

Letters to Maximus

Amanda Cook

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Amanda Cook, *Letters to Maximus*. Video. [\[view at article URL\]](#)

When I started working on my *Letters to Maximus* it felt like a necessity. Charles Olson was the big man in the room, quite literally staring at me from more than one wall inside the Gloucester Writers Center as I taught. He had been hanging around the edges of my life for years. I found him in my places and I found myself in his places.

I started writing my reactions to his *Maximus* poems not because I wanted to, but because I felt like I had to. I wanted to deal with Olson one-on-one, through my own eyes and through my own relationship with poetry, with Gloucester, and with people he and I both loved.

This is not fun work. I see in Olson some of the best and the worst of my city, my country, myself. There are things in his poems I can not reconcile. Sure, he was writing

in a different time, in a different world, but he was writing about my Gloucester, my people. And he was leaving a lot out.

Listening to my husband read Olson's poems for this project I was struck by how different my reactions to the same poems would be if I were to write them today. Like Olson's, my poems are shaped by what is happening in my life and in the world around me. I joke with friends that I will need to annotate them at some point. I suppose that is true to the form. I would be my own Butterick.

I have finished the first volume. Two more to go. I never know what Olson's poems will draw out of me. I don't know who I will be when I sit down to write. My one rule is that I have to finish writing one poem before I read the next. It is slow work. It feels sometimes like I am working on geological time. No part of it is stable. The world is changing. I am changing. Even Olson's poems change with time. I am trying to give it all the care and attention it needs.