Black Mountain Poetry (or the Black Mountain School) takes its name from Black Mountain College where poet Charles Olson served as rector from 1953-1956. The progressive-arts-based curriculum of the school was defined against both professional-school norms and Great Books programs of the era. As founder John Andrew Rice wrote, the emotions as much as the intellect were part of the education. Artists and intellectuals seeking refuge from Nazi Europe strengthened the faculty ranks. Among the American students and teachers were Robert Creeley, John Wieners, Robert Duncan, Hilda Morley, Ed Dorn, Joel Oppenheimer, and Jonathan Williams. Black Mountain Poetry also takes its name from the *Black Mountain Review* (1954-1957) that Creeley founded in Mallorca. He published not only writers affiliated directly with the college, but also Denise Levertov, Larry Eigner, Paul Blackburn, Cid Corman, Irving Layton, Gael Turnbull, and, in the seventh and final issue, many of the Beats.

In his epochal manifesto “Projective Verse” (1950), influenced by his correspondence with Frances Bolderoff and Creeley, Olson rejected prosodic conventions in favor of an open poetics grounded in the breath. Like William Carlos Williams, Olson wanted poets to learn from the everyday language of their community. He eschewed the “inherited line, stanza, over-all form, what is the ‘old’ base of the non-projective” in favor of Creeley’s famed mantra: “FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT.” He wanted poets to use (as Mallarmé had) the whole space of the page, and he declaimed that the jazz of Charlie “Bird” Parker was a greater guide for postmodern poetry than the romantic individualist brand of Confessional Poetry. Olson embarked on a long poem, *The Maximus Poems,* that developed around the maritime economy of his home in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Written in part as a critique of Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*, Olson strived to achieve a historical constellation that avoided the genocidal legacy of the West that he associated with the Holocaust and the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

What united nearly all of the Black Mountain poets was an alliance with the emergent counter-culture. In Creeley’s hands the lyric was a device that registered the privations of mid- to late-twentieth century domesticity. “All my poems are social crucifixions,” he explained to his friend Allen Ginsberg. Whereas his early forte was a compressed lyric style reminiscent of Emily Dickinson and William Carlos Williams, during the political upheavals of the 1960s, he adapted the seriality of Louis Zukofsky and George Oppen using a fractured syntax that presaged Language Poetry. When Levertov marshaled a compressed lyric that shunned ornamentation on behalf of her anti-Vietnam activism, leading to a tragic fallout with her friend Duncan, whose gnostic postmodernism could not abide a conflation of poetry with rhetoric. Eigner, the most widely published of his peers, used the typewriter to record the ecology of his immediate milieu while managing a multitiered correspondence with small presses around the world (he remained largely home due to cerebral palsy). Known as the unofficial laureate of gay liberation, Weiners wrote short poems of intense abjection, or as he put it, “I try to write the most embarrassing thing I can think of.”

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