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LIBERALISM AND CHARLES OLSON: A THEMATIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The reflection of contemporary liberalism in America in the poetry of Charles Olson is described in this paper. A link was forged between early revolutionary individualism and a new idealistic concern for the interest of society about liberalism in 19th century by poets like Charles Olson. In the U.S. positive liberalism was further extended, with such developments as the social criticism of the muckrakers, the agitation for the enactment of legislation curbing trusts and extending the suffrage to woman, the trade-union movement, the 'New Freedom' of president Woodrow Wilson, and the new deal of president Franklin De Roosevelt. Gradually these program movements and laws perhaps by the way provided sanctions for government intervention in the economy.

Key words- Contemporary Liberalism, Reflection, Poetry, Olson

INTRODUCTION

Liberalism-"A political philosophy that emphasizes individual freedom."¹ attitude, philosophy or movement that has as its basic concern the development of personal freedom and social progress. Liberalism and democracy all now usually thought to have common aims, but in the past many liberals considered democracy unhealthy because it encouraged mass participation in politics. Nevertheless, liberalism eventually became indented with movements to change the social order through the further extension of democracy. A distinction must therefore be made between liberalism, in which social change is conceived of as gradual, flexible, and adoptive, and radicalism, in which "social change has been as fundamental and based on new principles of authority."²

In its full flower in the 19th century, liberalism stood for limited government with a separation of powers among different branches such as the legislative, executive and judicial and for free enterprises in the economy. Because of the reaction against the excesses of the French revolution, however "liberalism shed some of its relevance on rationalism and began to base itself on utilitarianism."³ A link was thus forged between early revolutionary individualism and a new idealistic concern for the interest of society about liberalism Charles Olson writes in his poem "*There Was a Youth Whose Name was Thomas Granger*" that :

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*from the beginning, sin
and the reason, note, known from the start*
says Mr. Bradford : As it is with waters when
their streams are stopped or damped up. wickednest
(Morton, Morton, Morton)
here by strict laws as in no place more,
or so much, that I have known or heard of,
and ye same more nearly looked unto
(Tom Granger)
so as it cannot rune in a common road of liberty
as it would, and is in clind,
is searches every wher (everywhere)
and breaks out wher it goes vente, says he.⁴

Reflection of Contemporary Liberalism in the poetry of Charles Olson

In the U.S. positive liberalism was further extended, with such developments as the social criticism of the muckrakers, the agitation for the enactment of legislation curbing trusts and extending the suffrage to woman, the trade-union movement, the 'New Freedom' of president Woodrow Wilson, and the new deal of president Franklin De Roosevelt. Gradually these program movements and laws perhaps by the way provided sanctions for government intervention in the economy. The crisis concerning economic power was more profound. As industrial capitalism developed in the 19th century "economic liberalism"⁵ continued to be characterized by negative attitude toward state authority. The working classes began to suspect that the philosophy protected the interest of certain powerful economic groups, particularly the manufacturing and that it encouraged a policy of indifference and even of brutality toward the working classes. These classes, which had begun to acquire political status one organized strength, therefore turned be the political liberalism that was more concerned with their needs that is of the socialist and labor parties. Rosemaric Tong says about individual rights in his book *The Feminist Thought* that :

Our whole system of individual rights is
justified because these rights constitute
a framework within which we can all choose
do not deprive others of theirs.⁶

Apart from a limited inheritance from medieval democratic ideas, the movements which made liberalism an important force from the 18th century onwards were the reformation and the wars of religion, the constitutional conflicts of the European state in the 17th century, and industrialism and the economic doctrines associated with laissez-faire. It assumed that have certain inalienable right as from birth.

These usually include liberty, the right to property, and pursuit of happiness. Liberalism arose as a political doctrine apposed to the feudal survives in Europe to autocracy and despotism, and the privileged position of the clergy and nobility. Liberalism came to imply equality of all individuals before the law, the use of parliamentary assemblies to limit or control the head of the state, the independence of the judiciary, the absolute right to private and the state's duty to offer protection in the context, and the end of the mercantilism in favour of individual enterprise in matters of trade.⁷

Throughout much of his history, man as an individual has been submerged in his group. His emancipation as an individual can be understood as a unique achievement of western culture perhaps its very hallmark. If this be so, then the emergency of liberalism was, in an important sense, inseparable from western man's quest from freedom, for liberalism, in the broadest sense, inseparable from western man's quest from freedom for liberalism, in the broadest sense, seeks to protest the individual from arbitrary external restraints that prevent the full realization of his potentialities. Charles Olson says in his poem "Mercy of Egypt" about liberalism that :

I speak downfall, the ball of my foot
on the neck of the earth, the hard song
of the rise of all trees, the joy
who uses the air. I am the recovered sickle
with the grass-stains still on the flint of its teeth
I am the six-rowed barely
They cut down.
I am tree. The boy of the back of my legs
is roots I am roots water fall
when motion is the season of my river,
and the wild beer casts Me.
Bit be time is hawkweed.⁸

The course of liberalism in a given country is usually conditioned by the character of the prevailing form of government, for example, in countries in which the political and religious authorities are separate, 'liberalism connotes, mainly political, economic and social reform, in countries in which a state church exists or a church is politically influential,' liberalism connotes, anticlericalism. In domestic politics liberals have opposed restraints that prevent the individual rising out of a low social status, services such as ownership that limit free expression of opinion, and arbitrary power exercised over the individual by the state. In international politics, liberals have opposed the domination of foreign policy by militarists and military consideration and the exploitation of native colonial people, and they have sought to substitute a cosmopolitan policy of international cooperation. Charles says in his poem "Mercy of Egypt" that :

I hold what the wind blows and silt
 I hide in the swamps of the valley to escape civil war
 and marauding soldiers. In the procession
 I am first, and carry wine
 made of dondians, the new rites
 are my bones
 I built my first settlement
 In graves
 As they would fail crops
 Whe the spring comes, and flood the tassds
 Ride, as my head.⁹

Liberalism is the culmination of a development that goes back to the Hebrew prophets, the teaching of the pre-Socratic philosophers, and the sermon on the mount, from all of which these emerged a sense of the importance of human individuality, "liberation from the individual from complete subservience to the group, and a relaxation of the tight hold of custom, law and authority."¹⁰

The fortunes of liberalism differ with the historical condition in each country, with the strength of the crown. The clan of aristocracy, the pace of industrialization, the circumstance of national unification. on the political side and the guiding principle of historical liberalism has been an undeviating insistency on limiting the power of government. Inspired by the need to remove the state from destructive interference with the economic life of the community, the principle degenerated, under the influential of men like Herbiest Spencer, into a doctrinaire from the anti-statism. Even the less doctrinarie Bentham's sole advice to the state was to 'Be Quite', and Edmund Burk, who in this context must be reckoned a liberal declared that it is in the power of the state of prevent much evil, it can do very little positive good. Thomas Daine, eloquent pamphleteer for the American revolution. Charles Olson says in his poem "Mercy of Egypt" that :

I am followed by women and a small boy in white carrying a
 duck
 all have flate feet and, foot before food, the women with black
 wings
 And I intent
 upon idles
 and flowers
 the sedge
 as tall as I am, the rushers.¹¹

Liberals may one day challenge and another day cherish the church, in one age they may seek less government intervention in economics affair, in another age more, they may have been hospitable to

the interests and ambitions of the business communities, under changed circumstances they may be hostile according Charles Olson that :

as I am
as far as I am animal, antelope
with such's attendant carnivores
and rows of beaters
drive the game to the hunter, or into nats.
Where it is thick wooded or there are upon spaces
With low shrubs¹²

In the postmediaeval European culture liberalism was perhaps first expressed in humanism, which redirected thinking in the 15th century from the consideration of the divine order of the world and its reflection in the temporal social order to the conditions and potentialities of people on the earth. As social transformation continued the objectives and concerns of liberalism changed. It retained however, a humanist 'social philosophy that sought to enlarge personel, social, political and economic opportunities,' for self expression by removing obstacles to individual choice. Charles Olson says about individual choice, in his poem-"There Was a Youth Whose name was Thomas Granger" that :

Rest, Tom, in your pit where they put you a great and
large pitte digged of purpose for them of Duxbery.
Servant, being about 16 or 17 years of age his father and
Mother living at the time at sityate
Espetially drunkenness & unclaims
In continence between persons unmarried
But some married person also
And that which in worse
(thing fearful to name)¹³

Liberalism does not aid itself to easy definition. A major difficulty is that; with some exception liberals have shunned dogma. Preferring generally a pragmatic to a doctrinaire approach to social problems. Another which has been a profile source of misunderstanding, has been liberals own frequently opposing views concerning the scope of government. The confusion thus engendered is sometimes compound by a tendency of identify liberalism exclusively with its 18th and 19th century varient or with the programs of this or that liberal party in a formation that has on occasion led many of announce the "decline"¹⁴ end of liberalism and to compose obituaries that have been quite misleading. Through the centuries liberalism has changed drastically in context, but it has maintained a constant form. Charles Olson says in his poem "*There Was a Youth Whose name was Thomas Granger*" that :

*Mr. Bradford; I forebear particulars
and accordingly he was cast by Ye jury.
And condemned
It being demanding of him
The youth confessed he had it of another
Who had long used it in old English
And they kept battle together¹⁵*

In fact liberal thinking was hostile to the prerogatives of kings, aristocrats, and the church, it favoured freedom a nature right-from traditional restraints. These nations did much to precipitate the American and revolutions and were important factors in various uprising in the 19th century liberalism sought to expand civil liberties and to limit political authority in favour of constitutional government and promoted the rights to property and religions toleration. In the economic sphere, classical liberalism was opposed to direction by state, Charles Olson says about civil liberties in his poem "There was a youth whose name was Thomas Granger" that :

*Mr Charles Channeys reverned, godly, very learned man
Who shortly thereafter, due to a difference about baptizing
he holding, it ought only to be dipping
that sprinkling was unlawful, removed him self
to the same sityate, a minister to ye church ther
in this case proved, by reference to ye judicials of mayers
& see; luther, calesin, hen; Bulin; Theo; Beza, Zanch;
what grievous sin in ye sight of God
By ye instigation of burning lust, set on fire of hell.
To proceed to conteetum Y fricationem and emissionam seminis,
& c.& yet contra naturam, or to attempt ye grosses act of⁶*

In broad sense political beliefs emphasizing freedom of the individual from external restraint. The liberalism of the 18th and 19th centuries was based on the ideal of the free market and sought to limit the "powers of government through such devices as federalism, bicameralism, and the separation of power,"¹⁷ though it was not necessary democratic. In the 20th century many liberals, wary of the concentration of wealth in private hands, tuned to social legislation and trade unionism to achieve a broader distribution of power rewards. The liberal program thus varies with changing conditions. Charles Olson says about individual freedom in his poem "Mercy of Egypt", that :

*I sing the tree in a heron
I prays cong grass
I wear the lion skin
Over the long skirt
To the ankle. The ankle
Is a heron.¹⁸*

I look straightly backward, or I bent to side straightly human beings as essential ration agents. Stated abstractly this conception does not found particularly innovative; afterall, the nation of rationality had always been prominent in the western philosophy tradition, from Aristotle to the medieval philosophers. But liberal theorists has constructed their own characteristic account of reason that uniquely distinguishes that “liberal conception of human nature. Charles Olson says in his poem “Mercy of Egypt” that :

*to rais that sheaf
up the stock of the leg
as the bittern's leg, raised
as slow as
his neck grows
as the wheat; the Presentation¹⁹*

The essence of the liberal solution is of two fold. It lies partly in making the decision of any given majority subject to the concurrence of other majorities distributed over a period of time. The majority that elects a president of United States, for example, is different from the majority that two years before elected one-third of the senate and two years later elected another third. Likewise two-thirds of the senators are elected by a majority other than the majority by which members of the house of representatives are elected. These groups in turn, are checked by the constitution, which was approved and later amended by majority no longer alive. In historical perspective it can be seen that the complex of forces, of which “classical liberalism”²⁰ was the rationalisation, brought great changes. The feudal system was destroyed, capitalism replaced the static society of the middle ages.

Positive development of liberalism in United States

In the United States liberal thought, as embodied in the declaration of independence (1776) has underpinned not only the constitution of the country but also most of policies and emphasis on rampant individualism that characterized political and business life until the 20th century. Wilsolian liberalism, allied to the tradition of England and France was the ideology from work of fourteen points and the Semar king of Europe at the treaty of Versailles in 1919. That peace settlement was

probably the high-water-mark of liberal political philosophy at the international level. Since 1945 most liberals in capitalist countries have had to rethink the old problems of the relationship of the individual to the state which inevitably assume a "greater role in supervising the lives of its citizens."²¹ By the 20th century, political and economical thinking among liberals had began to shift in response to an expanding and complex economy. Liberals began to support the idea that the government can best promote "individual dignity"²² and freedom through intervention in the economy and by establishing a state concern about the welfare of its people. Some liberals, became socialists, although opposing doctrinaire Maxism and communism. According to Rosemarie Tong about liberalism that :

Liberalism, the school of political thought from which liberal feminism has evolved is in the process of recon captulizing, reconsidering, and restricting itself, which makes it difficult to determine the state of liberal feminist.²³

A form of religious thought that establishes religious inquiry on the basis of a norm other than the authority of tradition. It was an important. Influence in Protestantism from about the mid 17th century through the 1920s. The defining "trait of liberalism"²⁴ is a will to be liberated from coercion of external controls and a consequent concern with inner motivation. Although some earlier indications of the liberal temper of mind existed.

Today, although most conservative might resist liberal proposals to establish a council on national goal. They would no doubt support national agency to plant the use of natural resources. Despite appearances, western society could be on the eve of less, rather than more polarization. All of this suggests a new source of strength for liberalism what has been called the "end of ideology."²⁵

In the U.S., positive liberalism was further extended, with such developments as the social criticism of the muckrakes, the agitation for the enactment of legislation curbing trusts and extending the suffrage to women. The trade-union movement, the new freedom of president Woodrow Wilson, and the new deal of president. Franklin D. Roosevelt. Gradually these programs, movements and laws prepared the way and provided sanctions for U.S. supreme court, which had long maintained a study defense against. Such intervention, heard eloquent defense for state regulation of hours and wages by both conservatives, such as justice Oliver Wendell, and liberals, such justice Louis Dembitz Brandies. Their opinions were accepted by the majority after 1936, when the court sustained one act of new deal legislation after another, asserting that individual citizens must be protected against overpowering economic groups and from disasters they have not brought on themselves. Legislative enactments provided for old-age and survivors insurance, unemployment insurance, federal control of various financial interests, minimum wages, supervision of agricultural production, and the "right of labour unions to organize and bargain"²⁶ collectively.

The modern historical period of theological liberalism began however, with the 17th century French philosopher and mathematician Rene Descartes. This first phase, called Rationalism lasted until about the mid 18th century. In designing the thinking self as the primary substance from which the existence of other realities was to be deduced, Descartes initiated a mode of thinking that remained in force through the 19th century and laid the basis for the presuppositions of this modern consciousness, 1. Confidence in human reason, 2. Primacy of person, 3. immanence of God, and 4. the belief that human nature is improvable and is improving. Many persons who influenced "religious thought"²⁷ in this period included Benedict de spinoza, Wilhelm as the Cambridge Platonists and the Deists.

Medieval society did not provide a soil in which the first beld of liberalism might easily germinate. The middle ages produced a society of status in which the rights and responsibilities of the individual were determined by his place in a stratified, hierarchy ordered system, such a closed, authoritarian order, however grandiose in outline and noble in aspiration was soured to place great stress upon acquiescence and conformity. As new needs and interests generated by the slow commercialisation and urbanisation of Europe, the mediæval system was modified to accommodate the ambitions of national rulers and the requirements of an expanding industry and commerce. The ensuing policies and arrangements came to be known as mercantilism, a policy of state intervention that, in theory at least might be extended to regulation of the most minute details of economic life. "Classical liberalism as an articulated creed in product of those great collisions."²⁸

Anne Hutchinson's trial revealed the dangerous implications of winthrop's theocratic commonwealth. Olson was least concerned with her religious conviction than with her right :

*to rouse up women
on thursdays
at her house
talking grace
versus works, when housekeeping
dealing with realities
affairs. . . .²⁹*

At first, and for part of the 19th century, socialists were ready to go along with liberals policies. Since middle-class liberals were more likely to benefit the people as a whole than any other practicable alternative. In time, however the principle of egalitarian claims in spheres other than the law was seem to be hostile to liberal thought. Such ideas could cut across the sacrosanct notion of liberty if it meant that the weaker members of society had to be protected by legislation. In time

liberalism itself came to accept this idea, and state action, first to remove abuses and then to improve men who were sometimes reluctant to improve themselves, came to be part of most liberal programmes state welfare, which would have been as intolerable meddling by "classical liberals"³⁰ of the early 19th century, was part of most liberal programmes by the middle of 20th century.

During the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries the medieval feudal order gradually gave way as protestantism. The new liberal order, drawing on enlightenment thought, began to place human beings rather than God at the centre of things. Humans, with their rational minds, could comprehend all things and could improve themselves and "society through systematic and rational action."³¹ One of the first thinkers to formulate a comprehensive liberal philosophy was the Englishman John Locke.

Classical liberals differed in their interpretation of individual rights, whether to understand them as "natural"³² and therefore inalienable and indefeasible, to justify them as functional or traditional. But eloquent and persuasive declaration affirming such right were embodied in the English Bill of rights of 1689, the American declaration of independence and constitution, the French declaration of the rights of man and of the citizen of 1789, and the basic documents of nations through the world that later used these as their models. Freedom thereby became more than the right to make a fractional contribution in an intermittent mandate to government, it designated the right of men to live their own lives.

The second state of theological liberalism, the Romanticism, lasted from the late 18th to the end of the 19th century. Marked by the discovery of the uniqueness of the individual and the consequent of the individual and the consequent significance of individual experience as a distinctive source of infinite meaning, it placed a premium upon personality and individual creativity that exceeded every other value. The American and French revolutions provided the symbol of this "spirit of independence"³³ and dramatically exemplified it in political action.

Comparative analysis in reference to present scenario

At present the traditional coalition on which liberals have relied is in disappearance in many countries. Ethnic minorities have become confused and divided by the separatist creed of their more militant leaders the academic community is traumatized and in a state of turmoil and labor unions lack a good deal of their old dynamism, even the once engage artist has been lost to aestheticism and esotericism. The increasing polarization between right and left finds the liberals attacked on both flanks, but the appearance of beleaguèrment may well be deceptive. Much of the liberal program has in fact become public policy. When in the 1930s, Franklin D. Roosevelt established the national resource planning board, it was called un American by conservatives, its budged was slashed, and it was finally abolished. All of this suggests a new source of strength for liberalism in what has been called the "end of ideology."³⁴

By the middle of the 19th century, liberal thought concerning constitutionalism, wider suffrage, toleration of dissent, absence of arbitrariness, and policies designed to promote happiness had acquired powerful advocates in Great Britain and other European countries and in the U.S. despite a prevalent tendency to find fault with the U.S., European visitors considered that nation an exemplary of liberalism because its popular "culture, emphasis on equality,"³⁵ and wide suffrage. Nevertheless, liberalism reached a stage of crisis at this time, in relation to democracy and economic power, that was important to its later development on the one hand, some democrats such as the French philosopher and author Jean Jacques Rousseau were not liberals. Rousseau objected to network of voluntary, private groups that many liberals considered essential to the movement. On the other hand, most early liberals were not democrats.

A philosophy of liberalism was formulated by John Locke who also pleaded for religious liberty especially in his second treatise of government (1690). To these legal and religious liberties Adam Smith's wealth of nations added an economic element. He maintained that economic life must be left free from protection of all sorts, and that free competition improves the quality and quantity of goods. In the 19th century Jesemy Bentham saw liberty as being based on self-interest and the principle that government should reflect the greatest happiness of the greatest number. "self interest and the interests of the community are identical, and introduced the social element into liberalism."³⁶

An influential early liberal was the English philosopher John Locke. In his political writings, which deeply influence the farmers of the U.S. constitution, he argued for popular sovereignty, the right of rebellion against oppression, and toleration of religious minorities. According to the thought to Locke and his many followers, the state exists not to promote people's spiritual salvation, but to serve its citizens and to guarantee their "life, liberty, and property"³⁷ under a constitution. If minimum of government activity in legislation, on the grounds that the individual was able to look after himself, given such freedom of action as is constant with the maintenance of law and order.

Liberals have been less successful in correcting what they regard as an irrational schedule of priorities by using the taxing powers of government to obtain greater allocations for the public sectors of the economy, they have been least successful at any rate in the United State, in persuading the business community and labour unions to accept government participation in pricing and wage decisions. To achieve a Juster distribution of rewards, liberals have relied on the two major strategies. First they have promoted the organization of workers and consumers to improve their power to bargain with employer-producers. Such a redistribution of power has had political as well as economic consequences, making possible a party system in which at least one party is responsive to the interests of wage earners and consumers, second, enlistning the political support of the economically deprived, liberals

have evolved the so-called welfare state, with its panoply of social services "from the cradle to the grave."³⁸

The third period of theological liberalism, modernism, from the mid-19th century through the 1920s, was marked by the discovery of the significance of historical time and an emphasis upon the notion of progress. The decisive events stimulating these interests were the industrial revolution and the publication of Charles Darwin's origin of species. A determined course emerged among modernists to bring religious thought into accord with modern knowledge and solve issues raised by "modern culture."³⁹ The study of Christian doctrine was transformed into the psychological study of religious experience and into sociological study of religious institutions and customs and the philosophical inquiry into religious knowledge and values. Among important figures during this period were Thomas Huxely, Spencer, James and Ernst. After 1920s many theologically liberal ideas were challenged by neo-orthodoxy, a theological movement in Europe and the U.S. that used the traditional language of protestant orthodoxy and advocated a return to biblical faith centred in Christ although accepting modern critical methods of biblical interpretation.

In 1960s, the emphasis of liberal again shifted as it became more and more evident that expanding production is not an unmarried blessing. The litany is now a familiar one. The same industry that produces our wealth pollutes our rivers, lakes and atmosphere. Its gleaming artefacts become mountains of junk and it menaces the ecological balance of nature. It concentrates millions in drab cities that in the United State at least are being evacuated by those who can afford to escape to the suburbs. The result is a daily movement of traffic, choking the highways, poisoning the air, jangling the nerves. The inventory could be extended indefinitely. Much of the "wealth"⁴⁰ produced by industry hardly justifies such consequences.

Conclusion: A distinction is sometimes made between so called negative liberalism and positive liberalism. Between mid-17th and the mid 19th centuries, liberal fought chiefly against oppression, arbitrariness, and misuse of power and emphasized the needs of the free individual. About the middle of the 19th century many liberal developed a more positive programme stressing the constructive social activity of the state and advocating state action in the interests of the individual the present day defenders of the older liberal policies deplore this departure and argue that positive liberalism is merely authoritarianism in disguise. The defenders of positive liberalism argue that state and church are not the only obstructers of "freedom"⁴¹, but that poverty may deprive the individual of the possibility of making significant choices and must therefore be controlled by constituted authority.

If, as the Enlightenment liberal assumed, 'reason's comparing balance' rarely fails man in any of his activities, it could be affirmed a fortiori that they would also meticulously balance utilities

against costs at the marketplace, since rational men best know their own interest it must follow that interference by agencies of government could only diminish that "greatest happiness of greatest number"⁴² that the followers of Bentham claimed to desire. Assumed also by the classical creed is a conception of the consumer as sovereign. The contemporary variant of liberalism is even more amorphous than the classical.

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