the notions stronger Watten engages his poems with philosophically heightened expressions. In *Progress*, the abstract philosophical idea “skepticism,” for instance, has been defined as “a social disease” (52). He also questions the rules of nature and law, “Little fish eat big fish then/ The entire pond,/ sun dries” (179). The reversal of the general belief has come in the sense of number. The elite class in little number exploits the big number workers, and afterwards the whole system. The decay of nature appearing at surface stands for the ruin of the social system. In several other occasions the poem includes philosophically rich poetic expressions.

Satire and humor are used at places. *Progress*, for example, contains several satirical and humorous comments. It satirizes the narrowness of knowledge as “Frog in bucket speaks of well....” (75). Similarly, the fragility and weaker structure of social system has been ridiculed in the statement “Ephemeral as a card palace” (113).

Watten’s poetry is engaged with the politics of poetic form by deviating from the existing conception about it. So, there are numerous comments on the definition, nature, and expected role of poetry. In *Progress* he writes, “The poetry,/ by/ Making him think certain ways....” (22), and “The materials of poetry / Are prose as I render it” (99). His idea about poetry is that it should make people think, and this genre should cover the elements of prose too. *Under Erasure* also contains commentaries on poetry and poetics. It urges the reader to meditate on the nature and role of poetry, “What is a poem? Try to find a negative for *this*/ Another holds an open scroll and you read within...” (232).

Watten's writing maintains a dense structure of collagist composition. *Progress* gets its collagist recognition by its use of the ideas from different disciplines. It bears an inter-textual nature by echoing the beginnings of Silliman's *Tjanting* and "Demo" respectively with the statements "Not this is not only a text" (176) and "This is only a test" (*Progress* 177). Likewise, it has an extensive incorporation of philosophers, political leaders—both American and foreign—and other figures. Dozens of times *Progress* talks about the political performances of the state leaders. Some major philosophers it contains are Nietzsche (33), Aristotle (69), Spinoza (73), Marx and Engels (110), Descartes (147) and so on. It also talks about the policies of the US presidents like Kennedy (56), Nixon (62), and Roosevelt (83). And the foreign political leaders it refers to are Stalin (21), Churchill (39), Trotsky (50), Mussolini (71), Brezhnev (77), Khrushchev (85), Chiang Kai-Shek (87), Franco (91), Lenin (95), Ho Chi Minh (98), Napoleon (124), Castro (190) and so on. Most of the political leaders dealt with are radicals and communists.

Under Erasure makes an extensive use of the italic print. About a third of the poem is italicized. The normal font and italics not only separate the ideas and issues, but also create dialectic between these two. Three line stanzas with irregularly regular alternation of italicized slim construction and normal compact form create dialectic of two shapes. Furthermore, some stanzas bear some deviations too. Some normal font words occur within italic stanzas, and some italic words occur within the normal font stanzas. It suggests the partial and momentary intrusion of one class into another.

Under Erasure uses the speeches of people within quotation marks. These statements are not much allusive, though they create a collagist difficulty. Comments on chess game are used several times like "(Knight jumps over pawn for any player of the game)" (263). The moves and the pieces often denote political meanings. Likewise, the inclusion of references to the

sword of Damocles (258), Kant (274), Kierkegaard (275), Whitman (276), Lenin (277), Bush (283), Byron, and Napoleon (284) strengthen the collage structure.

Bad History abundantly applies the language found in critical writing, press, dream narration, romantic lyric and financial prospectus. It combines several discourses like art criticism, media, lyric, financial management. Sentence is used as the central formal device instead of line. The non-narrative and cross-discursive techniques from multiple and often disparate discourses are combined and deformed too. The conventions of scholarly works and that of newspapers are used together. The centered newspaper-like column leaves large margins at both sides. The white margins are unspoken thoughts that are required to be inferred by the reader. Similarly, the hidden preceding and following column increase a sense of missing. The large annotative entries at the book's end make it clear that Watten has borrowed the ideas from extensive sources of different disciplines. In totality, he has skillfully performed a politics of form to fit the poem's newness on the thematic level.

His works always reveal serious demands on reader's attention. In both *Progress* and *Under Erasure* the stanzas end with ellipses. The ellipses indicate that there is no true completion. Such incompleteness is to be worked out by the reader. The ongoing continuity is the vacancy left for the active participation of the reader. The pronouns like I, we, you, he, they are unspecific. These pronouns which do not follow any noun are regularly changing from place to place. But, the readers with the exercise of inference can assume their indications from the context.

Bad History applies several innovative techniques. The use of footers, newspaper-like columns, and the following appendix are some noteworthy examples of the formal innovations.

The footnotes mark various dates like Jan. 16, 1991; March 1, 1991; Jan. 18, 1990; April 19, 1993; and finally Dec. 27, 1993. The entries of the dates are given with forward and background leaps. The first date 16 Jan. 1991 is clearly the day when bombing started but the other dates do not speak for themselves. Relevance of these dates should be investigated and understood by the reader. As a suggestive critique of war details on media, there is no direct relationship between the content and the dates mentioned. The non-referred dates try to create a historical counter narrative. When the reader tries to solve the problem he participates in the making of history itself. For example, 1 March 1991 is the next day of the official declaration of war's end. Similarly, the appendix of secondary sources and column structure defy the mainstream rule-governance. In sum, the method resists the determined language of official history.

The cover page of *Bad History* itself expects active participation of the reader. The cover page image, art work titled "Decoy #1" by Michal Rovner, creates a problem of interpretation. At the left margin, there is an unclear human figure raising both arms. The color used is gray, and no other thing is visible. It is not easy to say whether the figure is male or female, front part or back, Iraqi or American, showing victory or surrender. To some extent it is like an aerial picture of a shooting-destination that is to be ruined by the launcher. Such blocking of particularity urges the reader to be active and imagine on his own behalf. Furthermore, the cover illustration resembles the approach reader should apply to go through the poem. As in the case of the cover page, the meaning of the poem depends on the inference skill of the reader. Like the picture the poem avoids decisiveness and a narrative.

To recapitulate, the politics of Watten's writing begins with its project of linking poetry with other disciplines. It expands the frontiers of poetry by including the external world. In addition, Watten's theoretical writing or poetics, and his poetry are almost alike. The theory

supports the project of poetry, and poetic writing illustrates the theoretical principles formulated. As Watten himself identifies a constructivist author in terms of two aspects—negativity and fantasy—his poetry does both the jobs. Indeed, his poetry and poetics work like sensitized eyes as claimed in *Progress* “And I was one thing,/ A Sensitized eye in society” (163).

Theorizing Watten

Watten’s way of questioning the traditional form of poetry and experiment with new ones gets validity from Foucault’s assertion that the dominant narratives are not stable. However, his rejection of the subjective poetry maintains a radical break from the Foucauldian premise of the author function. Instead, like Bakhtin’s heteroglossia his poetry incorporates multiple unidentified voices and styles. With numerous breaks from the dominant mainstream poetry and incorporation of extra literary discourses, it meets the height of carnivalization. Unlike, Bakhtin’s proposition his poetry fully regards the reader. There is no trace of an individual controlling the discourse. As Watten’s epic poems like *Bad History* are solely about the recent issues they escape Bakhtin’s suspected epic distance. Furthermore, this very feature rejects the inner harmony between man and art advocated by Lukács. Watten’s attempts at establishing man’s relation with the real world, opposition of subjectivity and reader’s alienation bring his poetry close to Lukács’ idea of critical reality. Likewise, his form reflects the program contained in content.

Watten’s practice of relating aesthetics to social history approximates Jameson’s idea of metacommentary. His texts function as the symbolic acts of real socio-political conditions. With this very characteristic his poetry meets the level of politically correct literature as defined by

Benjamin. Like Benjamin's storyteller he counsels without forcing the message to the reader. It keeps a due distance between subject and object.

Watten's dissatisfaction with the prevailing hegemonic practice and its ridicule parallels him with Adorno's cultural critic. His poetry contains dialectical elements both in form and content which resemble Adorno's social dialectic. Because of much emphasis on negativity Watten's poetry escapes the possibility of being a mere commodity of culture industry as discussed by Horkheimer and Adorno. Instead, bearing the features of "great art" it is engaged with self-negation and criticism of hegemonic repression. As Horkheimer assigned the job of social function to philosophy, Watten's poetry criticizes the prevalent.

Chapter IX

Resistance and Innovation in Charles Bernstein's Poetry

An Alternative Poetics

Charles Bernstein believes the poetic authority to have been made, not received. Being dissatisfied with contemporary American poetry, he ventures to experiment with an alternative poetics. He regards conventional poetry only as “high culture” of the mass. It bears an attractive shell and stays in tune. The Beat poetry is the only postwar American poetry that entered into mass culture. But, primarily focusing on social attitudes most of the Beat poets abandoned the textual practice as a discardable pulp. Therefore, refusing the American poetry’s tendency of “suburbanization;” Bernstein takes into consideration both the highs and lows of culture. He wants to bring into poetry the things that seem clumsy or awkward, and also that seem overblown like that of Hart Crane.

Bernstein holds a strong distaste of tightly bound, aestheticized, very tasteful poetry. Giving the reason for such likes and dislikes he says, “Partly, it’s a reaction formation regarding my inability or unwillingness to see myself as being assimilated within a ‘high’ culture of refinement” (Cummings 11). He favors the type of poetry that articulates meaning without using the hooks and ladders, tackle and bait as used by mass media. He also experiments on form, language, and techniques. Consequently, Bernstein has become an outspoken poet, critic, and spokesperson of an alternative poetry. In this arena he has become a “name,” being the main propagandist for the version of the poetry that language school proposes. Lazer views Bernstein as a metonymic substitution for language poetry, and his poetry recedes into a general discussion of the sociology of American poetry-culture (“Charles” 35).

Bernstein offers not a single model of poetry, but a number of poetics. Various experimental works—that he rather prefers to call “non traditional forms”—serve diverse social

purposes. For him poetry is a process of thought that offers a model for the exchange of ideas. His poems stand against the idea that poetry is a simple form of self-expression. Instead of self-expression they indulge in “self-alteration.” They are not about ideas, but they come from ideas and even produce ideas. His poetry does not sing of felicities and dance with facilities but it dramatizes the incapability of contemporary civilization. In this regard, Joris opines that an exploration of the relations between aesthetics and politics is central to his writing. He attempts to link the Anglo-American poetry and philosophical criticism.

He wants poetry functioning as an active agent to further thought. Rather than a report of already settled things he intends poetry to work as a process of thinking. It should be an investigation of figuration rather than a report of the things already figured out. Such ideologically informed, often using nonstandard language, poetry for him is “ideolectical” (“Americas” 5). Ideolectical poetry uses nonstandard language as the common ground of communication, in a different way from the norm. Nonstandard language practice enhances the element of cultural resistance. It is guided by a centrifugal force of opposition.

Another significant coverage of his poetry is identity and multiplicity. In a seminar paper titled “Writing Poetry Area,” he expresses that public can not exist if it does not find the means to constitute itself. And poetry is a major means of representing existing constituencies along with exploring new ones. It does not speak for someone, but for groups or the public. He believes that television and Hollywood movies provide only inadequate and non-existent identities of the multiplicities—or the multiplicities of identities—but contemporary poetry is an indispensable site for their exploration. Poetry questions both group and self identity. Not just an epistemological project, it also takes their description and narration. Bernstein is, obviously, in favor of multiculturalism, though he negates the new curriculum that just scratches the

surface of race, gender, and other identities. In sum, he is unhappy with the superficiality of contemporary American poetic practices, and its representation.

Bernstein's writing is marked with the serious processing of light and divergent matters. A number of people, who have written about him, have viewed him as a funny person. But, the issues he deals with are serious. His poems are able to present even jokes and noises in a serious manner. In the poem "Self Help" he writes:

Bald?—Finally, you can touch the sky with the top of your head.

.....

Hard drive crashes and novel not backed up.—Nothing like a fresh start.

.....

FBI checking your library check-outs.—I also recommend books on Amazon.

Gay marriages annulled.—Who needs to sanctify our live? (ll. 16, 18, 37-38)

The problems indicated here are of serious nature. A person losing hair and being bald-headed, a writer's hard tasks gone on waste, being investigated by the department of intelligence, and chosen marriage declared invalid are obviously grave matters for the sufferers. But, the solutions offered in the response are very funny. This is how he weaves light and serious things with a single thread.

His writing is often exemplified as a skillful twining of poetry and prose. His prose advertises the poetry by explaining its purpose. Bernstein's poems extend the ideas formulated in prose whereas his essays carry forward the ideas of his poems; they are coextensive. In his

world of poetic language the boundary between verse and prose breaks down. Poetry reads like prose and prose reads like poetry displaying inter-generic forays. For instance, a line of his poem “Sign Under Test” reads, “A husband returns home to find a burning cigar in his ashtray. He soon discovers a man in the broom closet. ‘What are you doing there?’ — ‘Everybody’s got to be somewhere.’ [Henny Youngman]” (l. 24). The poetic line is so long and much enriched with prosaic strength that it is very difficult to name this or that. Whether poetry or prose Bernstein’s writing asserts his discomfort with the tradition of the authoritative voice of criticism.

Bernstein draws a line between absorptive and anti-absorptive poetic language. He defines the language of absorption as the continuation of poetry by other means. It absorbs the reader’s attention with rhetorical devices that evoke transparent texture and easily accessible truths. He desires to explode such “artifice of absorption.” On the other hand, the language of anti-absorption that he favors deploys those techniques against themselves to “loosen the attention” of the reader. According to Bernstein himself absorptive is “rhapsodic, spellbinding, mesmerizing, hypnotic, total, riveting, enthralling” whereas the other is “artifice, boredom, exaggeration, attention scattering, distraction, digression, interruptive, transgressive, undecorous, anticonventional, unintegrated, fractured” (*A Poetics* 29). Absorptive poetry inclines towards realism, transparency, and continuity, while the anti-absorptive is comparatively artificial, opaque, and discontinuous in character. Critic Susan M. Schultz views his *Rough Trades* as a celebration of language and an exercise in non-absorptiveness that is meant to refashion prevailing world political views.

Bernstein’s poetry is essentially affirmative towards the people of the lower strata, and critical of capitalist state policies. He displays sympathy to workers along with the critique of state apparatus. His prime purpose seems to be making the contemporary people aware of

themselves. He is bent on opposing the dominant strains of American cultures and heroes too.

“The Ballad of the Girlie Man” reads:

Thugs from hell have taken freedom’s store

The rich get richer, the poor die quicker

& the only god that sanctions that

Is no god at all but rhetorical crap (ll. 13-16)

Freedom of the ordinary people has been abused by the rascals of the society. In the existing capitalist hegemony only the rich people are benefited. The poor people are all exploited and bite the dust before time. But, all this has been witnessed and rectified by political rhetoric. In this way, the poem discloses his rage with the bourgeois.

Perceiving writing as an engine for social change, Bernstein wishes to speak for the people who are not heard. He says, “A historical value of poetry in this culture is to allow those who are not given voice in the dominant media—television, radio, and so on—to use small press and other alternatives media to get their voices heard. That’s one of the great vitalities of poetry” (Cummings 19). He desires to stand firm on the side of marginalized people. For instance, the problem-solution pattern poem “Self Help” indicates the importance of trade union for the workers, “Wages down in non-union shop.—You’re a sales associate, not a worker; so proud to be part of the company”(l. 21). The workers who serve the merchants are being underpaid. When they appeal for an increase, they just get sweet words. Their voice for justice has been repressed by banning the trade unions. The task is, after all, a social project committed to a transformation of society on a large scale social level. He makes his mission obvious as:

& obviously we're committed to political struggle, to the necessity of changing current capital distribution, to making the factories & the schools & the hospitals cooperatives, to finding a democracy that allows for the participatory authority of each one to the extent of the responsibility we place on her or him. (*Content's* 30).

Thus, his intention is the promotion of participatory democracy through the works of art. For him, the pleasure of life lies in social art. But, he is aware that "the greatest enemy of art is the system of Commerce and Fashion that produces both unnecessary things and a slavish compulsion to possess them" (*A Poetics* 115). Therefore, he is determined to compose the poetry of social and cultural criticism.

His rather longer poem entitled and beginning "Dear Mr. Fanelli," is a remarkable piece of social criticism. The poem unfolds that in the 79th street station there is a hoarding board with a big photograph of Mr. Fanelli who is requesting the public for the comments on the condition of the station. As a response the speaker says there is a lot of debris that makes it unpleasant. He suggests fixing up new loudspeakers, so that frequent announcements of train delays could be heard. Mr. Fanelli is also required to think of shelters for a lot of homeless people who sleep in that station. Thus, Bernstein tries to attract the attention of authority towards the city problems of dirt, train delays, and the homeless.

He is frankly critical of the mechanical life style. The life in modern America has been atomized and boring. And the factor behind is no other than the dominance of materialism and consumerism. His semi-poetic work "Three or Four Things I Know about Him" shows the boredom of a usual American citizen as:

its like a living death going to work
 every day sort of like being in a tomb to sit
 in your office you close the door theres the
 typewriter theres three or four maybe three hours of
 work to be done between that nine oclock and five (*Content's* 13)

Based on the work schedule of this employee, Bernstein further says that she initially hoped the job to be more bearable. But, unfortunately, she has got no escape from this process of being commodified.

Bernstein thinks that commodities are accessible, not art. He is frustrated with poetry being a common place for a market-driven art production. Like various developments in education, he assumes, the trend toward a representative poetry is much market or consumer-driven. He is cold towards the writing that makes money, that is, popular writing, and admires the writing where there is much fun in reading. Unlike many other contemporary writers Bernstein got his works mostly published in small magazines and through small press publishers. In early days his anthologies were photocopied and stapled too, indicating a search for alternative media and means. This is also an attempt to escape the capitalist hegemony. However, such oppositional notion collides with the capitalist market economic trends. Lazer observes:

Bernstein and others, especially experimental poets who resist the trends and habits of the mainstream, face a serious issue: how to commodify poetry (for publication inevitably constitutes commodification) without destroying poetry's

oppositional potential and the poet's position as a player in the enterprise of cultural criticism. ("Charles" 39)

Bernstein has made himself a fearless opponent of official verse culture, that is, the set of assumptions about language that govern mainstream American poetry containing its literary institutions, prizes, titles, is all convention-bound. Bernstein sees it as narrow, stylistically rigid, and aesthetically xenophobic. So, he criticizes it as the "culture of careful and critical discourse" (CCD). Redressing the CCD ideals of "institutionalization of interpretation" he initiates a systematic challenge to mainstream poetry as an attempt to democratize both readers and writers. His quarrel against official verse culture is his political standpoint against traditional poetics. It is also an attempt to rescue poetry from the boredom of banality. Opposing official verse culture he presents the poets as heroes, who dare oppose the dominant strains of American culture.

He intends to liberate language from the manacles of mainstream poetic conventions. Such liberation is obviously noteworthy in his refusal to adopt the worn-out poetic subjects and speakers. Rather, Bernstein claims that his type of poetry is the mainstream. But he is surprised why such mainstream poetry so rarely gets any big literary awards and prizes, why it does not get enough reviews in the big-shot newspapers and periodicals? Such poetic conventions that he desires to break, for instance, have been elaborated in the poem "Thank You For Saying Thank You." He feels unpleasant with a "real poem" that is "totally accessible" without posing any difficulty to understand. He does not enjoy a poem with all the simple words but without new concepts, theories, and ideas. In addition, it is a purely emotional poem that fully expresses the feelings of the speaker. A poem in which "word, & syllable/ have been chosen/ to convey only the/ intended meaning/ and nothing more" (ll. 40-44) annoys him. Even a hundred readers

go through the poem they come up with the same identical meaning without any chance of guessing. It says just what it says without following any school or dogma. Obviously, these are the old hats that Bernstein wants to abolish from poetry as tabled in “Thank You For Saying Thank You.” He, thus, seems to have strongly believed that poetry is concerned with the imagination, not facts and statistics.

He believes that poets are the extensions of their society. Therefore, his role is not limited to just being a poet but becoming a cultural worker. He is fully aware of the effect of social conditions on the consumption and production of the arts. He emphasizes that language does not function in an isolated, self-contained sphere but in an interactive social sphere (Haralson 58). He opts the language as a series of duplicities and multiplicities instead of singularities. About the type of socio-political discourse he favors Bernstein himself writes, “It is, then, *our thesis* that political writing becomes disoriented when it views itself as description and not discourse: as not being *in* the world but *about* the world” (*Content’s* 20). So, his “social poems” address several cultural problems and orchestrate the new means of social reformation. In the poem “The Ballad of the Girlie Man” he writes; “We’re sorry we killed your god/ A long, long time ago/ But each dead soldier in Iraq/ Kills the god inside, the god that’s still not dead” (ll. 35-8). In addition to the desire for cultural reformation, the extract reveals his disgust at war. His poems frequently make judgments, ridicule the so-called centers, and promote the oppressed ideas. The poem “Pompeii” opens as:

The rich men, they know about suffering

That comes from natural things, the fate

Rich men say they can’t control, the swell of

The tides, the erosion of polar caps
And the eruption of a terrible
Greed among those who cease to be content
With what they lack when faced with wealth they are
Too ignorant to understand. Such wealth
Is the price of progress. (ll. 1-9)

The lines make fun of the rich people who take their “eruption of a terrible greed” like a natural calamity. Indeed, they are never happy with existing property. They are ever galloping for more material achievements. About his own choice Bernstein notes:

For me, writing poetry is all about making judgments, articulating tastes, especially (but not exclusively) those which are not “officially” sanctioned (by grammar, by conventions of sense-making, by literary tradition, by realpolitik, by social propriety, by commercial imperatives). But also making fun of, fun with, them. And not imagining that those judgments—my judgments—are world’s, or ought to be. (Cummings 11)

He always defines poetry and life simultaneously or by juxtaposing them. Time and again, he declares what poetry is, how it should function, and what is its relationship with the various components of human life and society. In the poem “War Stories” he writes, “War is a poem that is afraid of its shadow but furious in its course” (l. 25), “War is poetry without song” (l. 32), and “War is an excuse for lots of bad antiwar poetry” (l. 44). Similarly, in “Sign Under

Test” he defines, “Poetry is patterned thought in search of unpatterned mind” (l. 11).

Afterwards, in the same poem he mentions, “Everything in the world exists in order to end up as an opera. An opera without music is what we call everyday life. Poetry is opera without the story, score, costumes, make-up, or staging” (l. 46). He puts war, poem, song, music, opera, mind, life and other components together and tries to observe their inter-connections. Indeed, he is an intelligent and consistent contemporary thinker on poetry and poetics and their relationship with daily activities.

He is committed to poetic language as a vehicle for “truths” rather than the “Truth” of human life. It is such relationship of poetry with truth that makes him this genre quite endearing. He opines that there is an authoritative difference between the truth of a poet and that of a critic or non-fiction writer. The truth poetry invokes is the truth of imagination. It is due to this distinct feature poetry is, Bernstein further claims, at the same time, beloved though it is destructive, sarcastic, demeaning, ugly, unpleasant, unaccommodating, and incomprehensible (Cummings 20).

Use of Theory

Bernstein believes that theory is just an extension of practice, and reason can be claimed by poetry. He desires to transcend the generic splitting. He refuses to accept that the language of poetry and that of philosophy are different. Consequently, his poems are theoretically top-heavy and at the same time combined with personal reflection. “Just as Charles Bernstein’s poems construct deviant experience, calling for variant and questioning readings,” about his processing of poetry as theory Hélène Aji writes, “they inscribe themselves in a practice that its own theory, a poetry that is philosophy...” (354). For him poetry itself is a

prime theoretical instrument. It is an instrument that functions as a vehicle for theory by mixing various elements to end their generic distinctions. He writes in "Artifice of Absorption:"

it is just my insistence
that poetry be understood as epistemological
enquiry; to cede meaning would be to undercut
the power of poetry to reconnect us
with modes of meaning given in language
but precluded by the hegemony of restricted
epistemological economies... (*A Poetics* 17-8)

About Bernstein's conviction on the ideological function of poetry, the following lines from "Artifice of Absorption" can be referred to:

poetry does have a mission to be as powerful as
the strongest drug, to offer a vision-in-sound
to compete with the world we know so that we can find
the worlds we don't. But we don't
in fact escape ideology: but an alternate point
of perspective, a supplemental attentional
focus/unfocus. Paradise, as hell,

inheres: there are not limits that language can not reach. (*A Poetics* 76)

Poetry, like theory, is strongly determined to fulfill the mission it undertakes. It struggles with the world of knowledge by inserting ideas in sounds. It seeks to find a new ideology and frame a new world by exploiting the unlimited power of language. For Bernstein poetry is, thus, a tool or engine to convey ideas. The power existing in “vision-in-sound” (poetic lines) shows not only this familiar world but displays several other worlds that are unknown to people. So, poetry inherently contains ideology. Such belief empowers Bernstein to compose poems of political protest. Aji writes:

As Bernstein follows on in a fairly well-known fashion by opposing the writing of Montaigne to that of Descartes (Bernstein *in* Silliman [1986] 587), the strong ties between a refusal to differentiate between the domains of philosophy and poetry and a particular form of political protest come to the fore. In his close analysis of Bernstein 1992 collection of texts (for it is difficult to classify them as poems or essays, as essays in the form of poems or as poems in the form of essays), Bob Perelman links the double choice of the collection’s title (*a p o e t i c s*) and of including “Artifice of Absorption” to Bernstein’s own definition and approach to poetry. (345)

Furthermore, Bernstein’s 1992 collection, *A Poetics*, contains the inside title page with evenly spaced lowercase bold print *a p o e t i c s*. Refusing the hierarchy of capital letters and word boundary he manifests a radically new poetry that is not governed by any normative

poetics. Instead, it is poetry that forms its own poetics. However, ‘apoetics’ should not be taken as “anti-poetics.” It is, solely, a kind of hybrid text combining post-structuralism and Marxism.

Frustrations with Voice, and Innovation

As of subject matter, Bernstein displays a radical heterogeneity of form. He does numerous investigations of the visual aspects of language. He seems concerned about the ways people are alienated from language when ideas of correctness are imposed upon them. So, he does much effort to foreground language strategies and constructions. He opposes the principle of writing that praises plain style and calls such style as “shrunk prose fundamentalism.” He argues that the opposition to Standard English is not simply a retreat to something local or natural, but it is a learned opposition.

As a learned opposition, he questions the modern American poetry’s affair with personal experience and voice. He is against the convention of contemporary poetry that depends on the first person voice for its aesthetic and political effects. As an alternative he exhibits a conscious resistance to poetry of personal expression and eschews the mainstream essential of a recognizable individual voice. He advocates the elimination of subjectivity from poetic form and use of an authentically natural discourse. Bernstein’s principle can be noticed in the openings of the poems like “Pompeii,” and “Debris of Shock/Shock of Debris.” Another poem “The Voyage of Life” opens as:

Resistance marries faith, not faith persist-

Ence. Which is to say little to import?

Or little brewed from told and anxious

Ground an alternating round of this or

That, ... (ll. 1-5)

Making the speaker completely absent the poem communicates the intended message.

Likewise, "Saltmines Regained" proceeds, "Where goes the paraposturous/ brain-dead morning as/ cleavage relieves its/ apostate narcissism?" (ll. 1-4). The extract inquires about the destination of nonsense morning without any involvement of the speaker in the action.

Similarly, the opening of "Rowing with One Oar" reads:

So the sieve is sifted, the spun attended to

A token of foreign charm, lost here among

The can of category, disdain of

Destination. (ll. 1-4)

For Bernstein the coherent "I" speaker is a fiction because its structural conventions disguise or hide the in-constituencies and multiplicities of the actual subject. Such a fiction reduces both speaker and the body of poetic work to a little personality. Therefore, he actively avoids such "signature style" and hides himself behind the veil of words. Moreover, he is fascinated by how poems disclose or hide their authority. His poetry tries to place both the writer and the reader in the condition of anonymity. Poet and reader becomes a pair of nobodies. About the anti-traditional mode of his poetry Lazer comments with especial reference to *Dark City*, "... each poem different from those which surround it and a book of poems which

offers conscious resistance to signature and the cults of personal voice, personality, individualized-instantly-recognizable-style, and poetry-as-personal-expression" ("Charles" 41).

Bernstein believes that conventions are made to be broken. He practices the idea that counter-conventions in poetry and other discourses ultimately improve communication. Echoing Rousseau, Bernstein once expressed that verse is born free but everywhere in chains and it is his project to rattle such chains. So, innovative poetry should challenge the public cliché language. Such a challenge to the writing conventions enters the territory of politics of language. He disagrees even with the structuralist evaluation of language and refuses the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified as claimed by Saussure and Derrida (Nathanson 312). He believes that language is not merely differential but directly expressive. After all, language always controls people to some degree.

In the poetic practice, he assumes, a poet becomes a "technician of the human." Straining against received discourse and normative syntax, his writing is marked with iconographic and rhetorical intensity. His poems frequently use local dialects and idioms. They are composed of technical precision and "full-blown language: full of possibilities of meaning & impossibilities of meaning" (*Content's* 46). They are opaque poems due to defamiliarization of the prevailing transparent communication. "Two Stones with One Bird" appears as a fine illustration of such features, "Re-/ demption/ comes/ &/ redemp-/ tion/ goes/ but/ trans-/ ience/ is/ here/ for-/ ever" (ll. 1-14). Lazer calls Bernstein a realist because of this resistance to clichés, "Bernstein's writing were to be called a new kind of realism, that realism would be premised not upon closure and (thematic) unification but upon resistance to these particular over-used poetic devices" ("Charles" 40). Bernstein's is a self-conscious poetry of venture and adventuring.

The Rambling Poems: Collage, Shift, Hybridism

For Bernstein, “writing” rather than “language” is the central term; poetry, prose, poetics, theory are not distinct genres or forms. So, all are combined together to form an organic whole. He favors the writing that attaches numerous bits and pieces together in a variety of ways (*Content's* 48). Likewise, he gives high importance to stylistic features. One of such distinct features is the creation of the rambling poems.

Dislocated fragment is the basic unit of Bernstein’s rambling poetry. The fractured poems are composed of fractured lines and condensed collage. Abrupt movement and rigidity of shifts give the poem a nomadic flow. There are abundant cracks in the syntax and shifts in the voices which are sometimes visible and audible in the text, whereas at other times they are not. The sentences are haphazardly composed and they skate in different directions. Silliman states about his technique used in *The Sophist* in the book’s introduction which is also similar to other works that, “*The Sophist* is a jumble, a jungle, a jangle of—dare I say?—overdetermined elements hodged-podged together” (ix). So, there are numerous shifts and uncertainties in the meanings as well. Meaning is not centered at an exclusive moment but dispersed throughout the poem. He is committed not to the final object but to the process of creation, that is, the method of investigation is more important than the results of investigation. Bernstein’s resistance, subversion, humor, rapid shifts, collage and other features can be all eyes and ears in the poem “Debris of Shock/Shock of Debris” from *Dark City*:

The debt that pataphysics owes to sophism

cannot be overstated. A missionary of horse

gets saddlesores as easily as a politburo
functionary. But this makes a mishmash of overriding ethical
impasses. If the liar
is a Cretan I wouldn't trust him
anyway – extenuating contexts wouldn't amount
to a hill of worms so far as I
would have been deeply concerned about
the fate of their, yes, spoons. Never
burglarize a house with a standing army,
nor take the garbage to an unauthorized
junket. Yet when I told the learned
ecologist about my concern for landscape
she stared unsympathetically into the
carbon. Mr. Spoons shook his head, garbled his
hypostases. To level with you we'd have
to be on the same
level. Then, with all honesty, we can

only proceed to deplane. (ll. 1-20)

The poem is simply rambling from idea to idea that is very divergent. Science, sophism, horse, politburo, Cretan, hill of worms, burglary, ecology, and garbage at junk are totally heterogeneous ideas and images. Because of such extreme disruption, Nathanson calls it pulverized language. Likewise, about his book *Rough Trades* Joris opines that the majority of his poems are constructed from a cornucopia of found, read, and overheard phrases and sentences from extremely heterogeneous origins. Of course extremely disjunctive and pulverized language goes into the composition of his language games. For instance, a section near the end of "Standing Target" goes ahead as:

fatigue

of of

open for

to , sees

doubles

glass must

are for

in : they

, her

that it

watches, leaves,

days that

made

and the

The

to plates

all shaped

am

must get

it if not

or

houses, beginnings

newly

hind an

other here

. Give

come to

off,

an (ll. 1-29)

The poem displays linguistic standardization and commodity reification. The terms “must,” and “must get” indicate the compulsory social and ethical functions of language itself. Such fragmentary transcriptions demand the reader’s participation for meaning. As a result, the reader becomes a producer rather than a consumer of meaning. Moreover, the meaning is enjoyed, not circulated. A line seems to make a sense, but if attached to the previous line it seems to be saying another thing, and attachment with the following line again makes it different. Thus, the poems are echo chambers of meaning in which multiple readings are actively invoked, but one reading does not displace the others.

The poems are marked with multi-voiced construction. Though not absolute, relative plurality of voices can be found in most of the poems. There is a celebration of hybridism and every other form of mixing. Bernstein acknowledges multiculturalism as the strongest force of contemporary American poetry. Ethnic, class, sexual and gender identities in writing demand the collage structure. His poetic technique of collage synthesizes with his judgment of fragmented America. He opines, “America also can be understood as an *imaginary* space that’s filled with conflict, that’s not unified, not reconciled, not totalized” (“Conversation” 53). He calls “Americas” not just the US to keep the sense of new worlds (“Americas” 4).

Bernstein has also composed collage-poems of social and consumerist manipulation. He combines the standard business-style language with standard but dissociated fractured phrases. The phrases enable the reader to produce their own meaning rather than receive the poet’s meaning. “Emotions of Normal People” collected in *Dark City* is an extended collage poem that

begins in the language of computer sales. He talks of the world of words where people command and are commanded. "Emotions" reads:

With high expectations, you plug
Into your board and power up. The
Odds are shifted heavily in your
Favor as your logic simulator comes
On-screen. If there's a problem
You see exactly where it's located
& can probe either inside or
Outside with a schematic editor.
English-like commands make
Communication easy. (*Dark 85*)

It lights on the process of computer operation and functional errors that occur frequently. It also reveals the mechanical control over human activities and communication. The poem further reads:

Compatible with target-embedded
Resident assemblers & wet-wet
Compilers. & the fact that you can

Configure it yourself means you

Get exactly what you want (86)

The poem shows how commercialization of technology shapes public thinking. It indicates the ways in which consumers are sold and resold on computers by the vendors. It pictures a world of total commodification where exchange and sales are endless because the shrewd vendors are always on duty. Bernstein is certain that writing does not further class struggle; it is just a fertilizer not a tool (*Content's* 30). However, he never misses a chance to fertilize the class struggle through writing.

Humor and Other Tools

Humor, rather than irony, is Bernstein's prime tool to resist or establish some idea and policy. Generally it is believed that serious and difficult poets lack a sense of humor. But it is not so in the case of Bernstein. His poems display a playful, satiric, witty, engaged sense of humor. His poem of prosaic-strength "Self Help" reads:

\$75 ticket for Sunday meter violation on an empty street in residential neighborhood. – The city needs the money to make us safe and educate our kids.

Blue cashmere pullover has three big moth holes. – What a great looking shirt!

Son joins skinhead brigade of Jews for Jesus. – At least he's following his bliss.

(ll. 22-4)

It makes fun of the metropolitan policy of enforcing huge amount of penalty on minor traffic offence; wearing a pullover with holes as a new fashion; and the Jewish trespassing of gentile boundaries. Humor is created through puns, rhymes, sudden shifts and recombinations too. Lazer names some types of humor used in *Dark City* as “slapstick, punning, low humour, the humour of an associative stand-up comic (ala Lenny Bruce or Jackie Mason), a self-critical Jewishness” (“Charles” 38). In addition to supporting and opposing, humor also fragments the language. It also carries political and aesthetic-critical implications. Like other serious word play, Bernstein’s humor reveals the gaps or instances of non-sense in the relationship of poetry and politics.

Like humor, his writing is enriched with such tools as defamiliarization, conversational lines, allusions, language of advertisement, element of encodedness, call-and-answer method, and quotations. In the use of quotations he adopts the cherry-picking method as that of Pound and Olson. Poems like “The Voyage of Life,” “Fear and Trespass,” and “Romance” begin with quotations. And the use of in-text quotation can be noticed in various poems like “War Stories,” “The Klupzy Girl,” and “Sign Under Test.” Such quotations are supposed to secure a “readerly sense” of mastery.

As with the words Bernstein is interested with their sounds too. He believes that sound greatly contributes to meaning in a poem. The sound and form themselves become the poet’s content. Words do their work at the level of sound and appearance. In sum, he works with several strategies and tactics in order to make his writing forceful. As an answer to the question “Do you see yourself as a tactician or a strategist?” Bernstein says “I pursue both a strategy of tactics and tactics of strategy, though not necessarily at the same time” (Cummings 5).

Bernstein has done several experiments in poetry. However, there are some contradictions and problems in his approach to poems. Firstly, they lack sufficient stable characters. Almost all of the poems are different from each other. Each poem reveals something new. Likewise, it is very hard to trace his single poems that are obviously memorable. The readers who appreciate his poems are even in confusion to indicate a few best ones. His poetry does not offer an easy or steady target for quotation or summary, nor is it easy to locate his fundamental views and themes. It is so because his writing probably lacks a determinant “signature.”

Basically, Bernstein uses formal elements and techniques with a disregard for subjective aspects. But, sometimes the poem’s formal consciousness is mixed with personal and biographical elements like his children, family, and father’s business of clothes. As an aesthete he admires Swinburne and Wilde, but also speaks like a proto-Marxist; he displays both clarity and obscurity; he appears as a preacher and skeptic too.

Though he seeks to be different from the mainstream poets there are some overlaps. For instance, Bernstein noticeably uses the language of movies and business, refers to cartoon characters, and styles of comedy which are also immensely found in mainstream American poetry of his time. It means that Bernstein is not dissatisfied with everything of the mainstream or maybe it is not possible to escape the tradition totally.

In sum, discarding the binaries he is engaged with the multiplicity of things. Thus, some of his ideas and techniques, in the attempt of resistance and innovation, seem contradictory. But in contradictions Bernstein’s very idea of the unstable nature of thinking and writing can be grasped. After all Bernstein believes in plurality and contradictions as he asserts in “The Simply,”

“The world deals with negation and/ contradiction and does not assert any single/ scheme” (ll. 138-40).

Theorizing Bernstein

Looking through the lenses of critical theories Bernstein’s political poetry is a rich mine of resistance and innovation. A forerunner public poet, like Pound and Olson, he refuses the popular claim that poets write in isolation and behind the scenes. Also taken as a prolific autodidact he is a distinctly political and innovative writer. In his writing there is enough concern for the relation of politics to writing, and the relation of the individual to the society. Bernstein’s poems are open chambers for the application of principles formulated for the study of political poetry. One of the major aspects where his writing meets the common ground of the theories is its deep concern with various social phenomena.

Bernstein tries to place poetry and society as integral parts of each other having a reciprocal relationship. His convictions about the social responsibility of art are compatible with Lukács’ discussion of the “inner harmony.” Lukács refuses the bourgeoisie aesthetics of the inner harmony of man and art. Such harmony disconnects literature from social reality. The poetic practice of Bernstein reinforces this principle. He attempts to make writing responsible by associating it with various social components. Like Bakhtin’s requirement, his poetry is close to human life and aware of the surrounding. Bernstein is sympathetic to toilers and sarcastic to capitalistic commodification in the Foucauldian vein. Like Jameson’s idea his poetry emphasizes the social function of art, and he sees the possibility of a new cultural counter-revolution. Moreover, Palattella believes that Bernstein vaguely follows Jameson’s theorization of a cultural logic of dystopian totality (190).

His writing is closer to the ideas of cultural criticism, and politically correct literature put forward by Adorno and Benjamin respectively. His concern about socio-political aspects is in agreement with Adorno's belief that art, though not necessary to be directly political, can not be aloof from politics. Obviously, Bernstein integrates the idea of Adorno's cultural critic who is dissatisfied with this civilization. Like Adorno he seems to have believed that "truth is the antithesis of existing society." With such an idea he ventures to challenge the authority of convention. Similarly, Benjamin favors the politically correct literature that is affirmative towards the working class. Bernstein's poems at times openly stand for that class and ridicule the hegemony of capitalism and the bourgeois. Because of such attitudes he falls in the Benjaminian category of a progressive writer. The expected role of writer as teacher, in Benjamin's principle, is fulfilled by Bernstein.

As Foucault outlined, Bernstein casts his discourse in the same mold as a vehicle for the functioning of power. Basically, his poems enhance the rival powers that are against the state power. Through the ideas expressed in the texts he tries to resist the state and dominant power that controls the life of the individual. Lukács believed that mere individual attempts to challenge the state powers get doomed. So, one should be a participant of a movement for the goal. Bernstein, unlike Pound, got affiliated to a team known as the language writing to resist the dominant powers. Such resistance can be observed both in his themes and methods.

One of Bakhtin's big claims about poetry is that the dialogical and ideological features of language remain strongly present in prose, not in poetry, and the epic lacks the multi-linguaged consciousness. But, Bernstein's poetry of dense prosaic strength and inter-generic features are largely free from such limitations. His method of abrupt movement from discourse to discourse, and humor working as destabilizer are like Bakhtin's principle of carnivalization in literature.

Talking about Bernstein's method of collage and Bakhtin's idea of socio-ideological contradictions, Nathanson mentions:

In Bernstein work, however, the refraction of collaged discourse tends to take place along more consistent and predictable lines than it does in the novelistic practice Bakhtin extols, in which a full range of heteroglossia competes for dominance and thus displays what Bakhtin calls the socio-ideological contradictions of the society in which they emerge. (304)

Benjamin's idea that there is not much difference between writer and reader finds common ground in Bernstein's poetry. The reader turned writer writes poems to show immediate reaction to the political issues, and they are published in little magazines.

Bernstein, however, has reservations with Foucault's principle of the author function. For Foucault, the author is not just a proper name, or an insignificant element in a discourse. He believes that a discourse holds certain values and authenticity in association with the author. But, Bernstein deliberately minimizes the status of the author by diminishing the voice. Foucault's author-function seeks inevitable presence of the author in the universe of the discourse; more than an individual it is a cluster of different selves. Bernstein frankly dismisses the active author function; however he is closer to the Foucauldian idea of plurality, the author as a cluster.

Chapter X

The Changing Face of Contemporary American Poetry

An Overview of Previous Chapters

The social power of political poetry is a long but often ignored trend in American writing. Political poetry is defined basically as writing based on social issues and it is largely critical in nature. This definition delimits the kinds of poems and the issues to be discussed. In the preceding pages arguments stated for and against the merging of poetry and politics have been traced too, and a brief historical development of political poetry with especial reference to American writing has been sketched. The conceptual framework developed for the study of political poetry makes a general overview of the crucial ideas of seven selected theorists. Mainly, it deals with concepts like author function, dialogical language, writer's act of dreaming,

and politically correct literature, as well as takes accounts of counter-culture revolution, cultural criticism, and the culture industry. In this connection, the experimental school of language poetry that departs from the mainstream tendency has been given special emphasis, mainly because this school is explicitly political and politics is the agenda of language poetry. Some of the important features and multi-faceted nature of this politically conscious and formally radical poetry have been delineated, and it has been seen how the whole language poetry has been an innovative extension of the Pound-Olson tradition mixed up with some remarkable features of the counter tradition.

A focused study of the poetry and poetics of Pound and Olson reveals how contemporary American political poetry springs from and departs from the poetic principles and techniques of these two important poets. Pound has been identified as a hater of war and other social abuses particularly based on *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* and *The Cantos*. In these works he appears antagonistic to the current bourgeois convictions. Afterwards, the aspects of his dissatisfaction with American culture and its causes have been assessed. Based on his dissatisfactions and appreciation of heroes, his ideal great good place is identified as a paradise on earth with peace and sublimity as its chief characteristics. Likewise, Olson's poetry is featured basically as intellectual and elitist. His writing is public as opposed to personal self-reflection. In addition, Olson appears an anti-traditional because of his experimental methods and techniques as enunciated in the theory and practice of projective verse.

This work then fixes its critical gaze on society, culture, poetics, and politics as found in the works of three language poets—Silliman, Watten, and Bernstein. Silliman's rejection of voice is claimed to be an attempt at empowering the reader and the democratic system. He is dissatisfied with mainstream poetry which he calls disapprovingly the "School of Quietude" as it

is much self-reflective and devoid of socio-political business. His own poetry criticizes the American culture where horror reigns supreme in society, television, and film. He frankly talks about the poor working class people and their exploitation along with other social issues like pollution, militarism, problems of immigrants, and the like. His poetry criticizes the market culture for totally commercializing the American society with the motto of “time is money” and faulty government policies. Similarly, Watten speaks for a social engagement of poetry by breaking the traditional boundaries within which it is placed. His poetry resists war by elaborating its horrors and devastations. As the root cause of war-mentality is the capitalist market system, he expresses open disagreement with the market culture. He identifies negativity as the base of his poetry and he directs it towards culture and generic formalities. Bernstein criticizes official verse culture for its indifference to social issues. As a poet, he stands for the lower strata people and ridicules the capitalist system. Disgusted with the boredom and banality produced by official verse culture, he concentrates on the pluralism of voice. The poets have developed a praxis of their own where poetry and theory are inseparably mixed, that is, poetry contributes to attain the goals theory intends.

The Wedding of Poetry and Politics

The term political poetry means the poetry that reflects—either explicitly or at least by suggestion—politics that is oppositional, critical, populist or of a similar character.

Contemporary American poetry has convincingly harmonized politics with creative work. These poems ground the poetic language on the concrete physical texture and details of the world we live in. The outcome is not just a political speech or a pamphlet, or a set of theoretical statements simplistically grafted onto the skeleton of a poem. They are written out of an organic understanding of politics. Much of these poems are populist, pro-working-class, anti-fascist,

radically democratic. Some of them are rich in imagery that evokes feeling and sensory experiences in the reader's mind. Sometimes they verge on surrealism. They often work with the kinetic energy of public speech and communicate in elevated language their rhetorical strength in a poetry of ecstatic utterance. Some others stress intellectual argument or some political statement. After all, these poems make the assumption clear that it is thoroughly possible to write poetry that has progressive political content and that is well-written. For this purpose, they often reject the so called literary standards that preclude politics as acceptable subject matter. They belong to the real world by producing the poetry that grows from it.

Pound is a landmark poet of this school, who not only produced a new poetry but also set the terms to judge it. In the place of romantic mysticism and archetypal symbols, he initiated a trend of creating the precise image and natural object as adequate symbol. He founded the school of imagism and led poetry away from loose poetic constructions to the sharpness and intensity of a well-made image based on the real. Afterwards, poets like Watten exploited surrealism to merge poetry and politics. Similarly, a departure from the tendency of relying on a single authentic voice begins with Pound. His use of masks or personae that do not much represent the voice of the author leads to the creative use of multiple voices in language poetry. His reception of the epic as a poem including history paved a way for such writing. Indeed, *The Cantos* inaugurated the inclusion of historical sources and documents. It also identified an important model for open-form poetry. Likewise, the techniques of collage and parataxis are reworked by the language writers.

Language school, the contemporary representative school of political poetry, is largely indebted to the poetry and poetics of Charles Olson too. Olson began writing as a reaction against the existing American culture and poetry. He disliked the existing poetic tendency as too

rational, ego-centered, and distanced from experience. Having an irritation with symbolism and mimesis, he perceived a radical change as inevitable. So, his poetry intended to bridge the gap between pleasure and politics and so answer the earlier challenge to poetry of relating the opposing elements like pleasure and politics, aesthetic and social, individual emotion and public responsibility. He incorporated and demonstrated socio-political matters in soft ways, mostly avoiding the radical tone. He also encouraged the active role of the reader. He insisted on calling poetry as a community activity, not an individual creation. Language school's focus on process-oriented poetry comes from Olson. However, the newer poets have made their own modifications of Pound's and Olson's formal conventions. But, their innovative adventures have been possible, at least in part, by the demonstrations and the unwritten poetics of *The Cantos*, and *The Maximus Poems*. These newer poets have been inclined to learn from the tradition and construct it and deconstruct it.

Contemporary political poetry has derived some of its features from early protest poetry, though it also departs from it on other levels. For instance, the language poets' collective effort echoes the protest poetry of early twentieth century, but they move ahead in formulating a direct relationship between the poets and their social milieu, between the poet and the reader who collaborate to create poems of revolt and powerful demands for human rights. It needs to be noted, that except for the art for art's sake school and Aestheticism, socio-political matters have remained at the heart of dramatic poetry in one way or other. However, there are major differences between the earlier poetry and contemporary political poetry. Protest poems were written in simple language and straightforward way. But language poetry is complex, roundabout and heavily allusive. Unlike earlier political poems the contemporary ones use multiple voices instead of an easily identifiable traditional sort of voice. They are not simple

and straightforward as those of the past. The expression is generally incomplete and it demands the reader's cooperation. It does not obey the traditional forms anymore. Instead, it violates the major aesthetic criteria unlike the past poems. They perceive the traditional forms as serving the bourgeois capitalist economic system. For them, prose-poetry is associated with working class whereas pure poetry stands for the bourgeois. In the past, poetry was political in a discursive way, whereas recent poetry inseparably interweaves discourse, power, and politics.

The contemporary political poems are all about the real problems of people, society, and culture. They deal with man's relations to the real world. As Adorno believes these poems let the things heard that are concealed by ideology. They never try for an inner harmony of man and art that Lukács ridicules. These poems criticize the prevalent as Horkheimer believes to be the social function of philosophy. This is an exercise of power against repression. As Foucault indicates its power is constituted by knowledge.

All these poets are seriously engaged with socio-political matters. They give due importance to economic factors. They have composed poems with ideological convictions derived from varied sources. This trend of poetry is no more a bourgeois art as Bakhtin assumed. But it frankly speaks for the proletariat and against the capitalists. These poets have not only projected the horrors of war, but have also presented the capitalist market system as the cause for war. Furthermore, they are watchful of international affairs and generally stand antagonist to US policies. Thus, this trend of writing has a seamless weaving of poetry and politics and the poets have taken the Shelleyan role of legislators.

Contemporary political poems do not maintain an epic distance between the poetic world and the real world. Nor do they isolate the reader as Bakhtin accuses. These poems bear

his quality of carnivalization by opposing the official verse culture, political repression, and totalitarian tendencies. So, they are not just like the paintings that hang on the wall, but possess utilitarian values. These poems do not fall under the rubric of culture industry defined by Adorno and Horkheimer. They do not repress the audience. Instead, they show the possibility of resistance and oppose the liquidation of the individual, along with the status quo. Disconnected from big publication business, they ridicule the capitalist society by using small presses. Opposed to the products of culture industry, this poetry is committed to fulfill the utopian promises of Enlightenment.

Contemporary American political poets are plainly anti-capitalist and oppose the bourgeois cultural hegemony. Like Lukács' demand they oppose reification where people as consumers are reduced to things. With this same tendency, these poets function as Adorno's cultural critics who are dissatisfied with the civilization, basically because of its economic system. Like Foucault's intellectuals these poets are closer to the proletariat and against capitalist hegemony. Except Pound, all these poets are engaged with all movements that resist repression. What they have done through art really serves Jameson's concept of the cultural counter revolution. Thus, by writing in the interest of the dominated these poets qualify for Benjamin's crown of progressive writers. Having much sympathy with the working class their works are politically oriented to the left.

As typical postmodernist works these poems express the deeper logic of postmodern consumer society. Revealing the postmodernism of resistance, this type of poetry is engaged with cultural politics. It not only replicates or reproduces the logic of consumer capitalism but also resists it. In fact, language poetry is an affirmative answer to Jameson's question whether

art resists the late capitalist logic or not. Language poetry performs this job both through its content and its form.

Beginning with Pound and Olson, language poets have focused on active participation of the reader. This corpus of writing falls in Lukács' category of artistically progressive literature as it does not alienate the audience. As he qualifies, it wages a struggle against the subjectivization of art dominant in bourgeois aesthetics. Furthermore, this poetry's opposition to subjectivity and resistance to reader's alienation approximate the intention of realism. The poets are like Benjamin's storytellers who convey the message without forcing it on the reader. Each reader can understand and interpret the message in his own way. They have well-practiced the method of productive reception. By maintaining a distance between the subject and the object, these poems bear Benjamin's quality of aura. In fact, these poets are determined to insert aura back into art work. Such emphasis on reader's participation and rejection of subjective dominance stands in serious disagreement with Foucault's author function. For them, the author no longer holds certain values and authenticity that Foucault assigns.

In addition to being ideological, unlike the evaluations of Bakhtin, these poems are dialogical in terms of their collagist techniques and multi-voiced nature. They bear the features of heteroglossia, as the author alone no longer controls the discourse. The interdisciplinary nature of these poems prevents them from being monologic, and also there is sufficient room for chance. Conflict, contradiction, and doubt exist not only in the subject matter but in the language and form too. These poems do not obey the practice of pure poetic language, but contain the materials from interdisciplinary and extra-literary social dialects. Crossing the conventional boundary of poetry, they assimilate with other utterances.

In the works of the language poets, there is a correspondence among meaning, structure, and form. With special focus on form, language poetry is shaped to become the content. As Lukács advocates, this poetry unifies content and form. By merging form with content, and concentrating on objectivity it meets his criteria of artlessness. Furthermore, the poems maintain an analogy between the structures of the text and the outside world. Such echo of the text and the real world is in harmony with Jameson's perception of the text as symbolic acts of real socio-political contradictions. Likewise, the poems meet Adorno's premise that the dialectics of art should resemble the dialectics of society.

All these poets have displayed a fascination with quotations. Their works are marked for obscurity, and complexity. Minimization of worn-out poetic tools like metaphor, and the use of collage, and interdisciplinary materials are other significant commonalities of their praxis. Prosaic strength is featured through the prose-poetry intertwining. The epic tendency and poetry of brevity is obviously meant to resist. The language poets have extensively used ideas from critical theories. Through their matter and method they have proved Jameson's claim that post-structuralism and Marxism can go together.

These poets are frustrated with the universal modern wasteland. So, they dream of a good life. They believe that the hoped-for human world has not arrived yet. Their dream for a good life resembles Lukács' argument that the writers should dream for a change, a better future. Though their dreaming might not be able to cause big changes, obviously, it plays an affirmative role from the side of the art. To fulfill their ideological missions these poets have created powerful discourses with the use of dialogism, form-content echo, and other strong technical devices. For the same purpose they have rejected the elitist and totalitarian matters and methods that are bourgeois apparatuses.

These poets begin their politics with the question whether poetry generically is due to form or content. Does a poem become a poem due to what it talks about or the way it presents its talks? Ultimately, poetry serves a messaging function. Though poetry is not much interested in the day to day events of the world like journalism, it is interested in feeling the pulse of the world. A person does not go to poetry to know about politics, but poetry does tell about the people's feelings about politics. Both poetry and politics create a sense of urgency. Poets and politicians are similar in the force of their opinions.

Like politics, poems create their own state of mind. Poetry and politics belong to the category of verbal persuasion and as such they have strong connections with the art of rhetoric. Both try to persuade the audience to certain anticipated goals or actions. At times, politicians may take poetry as a symbol of empty talk, but at other times, they confess the most intense moments of their political life as "poetic," for instance, Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. Both poets and politicians attempt to hypnotize their audience and create the vision of some imaginative world. Though poetry lacks the active power of politics, it can protest against war but it can neither cause nor stop battling.

Implications and Further Research

This research has shed some light on the features of contemporary political poetry in the US. However, this work is limited and there are several other possibilities for further research. In this research, it has been claimed that though poetry can not considerably manipulate revolutionary changes, it can make significant contributions. It can play significant role from its side. Of course, poetry is a cultural construction and it can very well speak about the subsequent suppressions of the less fortunate by the more fortunate in history. However, it

is also possible that poetry may fail to perform any political work. Such attempts might be nothing more than a poetic failure. However, the linkage of poetry and the outside world can be a fertile area for further investigation.

The critical poetry of the twentieth century America has clearly adopted two opposite paths; elitist-totalitarian and its opposite. Researches in the similarities and differences of these two sub-genres are possible and promising. This research suggests that the mainstream American poetry is monologic, opposite to the dialogic nature of critical poetry. Such a claim has been made based on representatives of the language school and therefore it is limited. It may be fruitful to work on a larger corpus of poets. The dialogic feature of mainstream poetry can be an area of rewarding research.

The poetic works discussed in this work are fundamentally of public nature and personal elements have been deliberately repressed. However, socio-political matters can also incorporate personal matters too. So, may be a fertile area for research.

The poetic discourses used in the present research are noticeably complex and indeterminate. This work has not been able to elaborate upon this issue. From this perspective exploratory studies can be conducted on the complexity of these political poems. Likewise, this work claims that contemporary political poets look for a utopian state because of their dissatisfaction with the dominant market system's abuses. It may be rewarding to complement this view by bringing in the notion of dystopia and its impact on contemporary poetry.

Applying the critical theories used here many other socially aware poets can be approached. The critical poems of Joy Harjo, Carl Sandburg, Adrienne Rich, Michael S. Harper, Philip Levine, Carolyn Forché are some prime areas of further research. The poets discussed

here have primarily projected a masculine world. Their revelation of a patriarchal bias can be another interesting area of future studies. Similarly, some research works can be conducted on the racial protests of poetic discourse.

To conclude, contemporary American political poetry is a rich field of strong voices and prophetic visions. The poems depict a sort of Levinas's "traumatised semiotics," wherein if language is used as constructive of self-identity, it is a violation of our being, because our being is realized in the presence of the other. The language poets write of the other and for the other, and so in a sense violate our being—in this violation they are supremely political. The activist poets of the language school led their politico-poetic revolution in the face of regressive national politics by giving readings and starting lecture series, launching independent presses, and theorizing a new way toward the avant-garde. They penned their protests against the traditional backdrops of American poetry scene, the creative writing institutions, and national poetry awards that Charles Bernstein calls "Official Verse Culture." However, the strong wave of counter-tradition produced by these political poets has its damaging impact too. One has to acknowledge the fact that the corporate American culture has been largely successful in keeping these poets confined to the left community and in small press magazines so that their formative conversations are decidedly local. Poetry has not been yet successful in breaching the socio-economic strongholds. It is not enough to publish a number of journals and open up small presses to promote forms of avant-garde poetry, and look down on poetry that accepts a stable subjectivity as fascist. So the gap between the traditional poets and the

counter-traditional poets is still very wide. But language poetry has made a niche for itself in the American literary scene by finding some foothold on the popular media, advertising, politics, cinema, sports, the corporate world, public relations, and propaganda that really define and confine the American society.

One of the reasons the modern political poetry has not been able to win popularity and an avid readership is because these poems are decidedly difficult to comprehend. The poetry that makes its difficulty a basic means to accomplishing its ends is self-defeating. But a greater problem with this poetry is that it faces charges of privileging artistic complexity over political obligation. This is a serious charge, and poets like Watten and Bernstein insist that politics and poetry merge like fire and oil in their work chiefly because in their works the content *is* the form. Though there are some limits in the political project of language poetry, the language poets' poetic representation of their poetry's social space focuses on how they make the poems a site for identity. They transform institutions of their poetic culture to provide a phenomenology of social space. Yet they inspire quite different visions of private and public space. In these spaces, the location of agency and vision and the body's integrity change drastically. Moreover, the texturing of space in shaping their political subjectivity and the importance of this subjectivity in the context of social struggles to redefine politics is an act of momentous creativity and this is probably the most important contribution of the language poets to modern poetry.

Poetry does not just reject the ideas of state power fostered by Marxism and liberalism but also contains the seed of a new redefinition of what counts as love and life, and their writings engage the fundamentals of American identity. They communicate a

profound sense of the human agency that inheres in the conflicting stories and documents of history. They write about implicit and explicit institutional violence, state exploitation, racial hatred, conflict and genocide. In a time of crass political correctness, their poems favor the beauty of complexity and maintain a high regard for the reader. Their historically informed poetic theory and practice is bracketed within a visual poetics that owes a lot to Ezra Pound's use of the page as a compositional frame and his breakthroughs in the deployment of a whole range of poetic innovations in open-formed epic writing.

One important link between Pound and the language poets is Charles Olson's *Maximus Poems* that focuses on American history and which would not have been possible without Pound's example and vision. The rich experience of reading language poetry, the puzzling and productive visual poetics, the shock effect of being located as a reader, and the importance of prose in the composition of the poems are the unique characteristics of American political poetry. The poems ably demonstrate a radical extension of the Pound-Olson modernist line in American poetry, and they bring back the soul of poetry that was missing from the contemporary cultural landscape of the post-soul era, an era when poets retired to their ivory tower and poetry became a solely personal affair to a near complete decimation of the public soul. An examination of these poems in the context of American economic and political theories of the modern age suggests that the question of how personal choice becomes the ordering principle of a poem is identical to how personal choice becomes the ordering principle of a nation. The personal is the political, and in the poetics of politics instead of reflecting the interiority of the chooser, their choices are open to the contingencies of the social environment. Through this

radical representation of choice, the contemporary American political poetry successfully raises the utopian ghost of a collective national subject.

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