

daily round.⁷ Yet they are, indeed, the elements of a reality, if we try to put one together. (I have in mind Hannah Arendt's moving sense of the possible "recovery of the public world.") I think the fundamental problem here is a 'scientism' of the real, from which, in my reading, the gift of Whitehead's searching thought, as corrective, was to allow us to escape: that is, to see and work whatever real we can manage differently. It is this broad, general, rumoured sense of Whitehead, summed up in his word 'process,' that I believe brings him so forcefully into American poetics. Of that 'demystification,' which I am here identifying with a scientism of another order, we need to take mind. René Girard writes:

The cultural heritage of humanity is regarded with suspicion. Its only interest lies in its "demystification".

...

Humanity, we are told, has fallen victim to a vast mystification unrecognized until now. This is cultural nihilism, and it is often associated with a fetishistic cult of science. Because we have discovered the "original sin" of human thought, we think ourselves free of it. What is now needed is a radically different mode of thought, a new science that will allow us to appreciate the absurdity of all previous thinking. And because this lie was until recently immune from detection, the new scientific approach must be altogether unconnected with the past. Inevitably, it will take the shape of a unique discovery by some inspired being who has little in common with ordinary mortals, or even with his own past. In severing the cord that attached us to the matrix of all mythic thought, this liberator of humanity will have delivered us from dark ancestral falsehood and led us into the luminous world of truth. Our hard and pure science is to be the result of a coupure épistémologique, an epistemological revolution that is totally unexpected and for which we are entirely unprepared.

This he names "scientific angelism."⁸ It is an apocalypse of the objective or of a generalized humanity which can be seen as an objectivity. It is also a disguised superstition.

What I have noticed in the poetry and poetics of the most important poets is that they are arguing, weaving, and composing a cosmology and an epistemology. Over and over again. There is no

epistemological cut-off or gash in our deepest natures, nor in our engagement with life. Nor is the ambition of what is known short on its desire for cosmos. It is this structuring, large and deep in the nature of things, that still thrills us in Hesiod's struggle for the sense of it. Such concern, because it does tie to experience, is central to the historical role of poet and poetry. I am not denigrating the song of poetry, for the sense of self is always a part of poetry and reality, and so one sings. But repeatedly in the history of poetry, we find ourselves returning to epic structures and the bases of epic in the shape, size and feel of the world, cosmos. I suggest that great poetry is always after the world--it is a spiritual chase--and that it has never been, in the old, out-worn sense, simply subjective or personal. Of course, Whitehead's subjective principle, his theory of prehensions, and his notion of the ingression to the real do not leave the subjective to itself alone. It is this aspect of poetic experience, its yen for largeness and fullness, that has brought poetry throughout its history into close proximity with the modes of theogony and theology, with science in its deepest concerns, and with philosophies which propose a world. The density of meaning in the texts has increased, for us, as the gods, that wondrous vocabulary of the world, fall, but not without a trace, and the autonomous mind has had to re-pose itself. We may, then, sit in this corner of things to understand the way in which Whitehead enters so commandingly into Olson's poetic world.

I have arranged my essay to include copious quotation. My reason is that I have found in talking about Olson and teaching his poetry, singular assertion is not enough. And certainly, where his relation to Whitehead is concerned, there will be disparate views. The world of twentieth century thought involves a huge companionship. I have tried to put together some pieces of that companionship here.

Whitehead's sense of reality as process, which stands to correct both materialism and idealism in their command over us, does not enter upon our thought and imaginations unprepared for. Hugh Kenner in his discussion of the importance to Ezra Pound of Fenollosa's "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry" notices the depth of preparation for such a view:

The Descartes who (Boileau complained) had "cut the throat" of poetry, and the Locke who made poetry a diversion of relaxed or enfeebled minds, lived among learned men . . . [who thought] of words naming things, and words as many as there were things, and language a taxonomy of static things, with many an "is" but ideally

no verb. And it was just such notions . . . that Ernest Fenollosa, encouraged by ideograms, set out to refute, on behalf of "the language of science which is the language of poetry. . . ."19

In a letter of 1916, before the essay was printed in 1919, Pound states his interest: "'All nouns come from verbs.' To the primitive man, a thing only is what it does. That is Fenollosa, but I think the theory a very good one for poets to go by."¹⁰ It is of singular importance that among poets the effort to regain a world-view is also a search for a different stance in language. Olson will make a similar move by attention to the Hopi language in Benjamin Whorf's studies.¹¹ And it fascinates me that when I turn to science, I find the physicist David Bohm in his cosmology undertaking the same search:

The subject-verb-object structure of language, along with its world view, tends to impose itself very strongly in our speech, even in those cases in which some attention would reveal its evident inappropriateness. . . . Is it not possible for the syntax and grammatical form of language to be changed so as to give a basic role to the verb rather than the noun?¹²

This involves, I think, a renewed sense of literature, particularly poetry, in which the work of an active, undistanced language goes on, a parataxis.

I note Whitehead's currency in these contemporary cosmological concerns, in Bohm, in Ruth Nanda Anshen's beautiful essay "Convergence," and in Bernard Lovell's Emerging Cosmology. Lovell closes his book with this quotation from Whitehead:

There is no parting from your own shadow. To experience this faith is to know that in being ourselves we are more than ourselves: to know that our experience, dim and fragmentary as it is, yet sounds the utmost depths of reality: to know that detached details merely in order to be themselves demand that they should find themselves in a system of things: to know that this system includes the harmony of logical rationality, and the harmony of aesthetic achievement:

to know that, while the harmony of logic lies upon the universe as an iron necessity, the aesthetic harmony stands before it as a living ideal moulding the general flux in its broken progress towards finer, subtler issues.¹³

This wonderful voice, guiding science and, as we shall see, entering into poetry, draws attention to what is most to be attended to in art--if I may cadge some phrases from a scholar of Melville, Olson's first master--"the mode of [the] engagement with life, the capacity of the deep-diving literary imagination to plunge to the bottom of human experience and to find there what is funded as ontological possibility."¹⁴ Funded by Olson and Whitehead on this occasion. But it is Kenner's point that reality as process was prepared for in Emerson's 'organicism' to bring us by affinity to "Whitehead, and Darwin and Frazer, and Gestaltists and field physicists, and the synergism of Buckminster Fuller," to "organisms not systems," to "process and change and resemblance and continuity."

And behind that effort. Behind it, preparing for it, a chain of philosophers, a chain which "leads back through Hegel, Lotse, Schelling and Herder to Leibnitz (as Whitehead constantly recognized), and then it seems to disappear": seems to disappear because we are looking for European predecessors, and Leibnitz was indebted to China. So runs Joseph Needham's remarkable hypothesis, which attributes European organicism, via Leibnitz' Jesuit friends of the China Mission, to neo-Confucian Li and the school of Chu Hsi. . . .¹⁵

Kenner is surely right to point to the history of this receptivity, however much modern relativity theory, interpreted by Whitehead, placed a premium on process. Olson, modern as he is, is also New England. He had that ground. In an old fashioned American education, Emerson was simply among the books on the family shelves. In terms of poetry and process, Olson's first debts are to Pound's *Fenollosa* and Confucianism and, then, to William Carlos Williams' early interest in science, reflected in his poetry, as a means to gain objectivity and emotional accuracy. Mike Weaver has finely drawn these concerns together in his discussion of science and poetry in Williams' early work. There, we find out that Williams requested a copy of C.P. Steinmetz' book on relativity in 1926 and that he was given a copy of Whitehead's Science and the Modern

World in December, 1926. Williams wrote in that copy: "Finished reading it at sea, Sept. 26, 1927--A milestone surely in my career, should I have the force and imagination to go on with my work."¹⁶ Because Whitehead's science of reality influences stance and, thereby, form in so powerful a poet as Williams, it is fair to say that the currency of Whitehead in poetry has something like a date just there.

Among Olson's books, now collected in The Charles Olson Archives in the University of Connecticut Library at Storrs, only two of Whitehead's titles turn up: Process and Reality: an Essay in Cosmology and The Aims of Education and Other Essays.¹⁷ This tells us only so much: that certain titles remained in his library, others did not, and that his personal collection is not the record of the breadth of his reading. Charles Boer in his fine memoir of Olson's last months in Connecticut recalls an evening's conversation on Whitehead. His narration is addressed to Olson himself:

The Wesleyan University undergraduate curriculum in your day had been revamped along "general education" lines and Whitehead's book, published in your freshman year at Wesleyan, became one of the core texts in this curriculum. Its "philosophy of organism," its "subjectivist principle," and especially its scientifically minded efforts to offer a cosmology for the twentieth century were facets of Whitehead's thought that remained with you throughout your life.¹⁸

Olson was an undergraduate at Wesleyan 1928-1932, and he received his M.A. there in 1933.¹⁹ He was later to continue graduate studies at Harvard. Boer's descriptive terms for Whitehead's book seem more suitable to Process and Reality than to any other title, though all the elements noted are concerns present in Science and the Modern World which would be the likely book for an undergraduate programme. The latter was first published in 1925 and the former in 1929. The conversation, Thanksgiving Day, 1969, here remembered, may well have contained some fusion of the two books, since Process and Reality tends to drink up and, then, clarify the vocabulary of the earlier book.

In a lecture at Black Mountain College, dated 1956, Olson describes and dates his take on Whitehead:

I am the more persuaded of the importance and use of

Whitehead's thought that I did not know his work--except in snatches and by rumor, including the disappointment of a dinner and evening with him when I was 25 and he was what, 75!--until last year. So it comes out like those violets of Bolyai Senior on all sides when men are needed, that we possess a body of thinking of the order of Whitehead's to catch us up where we wouldn't poke our hearts in and to intensify our own thought just where it does poke. He is a sort of an Aquinas, the man. He did make a Summa of three centuries, and cast his system as a net of Speculative Philosophy so that it goes at least as far as Plato. And his advantage over either Plato or Aquinas is the advantage we share: that the error of matter was removed in exactly these last three centuries. I quote Whitehead:

"The dominance of the scalar physical quantity, inertia, in the Newtonian physics obscured the recognition of the truth that all fundamental quantities are vector and not scalar."

(Scalar, you will recall, is an undirected quantity, while vector is a directed magnitude as a force or velocity.)

So one gets the restoration of Heraclitus' flux translated as, All things are vectors. Or put it, All that matters moves! And one is out into a space of facts and forms as fresh as our own sense of our own existence.

This lecture was "preceded and followed" by study sessions on Process and Reality.²⁰ Doubtless, it comes as a shock to find the mathematical vocabulary of Whitehead so quickly translated into 'existence.' This is characteristic of Olson's use of Whitehead, a kind of translation throughout, beginning with his considered reading of him in 1955. Such translation is founded in Whitehead's own method, as Paul Christensen points out:

The breadth and comprehension of Whitehead's metaphysical thesis in Process and Reality suggested to Olson another manifestation of the new will to cohere.

Whitehead proposed to explain through his philosophy of organism how all the evolving forms of the totality are tending toward some final harmonious order which, he argued, will be the material embodiment of God. . . . The movement toward harmony is not directed from any outside force acting upon the chaos; it is occurring through the success of its own accidental combinations. . . . It is not this thesis by itself that stimulates Olson; rather it is the very grandeur of the act of Whitehead as he "takes thought" on his own perceptions. His speculation is that the bewildering prehensive activities of all levels of matter do have a goal, and he speculates boldly on what that goal might be. Part of Whitehead's argument has to do with the precise formative event in nature; to explain how it is that some entities receive formation and others deny it, he ascribes to any entity or formal group stages of "feeling." Olson finds this explanation the most compelling feature of Whitehead's book.²¹

This well-judged summary brings us a long way into a sense of Olson's response to the philosopher, but we should remember that, for Whitehead, the universe was incomplete and in process. And so it stood for Olson. I shall return to the stages of "feeling" in a moment.

What strikes me most in the passage from the Olson lecture is the predominant sense of freshness of view and stance--"out into a space of facts and forms as fresh as." The violets, seen in his own neighborhood, are remarkable. Sherman Paul, who has written a beautiful, insightful book on Olson, has elegantly gathered together the pieces of Olson's use of the image of a violet or a bunch of them: in this passage, he writes, "Whitehead's thought is a violet," and he notes Olson's violets in the dance-essay, Apollonius of Tyana, "how men spring up, when they are needed, like violets, on all sides, in the spring, when winter has been too long." Finally, he draws our attention to Olson's first use of the image in a poem of 1950, "The Story of an Olson, and Bad Thing," in which ". . . Olson associates the fragrance of violets with blood and the smell of life--with birth." In the same context, Paul marvelously reminds us of a parallel instance of such a freshening of view in William Carlos Williams' poem, "St. Francis Einstein of the Daffodils, On the first visit of Professor Einstein to the United States in spring of 1921," wherein

Einstein, tall as a violet
in the lattice-arbor corner
is tall as
a blossomy peartree²²

A fresh world-view, then, indebted to science by way of Einstein and Whitehead, neither otherworldly nor transcendent to life, is what is at stake. And further, the imaginary, the thought given by way of image is not denigrated but made dynamic in the perceptual field. That field is large, relational, in the sense of operative, and alive. This aspect of the translation of science into poetry leads to an enormous change in the formal mode of a poem. William Carlos Williams entitled his lecture at the University of Washington in 1948, "The Poem as a Field of Action." Therein, we find this statement:

How can we accept Einstein's theory of relativity, affecting our very conception of the heavens about us of which poets write so much, without incorporating its essential fact--the relativity of measurements--into our own category of activity: the poem. Do we think we stand outside the universe? Or that the Church of England does? Relativity applies to everything, like love, if it applies to anything in the world.²³

Olson's Maximus Poems extend into an enormous field of attentions, in which we find the poet in the guise of himself and his renewed, enlarged human figuration, Maximus, in the composition of the poem, attentive. Paul Christensen describes the look and feel of the poems in just such terms:

the unfinished, in-process look of the pages, the large leaves, the workbook appearance express the nature of his poetic composition. The poems are the partially stated connections between objects in the Gloucester field; they are "soundings" or, for that matter, the "field notes" of its metaphysical and cosmological exploration. The infinite potentiality and complexity of the field make any one effort at best a fragment of understanding; and the final books are just this, the

partial filling in of a vast totality.²⁴

Olson's direct uses of Whitehead's thought by way of reference, borrowing, and quotation can be traced to Process and Reality and to Adventures in Ideas.²⁵ George Butterick points out that Whitehead's "philosophy of process underlies The Maximus Poems," that, in one important instance, he names the philosopher "my great master and the companion of my poems," and that the meeting of the two men, referred to in Olson's lecture, occurred in Cambridge in 1938. And, out of his familiarity with the entire Archive, he notes: "The copy of Process and Reality [Olson] acquired in February, 1957 is one of the most heavily marked and annotated in his library."²⁶

Reading through Olson's copy is an intellectual delight. There is the complexity and profundity of Whitehead's thought, often in fine prose, and then there is the layered record of Olson's pouring over the text to find the use of it. Inside covers, back and front, flyleaves and title page, all are heavily written over in pencil and ink of various colours, mainly blue and red, offering a kind of personal index of passages and of ideas Whitehead sparked. The first flyleaf contains a dated record of Olson's repeated readings, including those which preceded his purchase of this copy: "1st read sprg 55/ again sprg 56/nov spring 57/3rd [4th?] spring - Whitehead 58," and above those entries, "now 1964," and to the side, "Jan 3, 1966." On the inside cover the notation "Sept. 11th 1969." Other dates turn up in the margins of the text, sometimes to date the place where he started rereading or to date a specific passage as it took on particular significance. The text itself, frequently underlined, contains remarks, exclamations, phrases copied from the text--a kind of memory device, I take it--reflections, schematizations and mythological notes now and again, which extend the text into image. All in all, a record of the richest kind of reading. On the title page, Olson sketches a chronology: beside Whitehead's name, "born 1861/(Yeats born 1865)/Charles Peirce born 1839 22 years only younger!/(H. Adams 1830/ Wm James 1842--3 years." Where the title page identifies Whitehead as Professor of Philosophy in Harvard University, Olson writes "(date of this?)," then, having found out, "1924." And where the title page identifies Process and Reality as "The Gifford Lectures delivered in the University of Edinburgh during the session 1927-28" (Olson's underlining), he notes: "I was 16-17, & in Europe that summer." At the bottom of the page is added "[D.H.] Lawrence 1885/24 years younger/than W'h/ came to US/when?" The date of Lawrence's coming to the U.S. is not filled in; it was, of course, in 1922. This

chronology relates to Olson's violets and it is interesting because, in it, Olson seems to have tried to tie together the modern English writers who most interested him, Yeats and Lawrence, with Whitehead and his English background. He, then, places Whitehead in the American philosophical tradition. It is noteworthy that Olson chooses Peirce, a physicist and founder of pragmatism (the term was current by 1878). As for the mass of the notations, it is not possible accurately to date them according to one reading or another, unless Olson has done so himself. The notations do seem to lead in two directions, one toward an understanding of Whitehead's argument and the other toward the use of the material. When we enter upon the use of Whitehead, I do not find the relationship between the two men systematic, but rather companionable, as Olson himself said, and creative.

This move away from a systematic relationship to Whitehead's philosophy of organism should be noted by the reader, and is, indeed, pointed out by Olson himself in the 1956 lecture:

In the pleasure of these substantiations of Whitehead I should like myself to gather up in a basket--or all it will take is a hand--my own pre-propositions to a knowledge of his thought. And it might be interesting to someone else in this sense, that, like violets we are a bunch!

It comes down to fact and form. A writer, I dare say, goes by words. That is, they are facts. And forms. Simultaneously. And a writer may be such simply that he takes an attitude towards this double power of word: he believes it is enough to unlock anything. Words occur to him as substances--as entities, in fact as actual entities. My words were space, myth, fact, object. And they were globs. Yet I believed in them enough to try to reduce them to sense. I knew they were vector and in Ishmael [Olson's first book, Call me Ishmael, 1947, scholarly on Melville and directive to his own work] treated them as such, but they didn't, for me, get rid of scalar inertia. Whitehead, it turns out, would say that I was stuck in the second of the three stages in the process of feeling:

"The second stage is governed by the private ideal . . . whereby the many feelings, derivatively felt as alien (the first stage of a response, the mere reception of the actual world), are transformed into a unity of aesthetic appreciation felt as

private." [Olson's parentheses]

I cannot urge on you enough to remind you that these stubborn globs one sticks by, and is stuck with, are valid, at the same time that I urge you, one day, to recognize them as "losses" of the vector force in exactly the sense in which Whitehead goes on to characterize this second stage further:

"This (the second stage described above) is the incoming of 'appetition,' which in its higher exemplification we term 'vision.' In the language of physical science, the 'scalar' form overwhelms the original 'vector' form; the origins become subordinate to the individual experience. The vector form is not lost, but is submerged in the foundation of the scalar superstructure."

So they sat for me, space myth fact object.²⁷

This lecture is marked by its introductory character from the initial statement on coming to know Whitehead's thought to, as we shall see, the poet's admonition which effectively distinguishes between the poetic and the philosophical intention. But, first, I want to draw attention to the passages from Whitehead, which Olson introduces here. They are from the chapter on "Process" (Part II, Chapter X, Section III), better than halfway through the argument of Process and Reality. Olson's purpose, then, appears to be to move directly to the "process of feeling" and to emphasize it. It is striking that, knowledgeable in mathematics himself, he continues to maintain Whitehead's mathematical vocabulary. Olson is here approaching the problem of a language that will hold on to reality as process. As it turns out, the solution will be found, not simply in the words, but in the form as well. Where one may have missed the point of Olson's earlier definitions of scalar and vector, which were strictly dictionary definitions, it may be useful, with Whitehead's sense of "the foundation of the scalar superstructure" in mind, to emphasize that the scalar is "a quantity fully described by a number" and a vector is "a complex entity representative of a directed magnitude, as of a force or a velocity."²⁸ Translated, as Olson appears to do, the one is complete form, say, the subjective poet of the old humanism, the other is coming into form by attention. The emphasis is upon prehensive activity. By maintaining Whitehead's vocabulary of the physical sciences, Olson

accomplishes two things: he places human nature in the physical, like Whitehead's actual occasions or actual entity--in this instance Whitehead is discussing both--and he shifts the attention to the vector, "the original vector forms," "the origins." This is important to Olson because origin, beginning, and renewal are finally the true subjects of his poems, and such regard transforms the finitude of modern humanism with its despair and terrorisms. He was to search for active form, rather than the referential kind which he reads as entrapment in present cultural conditions. A dead duck, if I may so express myself.

From the passages quoted by Olson, Whitehead turns to a further consideration of the "second stage of feeling," which makes the issue even clearer: ". . . the reason why the origins are not lost in the private emotion is that there is no element in the universe capable of pure privacy"--"to be 'something' is 'to have the potentiality of acquiring real unity with other entities'" [this is the third metaphysical principle]--"Thus emotion is 'emotional feeling'; and 'what is felt' is the presupposed vector situation"--"scalar quantities are constructs derivative from vector quantities." Whitehead, then, makes one of those brilliant adjustments in his argument:

In more familiar language, this principle can be expressed by the statement that the notion of 'passing on' is more fundamental than that of a private individual fact. In the abstract language here adopted, for metaphysical statement, 'passing on' becomes 'creativity,' in the dictionary sense of the verb create, 'to bring forth, beget, produce.' Thus, according to the third principle, no entity can be divorced from the notion of creativity. An entity is at least a particular form capable of infusing its own particularity into creativity. An actual entity, or a phase of an actual entity, is more than that; but, at least, it is that. (PRII, X, III)

Thus, without abstraction, we may read the physical and mental entity as coming into form by process, a flowing from its origins.

Because I want the reader to gain a sense of the long-hand of Olson's effort, I will continue to select a few passages from Whitehead. This Chapter on "process," in which the three stages of feeling are described, opens with a consideration of the 'flux of things': "That 'all things flow' is the first vague generalization

which the unsystematized, barely analyzed intuition of man has produced." It is there, Whitehead tells us, in the Psalms, for philosophy in Heraclitus, and "in all stages of civilization" in poetry.

Without doubt, if we are to go back to that ultimate, integral experience, unwarped by the sophistications of theory, that experience whose elucidation is the final aim of philosophy, the flux of things is the one ultimate generalization around which we must weave our philosophical system. (PRII, X, I)

It is at such a point as this that we may begin to understand what I have called Olson's translation of Whitehead. And it is certainly more than a simplification. This "ultimate, integral experience," which is a kind of continuance of feeling, is then distinguished from the "rival and antithetical" notion:

I cannot at the moment recall one immortal phrase which expresses it with the same completeness as the alternative notion has been rendered by Heraclitus. The other notion dwells on permanences of things--the solid earth, the mountains, the stones, the Egyptian Pyramids, the spirit of man, God. (PRII, X, I)

The ensuing discussion brings face to face "the metaphysics of substance," which Olson repeatedly in conversation with me, 1957-1959, argued that we must change, and "the metaphysics of flux," "the static spiritual world" and a "fluent world." I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the disclosure here, as it is argued in modern terms. It is the "static spiritual world," even when it is psychologized in an identity rather than in a fluent individuation, that is dead in the modern cultural condition.

Olson's 1956 lecture is in great part a record of the way in which Whitehead's thought entered into his as both corrective and companion. He uses it as an occasion to reflect back on his own work. "Space as such of course I opened Ishmael with. . . . I behaved better in Ishmael than I knew. Even, for example, to jamming in the other two terms as well as myth and space, hammering object and fact as process of composition. . . ." He connects this with words out of a dream:

of rhythm is image
of image is knowing
of knowing there is
a construct,

and he draws our attention to Whitehead's sense of a "blind perceptivity of the other physical occasions of the actual world." He had "stumbled and was stumbling" on those four words as they would direct the lifetime of his work. The problem was the vectorial, the fluency of the world. In the same section of Whitehead, where he remarks on Bergson's "charge that the human intellect 'spatializes the universe,' that is to say, that it tends to ignore the fluency, and to analyze the world in terms of static categories," Olson underlines and dates it 1959. Still at it, three years after the 1956 lecture. The problem was to make space alive in time by image. That would, of course, mean myth.

Olson consistently translates Whitehead's philosophy of organism and its magnificent 'vision' of process back into his own acts as poet of perception and intelligence. This means that in such use of Whitehead's thought, the poet Olson steps back from the systematic, abstract nature of the metaphysical task.²⁹

It is actually form that I am seeking to draw out of the thought--to seize a tradition out of the live air, or something, the Bejewelled Man once said--the thought which, I have suggested, and Whitehead has the system to demonstrate, man is now possessed of after the last three centuries once again. (I suppose because I am a mythologist and least of all a philosopher. The seasons of man also recur, even if it will be some time before we know them as deliberately as we do those of nature. . . .)

Whitehead's rereading--a corrective, in Olson's mind--of three centuries of philosophy in Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant and, by implication, Hegel, had been necessary to prepare for the three stages of feeling in process. Mythology in this context suggests a pre-systematic language, imaged, natural and fundamental to the feeling mind, Whitehead's ". . . the 'process' inherent in the fact of being a mind" (PRIL, VI, IV). Olson then moves to tie down his difference:

That is, I am not aware that many men's acts of form yet tap the total change of stance or posture (postulate or premise) of which Whitehead's "philosophy of organism" is one completed exemplification. Mind you, be careful here. Remember the violets. A philosophy, even of his order, or because of his order, a philosophy, just because it is a wind-up, it does seek, as he says, to be so water-tight that, "at the end, insofar as the enterprise has been successful, there should be no problem of spacetime, or of epistemology, or of causality, left over for discussion," form, in the sense in which one means it as of creations, can have no life as such a system. It is like the moon, without air. Or a mother. It has had to be like Whitehead has to find God as wisdom to be, "a tender care that nothing be lost." The creation of form by man could hardly let this statement of his operative growth cover him just because he is not God, and his third stage of feeling--"the satisfaction," Whitehead calls it--can only assert itself, even as a "completed unity of operation," in a new actual entity. In other words has to go back to the vectors of which it is a proof. Taking off from the thought one can define an act of art as a vector which, having become private and thus acquired vision, ploughs the vision back by way of primordial things. Only thus can it have consequence. It cannot, by taking up consequence, into itself.³⁰

Olson terms the condition a "return to object" and he returns art to the "contest." "I had already," he writes, "practiced the principle of the particular when [Robert] Creeley offered me the formulation form is never more than an extension of content (sign he too was one of Whitehead's violets!)." ³¹ The implication is clear: that the contest--"variance, dissension, contention, dissonance"--belongs to the poetic task and is the companion of that other task, the philosophical. The contest is suggestive of the theory of prehensions.

I am reminded of an earlier passage in Whitehead, where Olson underlines "an instance of experience is dipolar" (PRI, III, IV). The word dipolar, which will have continuous relevance for Olson, is encircled and a line drawn to the bottom of the page, where Whitehead is slightly reworded for emphasis: "Wh's cosmological silence repudiates the assumption that the basic

elements of experience are to be described, nota, in one, or all, of the three ingredients, viz:/consciousness, thought/sense-perception." Olson concludes with a definition of form as tensions, "primordial fluency" and "a consequent one":

And each makes up the matter: the objective immortality of actual occasions requires the primordial permanence of form, whereby the creative advance ever re-establishes itself endowed with initial creation of the history of one's self.³²

The sudden appearance of "one's self" in this context may seem abrupt. But Olson is here calling forward certain fundamental aspects of Whitehead's thought, keyed by the use of the philosopher's terminology. The issue of creativity is central. As Donald Sherburne has helped me to understand, "Creativity is one of the three notions involved in what Whitehead calls the Category of the Ultimate; this category expresses the general principle presupposed by all other aspects of the philosophy of organism. . . . The other two principles involved are many and one."³³ The return to the objective, for which Olson argues, has equally in the process to account for the one. I recall an extraordinary passage from Whitehead:

But creativity is always found under conditions, and described as conditioned. The non-temporal act of all-inclusive unfettered valuation is at once a creature of creativity and a condition for creativity. It shares this double character with all creatures. By reason of its character as a creature, always in concrecence and never in the past, it receives a reaction from the world: this reaction is its consequent nature. It is here termed 'God,' because the contemplation of our natures, as enjoying real feeling derived from the timeless source of all order, acquires that 'subjective form' of refreshment and companionship at which religions aim. (PRI, III, I)

And so it is also with poetry in which a world-view is at stake. Olson's sense of 'creative advance' seems to reflect a passage in "The Theory of Feelings":

. . . the process of integration, which lies at the very heart of the concrescence, is the urge imposed on the concrescent unity of that universe by the three categories of subjective unity, of objectivity identity, and of objective diversity. The oneness of the universe and the oneness of each element in the universe, repeat themselves to the crack of doom in the creative advance from creature to creature, each creature including in itself the whole of history and exemplifying the self-identity of things and their mutual diversity. (PRIII, I, VII)

To enter this creativity--"Creativity' is the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact"³⁴--was, indeed, to enter upon the process of world-view itself.

With many a quotation, I have endeavoured to dramatize the two languages of these men in order to avoid the critical flattening of Whitehead into his broadest generalizations or of Olson into a simplified or incorrect relation to Whitehead. When we come to one of Olson's last statements involving Whitehead, the reader will, perhaps, understand the reason I have been at such pains.

The spiritual edge in Olson reached for Whitehead. At the top of a page in the "Preface" to *Process and Reality*, Olson writes: "aim: a complete cosmology (a cosmology of the 20th century, to succeed the two previous ones: Plato's *Timaeus*, & the 17th century." In a series of lectures, which followed upon the lecture we have been considering, published as *The Special View of History, Notes from Black Mountain, 1956*, he brilliantly continues the translation of Whitehead into his own terms. Though closely related to the philosophy of organism throughout, these lectures are not on Whitehead in the introductory manner of the earlier lecture. The purpose of the lectures is to outline a "new humanism" that discovers "Actual Willful Man," obedient to the real and potentially heroic. The figuration of the heroic belongs to the depths of poetic imagination, its archaic nature, for heroes belong to "the becoming, the perishing, and the objective immortalities of those things which jointly constitute *STUBBORN FACT*" (PR, Preface, Olson's underlining, Whitehead's italics). Olson describes the "attempt" of these lectures:

. . . to supply you with what I don't think has had to be faced before, perhaps because the humanism of the Renaissance was sufficient until a few years ago, even if

it had run down by Keats' day. The anti-humanism which I have dubbed Hegelian has been made the most the poet's enemy. It is only recently, we might say, in which a pro-humanistic possibility has emerged.³⁵

Two epigraphs open the argument: Heraclitus' "Man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar" and a passage from Keats' famous letter on "Negative Capability," "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason. . . ." These become pointers in Olson's effort to enter upon a measured humanity within the process of things. In practice, this becomes a reversal of our condition, both "backward and outside" our present cultural condition. Sherman Paul has best discussed this active part of Olson's poetics:

This was Olson's advice to students in the Greek tutorial when they confronted Homer and the other great writers who appeared later in the fifth century B.C.: "take both backwards and outside em, not get caught in that culture trap of taking them forwards, as tho all that we are depends on em." He himself went back to the Sumerians and Hittites and outside to the Mayans, thereby escaping the "Western Box" in which he felt Pound was trapped.³⁶

Where in The Special View, with its play on Einstein's title, he argues the change, in the poetry he effectively pursues it. One may lose track of this if one does not understand the dynamics of the thought and stance his method of backwards and outside proposes. This he summarizes in his "impression that man lost something just about 500 B.C. and only got it back just about 1905 A.D." Thus, Olson goes backward to a turning point, as he saw it: Heraclitus who died in 481 B.C. and the loss of the familiar. In "A Comprehension," written in 1966, he clarified: ". . . the 'attack' by Plato on poets & poetry already has asserted itself in fragments 57, 40 & 41 of Heraclitus, dating say 505 when he was in his 40's or at around 480 when in his 60's. . . ." It is useful to remember these fragments, which Olson was studying in G.D. Kirk's Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments:

57: Teacher of most men is Hesiod: they are sure he

knows very many things, who continually failed to recognize day and night: for they are one . . . [in the Theogony, 123ff, Night is mother of Day]

40: Learning of many things does not teach sense . . .

41: for Wisdom is one thing: to be skilled in true judgment, how all things are steered through all . . .
37

Olson is proposing to date the loss of the sense of reality as process at that point. At the other end, the date 1905 A.D., positing a time when we could begin to return to it, is likely to mean Einstein, for that is the date of Einstein's, in his own eyes, "very revolutionary" paper on light. Thus, Olson is also suggesting a turning-point in Whitehead's thought also. He writes:

And that the stance which yields the possibility of acts which are allowably historic, in other words produce, have to be negatively capable in Keats' sense that they have to be, they have to be uncertain.

Or what we would call today relative. It will be seen within [these lectures] how thoroughly I take it Whitehead has written the metaphysic of the reality we have acquired, and because I don't know that yet the best minds realize how thoroughly the absolute or ideal has been tucked back where it belongs--where it got out of, in the 5th century B.C. and thereafter--I call attention to Whitehead's analysis of the Consequent as the relative of relatives, and that the Primordial--the absolute--is prospective, that events are absolute only because they have a future, not from any past.³⁸

This introductory notice of Whitehead excellently summarizes a living sense of the relational. Olson was then to draw out the implications for a 'measured' human will. The uncertainty in the process becomes the most difficult part to learn, for it is identified with love. Lest the word love seem soft or too human, I point out that the "backwards and outward" movement of information, made dynamic in relation to present cultural conditions, becomes in the vast world of The Maximus Poems a methodology for a return to that with which we are most familiar. The passage just quoted

appears also to be drawing upon the extraordinary last chapter of Process and Reality, "God and the World," where Whitehead writes:

Thus the consequent nature of God is composed of a multiplicity of elements with individual self-realization. It is just as much a multiplicity as it is a unity; it is just as much one immediate fact as it is an unresting advance beyond itself. Thus the actuality of God must also be understood as a multiplicity of actual components in process of creation. This is God in his function of the kingdom of heaven. (PRV, II, VII, Olson's underlining)

Olson draws a line from the underlined word 'multiplicity' to the bottom of the page and writes: "love etc." He did not let go unnoticed Whitehead's account of evil in this consequent world. Among other notations, he underlined this sentence: "The nature of evil is that the characters of things are mutually obstructive" (PRV, I, IV). Out of the companionship of the Blakean John Clarke, Olson's attention in his last years was drawn to the greatest poet of this vision of the creation as both "the Prolific and the Devouring," William Blake. Whitehead, we recall, returns us to "a complex structure of harmony" (PRV, I, IV).

It is one of the curiosities and discomforts of conversation and of lecturing, when one is involved in the presentation of, say, Dante or Giotto or Michelangelo that one meets embarrassment, even hostility, before the contents among so many people. It is necessary for them to relearn the old, natural calendar of the tradition. Many have fallen into time, so to speak, and seem unable to go forwards or backwards. We should remember that Olson's work and his use of Whitehead grow out of the meaning of the Second World War and be reminded of Pound's words out of the First World War:

There died a myriad
And of the best, among them,
For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
For a botched civilization.

History, for Olson, will not be the history of those powers, as we usually understand them, but "history as primordial and prospective."³⁹ History, then, taken out of the hands of power,

becomes "the function of any one of us," embodied intellectually and emotionally. The self, invoked here as an element of the-beginning-again, is not the "one of power," but rather, "the self as center and circumference."⁴⁰ Behind which is Olson's definition of will:

Will is the innate voluntarism of to live. Will is the infinitive of being.⁴¹

This "WILL" includes an obedience within the process, the renewed sense of subject and object, and leads to art as the "order of man," a principle close to Whitehead's sense of 'selection,' which is fundamental to the act of prehension. Olson:

If order is not the world--and the world hasn't been the most interesting image of order since, 1904, when Einstein showed the beauty of the Kosmos and one then does pass on, looking for more--the order is man. And one can define the present (it does need to be noticed that the present is post the modern) as the search for order as man himself is the image of same. Whitehead, then, makes sense in proposing a philosophy of organism.
...⁴²

This crucial sense of the possibility of a turn is present to Olson's work throughout, spectacularly so, in the reversals of backwards and outward, in order to renew place, one's own earth and cosmos. The most extraordinary reversal is argued in The Special View: "History is the practice of space in time. Time is the vertical or tenser and it can be for a man, of a man, precisely defined."⁴³ Or, as he said in conversation and elsewhere, "Time is the life of space."

When Olson translates this into poetry, the poem-structure is not simply a system of metaphors for the philosophical reversal, but a record of the dynamic as it is practiced. Since I am continuing my sense of the necessary companionship in twentieth century thought, I turn to Don Byrd, one of Olson's most sensitive readers, for a description of this:

The three stages of feeling which Olson derives from Whitehead . . . can be usefully recalled. The poem

[Maximus: Volume III] is taking its turn into the third stage. He says: "The first is that in which the multiples of anything crowd in on the individual; the second is that most individual stage when he or she seeks to impose his or her own order on the multiples; and the third is the stage called satisfaction, in which the true order is seen to be the confrontation of two interchanging forces which can be called God and the World" [Special View, 50]. The first and second stages of feeling are obviously the dominant modes of experience in the first and second volumes respectively. The paradox of the third volume is that the end of the personal process is a denial of the personal. The form which begins to emerge excludes every perfection but its own. The Maximus Poems, Volume III is perhaps the first religious poem to have been written since the seventeenth century. Of course, an abundance of poetry has been cast in the dilemma of belief or has asserted a belief which the poet wished he had, but no one has so successfully established himself in his own being that he becomes an agent of "two interchanging forces which can be called God and the World." "I believe in religion," Maximus says, "not magic or science I believe in/society as religious both man and society as religious" (Maximus III, 55). The God which appears in the Maximus, however, is "fully physical" (Maximus III, 13). It is the God which Whitehead describes "as the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire" [PRV, II, II]. He is not a final cause or creator but a principle of continuation which is no sooner manifest than it becomes the basis of a new beginning.⁴⁴

Olson's own words for this, preparing for the work of it in 1956, are:

We are able, I take it, to establish a cosmology without letting God in as creator in the old sense, in the old static sense of the universe. I believe we are equally enabled today to establish a mythology without letting God in as a primordial nature in the old static sense, but only an image of Primordial Nature in the prospective sense of the absolute which is included in the relative.⁴⁵

Interpretation, with its lingering positivism and its confused urge towards materialism, too often ignores the fundamental religious temper of poetic thought. It is not the embarrassment of outworn ways, but simply the way things belong together in the largest sense of such intuitions. Olson takes careful note of Whitehead's remarks on secularization, which are not to be understood in the contemporary sense of a wipe-out, with underlining and doubled arrows in the margins:

The secularization of the concept of God's functions in the world is at least as urgent a requisite of thought as is the secularization of other elements in experience. The concept of God is certainly one essential element in religious feeling. But the converse is not true; the concept of religious feeling is not an essential element in the concept of God's function in the universe. (PRII, IX, VIII, Olson's underlining)

This active thought not only moves Olson's cosmology near to Whitehead's, keeping in mind the latter's moving remarks on the tragic consequences of the "unmoved mover" in Christianity and Mohammedanism (PRV, II, I), but also reopens the mythological language of poetic cosmology, as a language of the depth of things inside us.⁴⁶

I have, by way of carefully ordered quotation, insisted upon the companionable--with the bread of--in this essay because there is another reading of the meeting of these two minds.⁴⁷ Robert von Hallberg in his study, Charles Olson: The Scholar's Art, chosés to measure Olson against what appears to be a more systematic aspect of Whitehead. He argues that Olson's "humanistic notion of order is not quite faithful to Whitehead." And he cites a passage from Whitehead on higher organisms and their type of order:

"It is the mark of a high-grade organism to eliminate, by negative prehension, the irrelevant accidents in its environment, and to elicit massive attention to every variety of systematic order. . . . In this way the organism in question suppresses the mere multiplicity of things, and designs its own contrasts. The canons of art are merely the expression, in specialized forms, of the requisites for depth of experience" [PRIV, IV, III]. When he read this passage Olson wrote in the margin: "The

egotism of creation!" But the egotism was more Olson's than Whitehead's.⁴⁸ (I have added Olson's underlining.)

This is an important moment of preparation in von Hallberg's argument, because, for all the memorable readings he gives us of individual poems, this alleged Olsonian egotism will lead to a dismissal of the dynamic structure of 'feeling' in the whole of The Maximus Poems. Maximus IV, V, VI and Volume III become a mere ego-centrism. What Olson did, indeed, write above the section heading and running into the margin is: "The egotism of creation is:" and he draws two lines across the text to the word 'order.' Thus, we are to read: "The egotism of creation is: order." Surely, this is recognition of the prehensive activity of order with its 'subjective aim.' And as one reflects on the mass of Whitehead's argument, the notation also calls forward the Cartesian separation of mind and matter that Whitehead has struggled to heal. Then, von Hallberg continues: "When Olson suggests that Whitehead's philosophy of organism is based on man as the image of order in the world, he is standing Whitehead on his head in order to define what Olson looked forward to as 'another humanism.' Order, for Whitehead, is process, and the process begins with the atom, not with man."⁴⁹ This is astonishing, for surely Whitehead begins with the depths of his own perception and then moves to the deeps where the atom is found.

I want first to say that Olson does not argue man as the image of order, but rather the new man who will have the measured image of order within by way of thought and art. The phrase "another humanism" is taken from Olson's major text of the outward dynamic, outward of the "Western Box," The Mayan Letters.⁵⁰ The Special View, which is also reflected upon in von Hallberg's context, ends with a chapter called "Enantiodromia, or 'the laws'; A METHODOLOGY," the running course of standing up against or with things, and an "Outline" which includes the re-posed subject-object relations.⁵¹ Which is where we find "Actual Willful Man" who acts. Dr. von Hallberg cites an important passage in Whitehead in order to argue that Olson "takes the diametrically opposite path . . .":

The philosophy of organism abolishes the detached mind. Mental activity is one of the modes of feeling belonging to all actual entities in some degree, but only amounting to conscious intellectuality in some actual entities.⁵² (PRII, I, VI; I have added Olson's underlining)

Olson draws a line from this passage to the bottom of the page and writes, "Touche (like T S E; 1961." A few lines further along in Process and Reality, Olson is attentive to the continuation of Whitehead's argument:

This is the problem of the solidarity of the universe [Olson writes in the margin, "Wow!"]. The classical doctrines of universals and particulars, of subject and predicate, of individual substances not present in other individual substances, of the externality of relations, alike render this problem incapable of solution. The answer given by the organic philosophy is the doctrine of prehensions, involved in concentric integrations, and terminating in a definite, complex unity of feeling. To be actual must mean that all actual things are alike objects. . . . (PRII, I, VI; Olson's underlining)

From the underlined word 'objects,' Olson draws a line to the bottom of the page and writes: "The end of the subject-object thing--'Wow.'" What goes wrong in von Hallberg's summary view of Whitehead is his underestimation of the importance of the activity of prehension for Whitehead and for Olson as demonstrated in his use and adaptation of the three stages of feeling. Further, he ignores the radical importance of the 'subjective principle.' Such distortion by generalization, a result of what I have earlier called singular assertion, is one good reason I have arranged my essay by way of careful quotation--perhaps another time to give an overview. This is a problem of methodology. It is important to understand that Whitehead's "'democracy' of actual entities," to quote von Hallberg again, does not wipe out person but resituates such an entity.⁵³ Thus, we return once more to the problem of "actual willful man." Where Whitehead writes, ". . . the actual entity, in virtue of being what it is, is also where it is" (PRII, I, VII, "what it is" and writes in the margin, "because of who it is! (1961)." At the top of the page, he has written: ". . . taxonomy is false object because no 'real' in [the?] many eternal objects $\chi\omega$ Tartaros." We remember that "Prehensions are not atomic; they can be divided into other prehensions and combined into other prehensions" (PRIII, I, XII).

With $\chi\omega$ and Tartaros we enter upon Olson's translation of a Whiteheadian cosmology into mythology, which is to say into a

of prehensions: "The principle of the graduated 'intensive relevance' of eternal objects to the primary physical data of experience expresses a real fact. . . ." He argues ". . . the prehension by every creature of the graduated order of appetitions constituting the primordial nature of God . . ." and the other side of the inductive and statistical, "an intuition of probability" for the origin of novelty, which, as "non-statistical judgments," "lie at a far lower level of experience than do the religious emotions." Just there, we come upon the passage already quoted on "the secularization of the concept of God's functions in the world." Olson was not superstitious. This is not a transcendentalism, nor is it an idealism. Olson was after the depth of the world to which, as I have said, we all respond, though the modern public culture refuses to think of it. It is a moving story of the real that Olson is preparing here. Whitehead argues, and Olson underlines, that "statistical theory entirely fails" to provide for the judgment of novelty (PRII, IX, VII). It is well to remember the definition of novelty: "'Creativity' is the principle of novelty. An actual occasion is a novel entity diverse from any entity in the 'many' which it unifies" (PRI, II, II; Olson's underlining). Without that individuation within the process, valuation would be lost, and, as Olson writes, "without it" dot, dot, dot. He moves in this outline to the imagination of permanence and change with the human actor within it. "The condition is hunger," "mouth," and I note that the hunger--the appetite, to use Whitehead's more abstract term--is of both body and mind. Meaning in this sense is an aspect of desire. The mythological, the story, begins at the ground, locus, region, where the world begins for any one of us. With the wonderful Greek, epic word TePAS, Olson begins. He transliterates the word except for the Greek 'rho.' It has a double meaning which I take to be important here: a sign, a wonder, the Latin portentum or prodigium, as the dictionary tells us, used in Homer for the heavenly constellations as signs and in other sources in a concrete sense, a monster, descriptive of the Gorgon's head, Typhoëus and Cerberus. Olson's use of the word in this context is of considerable complexity which I can only briefly suggest. It appears twice-over with its definition as "monster or giant" alongside Whitehead's discussion of the suppressed premise of inductive reasoning which is of limited knowledge (PRII, IX, VI). And then in this outline, some few pages later. As we open here into the mythological, the sense of the world, of cosmos, becomes overwhelming and archaic. When Olson draws God into the process, as $\chi\alpha\omega$, we come upon a renewed cosmogony. The outline becomes a curious map of the epic structure of The Maximus Poems. It is striking that this notation, which the poems turn into a tale, enters upon a fundamental

concern of ancient epic, out of Gilgamesh and Hesiod, the ground of knowing, epistemology. The muses were once a vocabulary for this and for a cosmology that belongs to the depths of feeling.

Olson is a careful and poised modern mind, but with this interest in the archaic he follows through on an intuition that has coloured the arts of our century. The archaic may be understood as a pre-rational language of being in love with the earth and the heavens, but in its telling in the twentieth century, it is also post-rational.⁵⁵ That is, a discipline of feeling outside what the rational is tied to. In "Letter to Elaine Feinstein," Olson writes: "I find the contemporary substitution of society for the cosmos captive and deathly."⁵⁶ The archaic is not a primitivism, but a freshness which has been beautifully described by Guy Davenport:

We have recovered in anthropology and archaeology the truth that primitive man lives in a world totally alive, a world in which one talks to bears and reindeer, like the Laplanders, or to Coyote, the sun and moon, like the plains Indians.

In the seventeenth century we discovered that a drop of water is alive, in the eighteenth century that all of nature is alive in its discrete particles, in the nineteenth century that these particles are all dancing a constant dance (the Brownian movement), and the twentieth century discovered that nothing at all is dead, that the material of existence is so many little solar systems of light mush, or as Einstein said, ". . . every clod of earth, every feather, every speck of dust is a prodigious reservoir of entrapped energy."⁵⁷

This energy in the depth of things may be subsumed abstractly; it can be learned, taught, imaged and so felt in poetry. It is not unrelated to religion, that means of controlling the unmeasured violence that is a part of ourselves. In Special View Olson writes:

For the loss of the city-state is now calculable, that man has had restored to him, since 1875, of a unit of place and time to make up for it. . . . He has this traction or friction innately: he either gets his time and place out of himself or via that trope of himself he calls God, and it is the vertu of history as it can now be understood that it restores God as well as locality, and

in so doing rids us of two other phonies of discourse, the infinite and eternal which diluted Him in distracting man from that with which he is necessarily most familiar--what he is.⁵⁸

The moral of the story is that we must not take what we mean by the aesthetic too narrowly; it is, of course, beauty, but beauty unfinished in context with place and time. Surely, this struggle for the real in Whitehead and in Olson to find a coherence is a modern triumph. It is also an obedience to the real. My mind leaps to that characteristic in Sophocles' thought, not read as tragedy, the word is too misjudged by us. I am thinking of Oedipus at Colonus disappearing into the earth and of Herakles' recognition of the coherence in The Women of Trachis.

II

ON POETICS

One of Olson's most important statements on the nature of the poem is found written at the bottom of a page in Process and Reality (PRIV, II, IV). It is a passage from Whitehead on the definition of a 'complete locus,' which can only be read in terms of the physical sciences. Whitehead:

The inside of a region, its volume, has a complete boundedness denied to the extensive potentiality external to it. The boundedness applies both to the spatial and the temporal aspects of extension. Wherever there is ambiguity as to the contrast of boundedness between inside and outside, there is no proper region.⁵⁹

And Olson:

The inside of a poem, its volume, has a complete boundedness denied to the extensive potentiality external to it. The boundedness applies both to the

spatial and temporal aspects of extension. Whenever there is ambiguity as to the contrast of boundedness between inside & outside, there is no proper poem.

This part of Process and Reality, which involves us in non-Euclidian geometry among other things, held considerable interest for Olson because it argues and augments our "extensive connection" to the "geometry of the world." For the unphilosophical and for the non-physicist, one of the pleasures of Whitehead's text is in the shifting quality of his vocabulary. Though one may follow with care the vocabulary which describes "the physical and geometrical theory of nature," Whitehead returns again and again to our experience of the cosmos. Whitehead begins the discussion of this part of his book by discussing "ways of 'dividing' the satisfaction of an actual entity into component feelings." And we suddenly remember the definition of satisfaction in an earlier chapter (PRII, I, III): "The actual entity terminates its becoming in one complex feeling involving a completely determinate bond with every item in the universe, the bond being either a positive or a negative prehension. This termination is the 'satisfaction' of the actual entity." Olson underlines "one complex feeling." Where Whitehead is discussing the genetic process, which "presupposes the entire quantum," Olson underlines and in the margin refers us far back in Process and Reality to Whitehead's citation of William James. The James passage should be recalled:

Either your experience is of no content, of no change, or it is of a perceptible amount of content or change. Your acquaintance with reality grows literally by buds or drops of perception. Intellectually and on reflection you can divide these into components, but as immediately given, they come totally or not at all. (PRII, II, II; Olson underlining)

Returning to the section under discussion, Olson stops over this: "The quantum is that standpoint in the extensive continuum which is consonant with the subjective aim in its original derivation from God. Here 'God' is that actuality in the world, in virtue of which there is physical 'law'" (Olson underlining). It is important to emphasize that the subjective aim is the "inherence of the subject in the Process" (III, I, V), which Donald Sherburne further clarifies: "Process doesn't presuppose a subject; rather the subject emerges

from the process."⁶⁰ The inherence of the subject in the process is fundamental to Olson's sense of himself in The Maximus Poems. We have Olson and the figuration of Maximus in the poems. George Butterick, citing Olson's own words in his essay, "The Gate and the Center," writes: "Maximus is the 'size man can be once more capable of, once the turn of the flow of his energies that I speak of as the WILL TO COHERE is admitted, and its energies taken up.'"⁶¹

In Whitehead's chapter on "Strains," Olson once again adapts Whitehead's vocabulary to the concerns of poetry. Here he draws attention to his sense of poetry as contest:

The poem established by geometric contents the possibility of 'rests,' a physical content, in order of space, or 'quantitative' verse. In the previous discourse it was all flow (song), bec'z there was no 'strain locus.' Thus the 'flow' was without the character of 'flow' (song without song). (Written in PRIV, IV, V)

III

THREE PIECES FROM CHARLES OLSON

A Later Note on Letter #15

In English the poetics became meubles--furniture--
thereafter (after 1630

& Descartes was the value

until Whitehead, who cleared out the gunk
by getting the universe in (as against man alone

& that concept of history (not Herodotus's,
which was a verb, to find out for yourself:

'istorin, which makes any one's acts a finding out for him or her
self, in other words restores the traum: that we act somewhere

at least by seizure, that the objective (example Thucidides, or
the latest finest tape-recorder, or any form of record on the spot
--live television or what--is a lie

as against what we know went on, the dream: the dream being
self-action with Whitehead's important corollary: that no event
is not penetrated, in intersection or collision with, an eternal
event

The poetics of such a situation
are yet to be found out

January 15, 1962

This is the opening poem in Maximus V. He calls it a note, referring back to an earlier letter on American poetics in the first volume of Maximus. It has already been noted that Olson's poem-structure allows for such openness in finding a new structure. I take the choice of the German word for dream to be Olson's way of removing the poetic softness that has come to envelop that word in English and possibly of allowing us to hear the sense of "trauma" in order to remind us that poetry is not easy--that it emerges from contest. The word also means vision in German and it may hold within it a salute to Jung whom Olson studied with care alongside his repeated readings of Process and Reality. There is evidence among his notations that Olson was trying to relate Jung's interpretation of dreams to Whitehead. At the end of the chapter on "The Ideal Opposites" (PRV, I, IV), Whitehead is discussing the final opposites of his cosmology, "joy and sorrow, good and evil, disjunction and conjunction . . . the many in the one," ending in "God and the World." Whitehead gives to the opposites "a certain ultimate directness of intuition," except for God and the World, which "introduces a note of interpretation." Olson underlines and down the page, he writes: "Wow, of Jung/says on the interpretation of dreams/M, D,R, p. 310." He adds the date June 23, 1969. The book is, of course, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, wherein we find Jung writing: "Mathematics goes to great pains to create expressions for relationships which pass empirical comprehension. In much the same way, it is all-important for a disciplined imagination to build up images of intangibles by logical principles and on the basis of empirical data, that is, on the evidence of dreams." Olson may also

have in mind a passage from William Carlos Williams' essay, "The Poem as a Field of Action":

. . . let me remind you here to keep in your minds the term reality as contrasted with phantasy and to tell you that the subject matter of the poem is always phantasy--what is wished for, realized in the "dream" of the poem--but that the structure confronts something else.⁶²

Olson would probably not have used the word phantasy. In this poem, the self-action is then attached to "an eternal." Whitehead's proper term would be "eternal object," god in the world. This brings me to think that Olson is reflecting on earlier works by Whitehead in which, Donald Sherburne points out, the notion of event was central.⁶³ But then Olson has returned to his own situation in which the "intersection or collision" would be an event. He ends, movingly, reflecting on the work of his poem of which "the poetics [as practice] of such a situation/are yet to be found out."

history as time
 alchemy of
slain kings roots
 planets
"through time and exact definition"
 (explicitness and
analogy like to like

the Lake Van Measure

I reject nothing. I accept it all (though there on rejected. What man's senses of examples--the demonstrative categories of employment which have all descended into the organization--of Time for plutocratic purposes and the result is the Americans are simply examples of the 7 Deadly sins) One means rather smelling entirely different--

both a fantastic sweetened possible difference
development, inner powers and
explanations. The spiritual is all in Whitehead's
simplest of all statements: Measurement is
most possible throughout the system. That is
what I mean. That is what I feel all inside.
That is what is love.

Charles, Saturday morning
December 13th
LXIX

This is a note drawn from a flyleaf of John Philip Cohane's The Key, which Olson had been given as a gift. An unorthodox book on ancient migrations, which links ancient civilizations by way of etymology, the gift was well chosen. It meets Olson's fascination with global migration, the history of place, but the text appears to have gone unread during those last few weeks.⁶⁴ Instead, all over the inside cover, flyleaves and title page are notes that approach poems. In this lovely testament and tribute, I think the only difficulty is with "Lake Van Measure," which turns up several times in Olson's work. George Butterick has straightened the matter out for us. Lake Van is in far eastern Turkey and is the site of the Armenian cruciform church at Achthaman. The "Measure" is an "Ideal Scale," also called "Armenian," as Butterick tells us, "in the general sense of 'northern,' or non-Greek, non-classical," which Olson drew from Josef Strzygowski's Origin of Early Christian Church Art.⁶⁵ There, Olson found that Christianity in the early years included Semites and Iranians, as Butterick notes, "neither East nor West in the modern sense. . . ." This is another piece of Olson's complex effort to escape the "Western Box." Butterick further notes that Olson took the "church of Achthaman, built 904-938 A.D. . . . [to] summarize the achievement of non-Western art" and he quotes Olson: "for an American the Northern condition at this point is more interesting than any Mediterranean. . . ." In this testament, then, Lake Van Measure, which was prepared for in The Maximus Poems, becomes a code phrase for a new measure of man outside the present Western condition. Then, in what is a fine tribute, Olson attaches that measure to Whitehead's sense of measurement. This takes us back to the chapter "Measurement" in Process and Reality (PRIV, V, V), where among many underlinings and notations, Olson circles "Measurement is now possible throughout the extensive continuum." This chapter, argued in terms of "mathematical relations disclosed in presentational immediacy"

is once again translated by Olson into the spiritual human order. "There is a systematic framework," Whitehead writes, "permeating all relevant fact." The human being and poet, entering that process among "enduring objects--electrons, protons, molecules, material bodies--at once sustain that order and arise out of it. The mathematical relations involved in presentational immediacy thus belong equally to the world perceived and to the nature of the percipient. They are, at the same time public fact and private experience" (PRIV, V, III). I am reminded here that "Experience realizes itself as an element in what is everlasting" (PRII, VII, III). At the end of the chapter on "Measurement," the argument is summarized:

That perception in the mode of presentational immediacy solely depends upon the 'witness' of the 'body,' and only exhibits the external contemporary world in respect to its systematic geometrical relationship to the 'body.' (Olson's underlining)

Beneath this, Olson writes: "sta." With Olson's propensity to turn to etymology in order to make a word in the language move again, this is easily understood. It is the Indo-European base 'sta' of the word stand. To stand in the process--that is to say, in the vertical of one's acts. It is also the root in Olson's important word "stance," as a good dictionary tells us: in such words as status, state, circumstance, constant, instant, destiny, exist.⁶⁶ Lovely. So, Olson builds the measure of ourselves within the process to stand against the wreckage which the human order has become. A few pages later in Process and Reality, Whitehead brings up the "contrivances for stunting humanity" and remarks:

It belongs to the goodness of the world, that its settled order should deal tenderly with the faint discordant light of the dawn of another age. Also order, as it sinks into the background before new conditions, has its requirements. The old dominance should be transformed into the firm foundations upon which new feelings arise, drawing their intensities from delicacies of contrast between system and freshness. (PRV, I, III)

In the margin, Olson writes: "The mercy of."

This essay has endeavoured to show the 'work' of translating a metaphysics back into poetry, there to retie us to the real. I began with violets. Let me close with Olson's poppies.

When do poppies bloom I ask myself, stopping again
to look in Mrs. Frontiero's yard, beside her house on
this side from Birdseyes (or what was once Cunningham
& Thompson's and is now O'Donnell-Usen's) to see if
I have missed them, flaked out and dry-like like
Dennison's Crepe. And what I found was dark buds
like cigars, and standing up and my question is
when, then, will those blossoms more lotuses to the
West than lotuses wave like paper and petal by petal
seem more powerful than any thing except the Universe
itself, they are so animate-inanimate and dry-beauty not
any shove, or sit there poppies blow as crepe
paper. And in Mrs. Frontiero's yard annually I
expect them as the King of the Earth must have
Penelope, awaiting her return, love lies
so delicately on the pillow as this one flower,
petal and petal, carries nothing
into or out of the World so threatening
were those cigar-stub cups just now, & I know
how quickly, and paper-like, absorbent
and krinkled paper, the poppy itself will, when here,
go again and the stalks stay like onion plants oh
come, poppy, when will you bloom?

The Fort
June 15th [Wednesday]
XLVI
(From The Maximus
Poems: Volume III)⁶⁷

NOTES

1. So George Butterick, Curator of the Olson Archives, University of Connecticut, remarked when we were considering one of Charles Olson's mythological notations in the margins of Whitehead's Process and Reality: i.e., "iotunns for iotunns" in the margin of the chapter on "Propositions" (PR II, IX, VII). Iotunn is

the Norse word for giant. Permission to quote unpublished material from the Olson Archives has been granted me by the University of Connecticut which holds the copyrights.

2. John Russell, The Meanings of Modern Art (The Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., Harper & Row, 1981), p. 9. He is writing about painting and sculpture. I have expanded his meaning to include literature and poetry.

3. Recorded in Charles Boer, Charles Olson in Connecticut (Swallow, 1975), p. 137.

4. Geoffrey H. Hartman, Beyond Formalism (Yale, 1970), p. 358.

5. The term is Merleau-Ponty's.

6. Here, I am reflecting on some of Hannah Arendt's arguments in On Revolution, rev. ed. (Viking, 1965).

7. Take note of Jean Clay, Modern Art, 1890-1918 (Vendome, 1978), p. 23, on "art's radical effacement."

8. René Girard, Violence and the Sacred, trans. by Patrick Gregory (Johns Hopkins, 1977), p. 233.

9. Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era (California, 1971), pp. 224-225.

10. Letter to Iris Barry, London, June, 1916. In Ezra Pound, Letters, 1907-1941, ed. by D.D. Paige (Harcourt, 1950), p. 82.

11. Charles Olson, The Special View of History, ed. by Ann Charters (Oyez, 1970), p. 24. Olson asks that we read Benjamin Lee Whorf, "An American Indian Model of the Universe," International Journal of American Linguistics 16, no. 2 (April 1950).

12. David Bohm, Wholeness and the Implicate Order (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 29.

13. Cited in Bernard Lovell, Emerging Cosmology (Columbia, 1981), p. 197. Ruth Nanda Anshen's essay is the statement of purpose for the series "Convergence," of which Lovell's book is one volume. The Whitehead quotation is from Science and the Modern World (London, 1926), pp. 23-24.

14. Rowland A. Sherrill, The Prophetic Melville (Georgia, 1979), p. 238.
15. Kenner, op. cit., p. 231.
16. Cited in Mike Weaver, William Carlos Williams: The American Background (Cambridge, 1971), p. 47 and p. 48, n. 2. Cf. Robert von Hallberg, Charles Olson: The Scholar's Art (Harvard, 1978), p. 234, n. 47.
17. George Butterick, "Olson's Reading: A Preliminary Report," The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives, no. 6 (Fall 1976), p. 88. Olson purchased the copy of Process and Reality now in the Olson Archives early in 1957 (Cambridge University Press, 1929). If one is trying to follow Olson in his interest in Whitehead, it is important to have that edition. The New York Macmillan edition of the same year is differently paged and, in at least one important instance, lacks a Whitehead note.
18. Boer, op. cit., p. 108.
19. George F. Butterick, A Guide to The Maximus Poems of Charles Olson (California, 1975). Such details are taken from the "Chronology."
20. Ann Charters, Olson/Melville: A Study in Affinity (Oyez, 1968), p. 84. The text of the lecture quoted here is included in her "Postscript," pp. 84-90, copyright by The Charles Olson Estate.
21. Paul Christensen, Charles Olson: Call Him Ishmael (Texas, 1979), pp. 63-64.
22. Sherman Paul, Olson's Push: Origin, Black Mountain, and Recent American Poetry (Louisiana State, 1978), pp. 99-100. The Williams poem may be found in his The Collected Earlier Poems (New Directions, 1951), pp. 379-380.
23. William Carlos Williams, Selected Essays (Random House, 1954), p. 283.
24. Christensen, op. cit., p. 139.
25. Butterick has searched these out and noted them in The Journal of the Olson Archives, no. 6 (Fall 1976), entry under Whitehead.

26. Butterick, Guide, pp. 358-359.

27. Charters, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-86.

28. These definitions and Olson's earlier definitions are taken from the same source: Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 5th ed., Abridgement of Webster's New International Dictionary, 2nd ed. (Merriam, 1945).

29. I am not unaware of William A. Christian's sense of "presystematic," "systematic," and "postsystematic" types of discourse in Whitehead. This layering of argument is one of the pleasures of reading Whitehead, but they remain aspects of an explanatory discourse, whereas Olson wishes to remain closer to the flux itself. See Christian, "Whitehead's Explanation of the Past" in George L. Kline, ed., Alfred North Whitehead: Essays on His Philosophy (Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 93-101.

30. Charters, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

33. Alfred North Whitehead, A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality, ed. with commentary by Donald W. Sherburne (Chicago, 1981), p. 218.

34. *Ibid.*, cited by Sherburne.

35. Olson, Special View, p. 35.

36. Paul, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

37. Charles Olson, "A Comprehension (a/measure, that," in The Pacific Nation, no. 1 (1967), p. 43, citing G.S. Kirk, Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 155-161 and 385-391.

38. Olson, Special View, p. 16.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

58. Olson, Special View, pp. 26-27.
59. Unfortunately, the 1929 Macmillan edition of Process and Reality does not include this explanatory note by Whitehead.
60. Whitehead, Key, p. 244.
61. Butterick, Guide, pp. XXVIII-XXIX.
62. Williams, Essays, p. 281.
63. Whitehead, Key, p. 222.
64. In John Philip Cohane, The Key (Crown, 1969). The passage is also quoted in Boer, op. cit., p. 134, where I first saw it.
65. Butterick, Guide, entries under Lake Van and Armenian. Butterick's scholarship is an invaluable aid to readers of Olson.
66. The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, ed. by C.T. Onions (Oxford, 1966), entry under 'stand.'
67. Copyright for "A Later Note on Letter #15" is held by The Charles Olson Estate. Copyrights for the "note" and for "When do poppies bloom" are held by the University of Connecticut.

ALLOW SELF, PORTRAYING SELF: AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN FIELD NOTES¹

I

The Shipwreck of the Sad Phoenician

That the I is a composite of selves--social selves, temporal selves--is a cliché of some centuries standing that has never yet plunged an autobiographer into the abyss of absence that figures so largely in contemporary criticism of the genre. But to use Rimbaud's phrase, "Je est un autre" (a phrase appropriated by Philippe Lejeune² and now popular among critics of autobiography), is not to say that the I is a composite of selves. It is to speak against the "common sense" of language itself, to use the linking verb to tie the subject homeostatically with a predication that alienates it. It is also to evoke and interpret the mythic image for subjective man, so dear to autobiographers and their critics, of "Narcissus and his Pool."³ Here Gérard Genette is, if far from the first, the most insightful speaker to the cultural value of the myth. Narcissus' reflection, he tells us, is a "double," both "un autre" and "un même"⁴: "the Self is confirmed by itself, but in the species of the Other: the mirror-image is a perfect symbol of alienation."⁵ The traditional image of the autobiographer as Narcissus identifies auto-erotism with the autobiographer's self-reference: it emphasizes the extent to which the mirror-image is "un même." Genette transposes this fascination to the "intellectual order,"⁶ by emphasizing the Other. Alienation enters in three threats of the loss of the Other, in three ways the reflected Other can become absent to the I. The threat to form: the fall of a flower, the passage of a bird, the rippling breeze, Genette reminds us, can destroy the image. The threat of evanescence: running water poses a familiar paradox: the stability of the image is composed of constantly changing matter. The

threat of metaphor: the watery surface covers unknown depths, threatens the reflection with shipwreck in its own depths. Paradoxically, the image which reveals Narcissus to himself also reveals "his illusory and fleeting existence."⁷

The auto-erotism of Narcissus as metaphor for the self-referentiality of autobiography is not only hackneyed, it is inaccurate, for the autobiographical activity is postulated against death and into the world of others, even if from a privileged position vis-à-vis the Self. The usefulness of Genette's version of the myth is that he moves it from the visual and "erotic" to the linguistic and "intellectual" order. For in Genette's version (designed to explain baroque poetics), Narcissus "does not live his abyss, he speaks it, and triumphs in spirit over all his beautiful shipwrecks/castaways."⁸

Genette's insight is informed by the linguistic work of Benveniste, who, in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, pointed out that the pronouns I and you occupy privileged positions in language in that they are the only signifiers without reference to either a concept or an individual.⁹ That is, I and you have as many references as there are speakers and listeners, occasions of speaking and listening. I and you, he argues, are the constituents of every spoken utterance and have no reference but the speech in which they are enunciated. Otherness, therefore, is implicit in all language, in all men speaking to other men. But this otherness is neither alienating nor static. Speech is a dialectic between I and you, in which, when you respond, you become I, I take up the linguistic function of you; that is, the reference of each pronoun changes. I and you exist in intersubjectivity (Benveniste's word), but you, as Other, neither overwhelm nor escape the subject I, for it is the I who appropriates all language for the duration of his speaking.

But if speech can save Narcissus from the depths that open when we say "Je est un autre," the critic of autobiography is still in need of a lifeline. For autobiography is written, not spoken, utterance and on this difference all our attempts at definition of the genre have foundered. Lejeune's modification of Benveniste's discussion of pronouns is among the shipwrecks. Arguing that I and you do not, in fact, remain unattached to concepts but always refer to a proper noun, Lejeune concludes that "The individual person and his discourse are connected to each other through the proper noun, even before they are connected by the first person."¹⁰ This allows him to distinguish autobiography from other genres by a "contract" between writer and reader in which the protagonist and the narrator, the narrator and the author, are signified by the same proper noun which appears on the title page. The craft is ingeniously and elegantly contrived, but it leaks; as Todorov points

out, every speech utterance grammatically "understands" that I is connected with a proper noun and there are almost as many proper nouns as there are references for "I"; what Lejeune has done is to identify autobiography in terms of the speech utterance which is its basis; "I, Shirley Neuman, was born in. . . ." He has failed to define the "transformations" by which that speech utterance becomes writing, the graph of autobiography.¹¹ The metamorphoses of speech utterances into the formal structures of writing became precisely the topic of Lejeune's most recent book, a book in which the doubling of the Self becomes both subject and method: Je est un autre.

However, I do not want to pursue Lejeune into that vertiginous space in which the I is but the echo of an Other's voice. For the moment, I want simply to note that it is in writing that the Narcissus myth images the power of the Other and its potential loss, that "Je est un autre." But when Narcissus abandons the attempt to capture and fix for posterity his image, bending closer and closer over it, finally distorting and destroying it, and, instead, speaks its hidden depths, when I speak to you about myself, the I (modestly, I assure you) asserts itself, intersubjectivity keeps the Other in its place, dialectic prevents drowning.

II

"s.o.s. says sink or swim"¹²

"I may be writing [an autobiography]," Robert Kroetsch mused in 1981, "It may be that my journals and this interview are as close as I can get to autobiography. . . . Field Notes . . . really is, in some perverse way, an autobiographical poem, one in which I just cannot accept any of the conventions of autobiography. . . . I get closer and closer in some way to that notion of autobiographical, and it is so tied up with . . . the very problem of language It's a language problem for me to write this autobiography. . . . Autobiography, as I conceive it, is paradoxical: it frees us from self. Saying 'I' is a wonderful release from I, isn't it?"¹³

I have not cited this passage because its assertion that "a poem . . . in which I just cannot accept any of the conventions of autobiography" IS an autobiography might well cause the critic to send out an S.O.S. I cite it because, in a manner typical of Kroetsch, it shows him moving from a hedged hypothesis ("I may be writing an autobiography"), to the statement that Field Notes IS autobiography, to a paradoxical concept of the place and functioning of the Self in the genre. The movement that

particularly interests me is the movement from what Kroetsch calls the "language problem" of writing autobiography, through the definition of autobiography as freeing us from Self, to the gloss on that statement: "Saying 'I' is a wonderful release from I." Where contemporary criticism emphasizes the attempt to escape the alienation of the Self's loss in the Other or loss of the Other, Kroetsch feels the need to escape the solipsistic I. And formulating the problem of writing autobiography, he cites speech, "Saying 'I'." But the speech utterance, according to Benveniste and those structuralists who use his work, and whom Kroetsch reads and admires, establishes a fluid and dialectical relationship between the references of I and you, which, while it avoids solipsism, still emphasizes I over you. What then, are the ways in which saying "I" is a release from I in Field Notes?

In the first of the poems which make up Field Notes, the I speaker of the poem is in fact an I writing:

This paperweight on my desk

where I begin
this poem was

found in a wheatfield
lost (this hammer,
this poem). (13)

Hammer and poem are not linked in homeostasis across the copulative verb in order to create a metaphor for writing: instead, "this hammer,/this poem" stand contiguously as do the two versions of the hammer found lost: one version imagined--

the pemmican maul
fell from the travois (14)--;

one version historical--

This won't
surprise you.

My grandfather
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This won't
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My grandfather
lost the stone maul. (17)

Neither metaphor nor symbol (nor, for that matter, a hammer any more), the paperweight is the locus of a dialectic between imagination and history:

Sometimes I use it
in the (hot) wind
(to hold down paper)

smelling a little of cut
grass or maybe even of
ripening wheat or of
buffalo blood hot
in the dying sun. (19)

The poem's conclusion--

Sometimes I write
my poems for that
stone hammer (19)--

turns on the ambiguity of "for." In this poem which gives us several versions of origin for the hammer, symbolism is refused and the hammer becomes the place of the poem, a locus for imagined hammers--pemmican maul, farmer's maul, paperweight. That is, the accountings for the hammer enact the process of writing. Kroetsch has most certainly not released himself from I in this poem, but in the dialectic which leaves the hammer smelling of buffalo blood (story) and of ripening wheat (history), the "autobiographical" element in the poem ceases to be an imprisonment in the historical self of reminiscence and becomes the I enunciating the poem. Present utterance (M.E. uttren--O.E. ut, out; and M. Du. utteren, to announce) is the subject and process of the poem which moves out from the I.

In "How I Joined the Seal Herd," the I is persistently present, telling, in the past tense this time, the story of its parodic metamorphosis into a "lone bull seal" (72) and its discovery of the pleasures of underwater breeding. Only the most ridiculous of allegoric readings could detect specific autobiographic reference in this fantasy. Nonetheless, the poem's configurations do have some bearing on Kroetsch's concept of the genre. Reminiscent of a Proteus, the speaker plunges into the abyss beneath the image of

parodically invokes the you in clichés. In "The Sad Phoenician" and "The Silent Poet Sequence," the voice is comically and self-pityingly confessional:

but I, the Sad Phoenician of Love, dyeing the world red,
dyed laughing, ha, lost everything, lost home; I,
homing
and lost: (93)

"At sea," the Phoenician is "a trad[er] in language" (79), bartering speech for writing, writing for speech, and scattering the artifacts of that barter around the Mediterranean of the poem, leaving them to be found out of context, fragmented, transformed into other uses, all use lost. The poem becomes, to use a favorite Kroetsch metaphor, an archaeological site of language. The dig turns up allusions, puns, clichés. Puns proliferate, sometimes literary, sometimes colloquial, often morbid, intentionally bad, nearly always based on cliché. One of the best, and one of the worst:

but he discovers, just then, the split of mind
and body; putting Descartes before the hearse (109)

and even if it's true, that my women all have new lovers,
then laugh, go ahead
but don't expect me to cry
and believe you me I have a few tricks up my sleeve myself
(77)

The dialectic of these poems is negative, less that of intersubjectivity than that of resistance, particularly the resistance of meaning and meaninglessness each to the other. "I live by a kind of resistance" (90), the poet tells us. Earlier he has suggested that "the poet must resist the poem, if you know what I mean" (85) and, before that, that "the poem must resist the poet, always, I can't help thinking" (82). Cliché resists language. The Sad Phoenician, the lost man, is the man without language: he speaks in cliché. Because cliché fails to communicate the subjectivity of the speaker, he finally lives silent. Cliché litters the "site" of the poem, its reduction of speech to silence mimed and mocked by the speaker's failure to complete it: "let the chips fall" (81), "every cloud has" (87). Well-worn allusions are cited only to silence them

with equal abruptness: "the wind has full cheeks, blow, thou" (87).
Resisting cliché, the poet distorts it, inverts it, parodies it:

offer no pity, remember, the worm turns

and could it not be argued, the grease gets the squeaking
wheel, the bridegroom the bride, the knot gets all or
nun, ha. (90)

Sometimes the poet orders his clichés according to the 26 letters of the Phoenician alphabet (themselves presented as visual fragments) which title the 26 stanzas of the poem: "she . . . on the Q.T. whispered" (93); "s.o.s. says sink or swim" (95); "fit to a T" (96) all appear predictably. But the distortion, the predictability, while they force recognition of the cliché, do not make it meaningful. And even in the alphabet resistance enters: the pun on "none"/"nun" appears under n/nu; b/beta includes "you better believe" and "you bet you me"; under i "there's all as well as iota" (85): the Greek alphabet resists the Phoenician.

The alphabet, through which Kroetsch pays tribute to Roland Barthes, is meaningless order. In the preface to that other Lover's Discourse, we find Barthes explaining that "to discourage the temptation of meaning, it was necessary to choose an absolutely insignificant order" that would make clear that there was "no question here of a love story (or of the history of a love)."¹⁶ To "resist the temptation of meaning" has become something of a byword with Kroetsch in recent years and, in "The Sad Phoenician" and "The Silent Poet Sequence," while running a thread of narrative, he has also fragmented his discourse even more than does Barthes. Not only does the alternation of verses beginning "and" and "but" replace the order of reminiscence with a more arbitrary repetition, and oppose each verse to that which precedes and that which follows it, but resistance is the imperative of many verses:

but whatever you do, don't
and remember, forget what I said about Watzernaym (112)

The end of such mutually exclusive injunctions can only be the incapacity to act. Its linguistic equivalent is silence. Succumb sufficiently to language and you end up either a poet or speaking in cliché. Resist it sufficiently and you end up silent.

turn, is addressed in clichés that void the you partner of utterance. He can only listen, pained, to that new voyager, Earache the Red, thief of his love and his language, in a new world. Earache's discourse is that of Narcissus affirming the Self in the double, never really addressing the Other:

and Earache, the crowd gathering, art should instruct,
he tells us, glancing at his reflection (108)

The poem seems to end in the total solipsism of the self afflicted, yet unacknowledged, by language. In the last section, "The Silent Poet Eats his Words," the I/poet once again addresses a you IN the poem:

but she was sound asleep, except for a rhythmic snoring,
suggesting she might be awake; please, she said, jerking
the covers from the place where I might have been, read
the review of your book again, make some coffee, scrub
that goddamn kitchen floor, vacuum, take your pulse,
fix the toaster, go put on your snow tires, asshole,
it's January (113, italics added)

It is perhaps necessary here to distinguish the lyricism of the poems from their linguistic methods. The poems recreate the clichés in which I gives voice to his loss, his self-pity, his sense of returning lost; dōing so, they expose those clichés and allow the poems as poems to become original and witty statements of a feeling which is in no way diminished or anaesthetized as it would be if the cliché were allowed to remain simply cliché. Their effect that most difficult thing: they distinguish between genuine feeling and its inauthentic expression without denying the feeling. The poet IN the poem experiences death of language and Self, he "eats his own words"; the poet OF the poem triumphs by saying "I" dialectically. He is simultaneously both where he is, the site of the poem, and where he "might have been," the subject of the poem.

All this, those unfriendly to Kroetsch's methods could remark with justification, is a convoluted and indirect approach to autobiography. The mechanism of the poems, their objection might run, is to create two Is, the voice in the poem, and a second over-voice which goes on at the same time, eliding the gap between past and present. An unnecessary obfuscation, our critic might

continue, of what conventional autobiography does (and does with much clearer indications of what we can believe) when its mature narrator reminisces about, interprets, judges his younger self. One of the things Kroetsch specifically refuses in conventional autobiography, however, is this manipulation of a diachronic doubleness within the self and its conformity to the Narcissus image for the genre. By synchronizing his two voices, his autobiography ceases to be an act of memory and becomes an act of speech, becomes an act of continuing self-enunciation. For it is speech conventions rather than writing conventions that Kroetsch has relied on in the poems I have been discussing. The unresolved problems of autobiographical form at the end of Field Notes are two: if the poem is, among other things, autobiography, a more direct access to the autobiographical experience would prove satisfying to the reader/listener; second, the dialectic of speech utterance needs a formal equivalent in the conventions of writing. The two recent continuations of Field Notes go some way to resolving these problems.

"Mile Zero" and "Delphi: Commentary" use as a principle of organization what Kroetsch calls "intertext." Although he frequently talks about intertextuality, as outlined by certain of the Russian Formalist critics and promulgated in France by Barthes, Derrida and Kristeva, Kroetsch's use of the term for these continuations of Field Notes is particular to him. The "intertext," here, is the space shared by, the relations between, different poetic texts in the frame of a larger "Collected Poem." The "poem" exists in the lacunae and intersections between the different texts it holds in its space. Kroetsch has used a version of the technique in the poem and its gloss of "The Criminal Intensities of Love as Paradise," in the columns of "The Ledger," and in the "found" poems in "Seed Catalogue" which are set against extended punning questions about the growth of the poet's mind.¹⁸ However, "Criminal Intensities" is a poem extremely abstract and not at all personal in its language or its conventions; and "The Ledger" and "Seed Catalogue" work by responding to and resisting the artifacts named in their titles, artifacts which become the objectification of questions, analogies and discontinuities. "Mile Zero" differs from these poems: all its texts are by Kroetsch himself; they are combined in direct autobiographical statement; they are gathered together under the rubric of a "Collected Poem" which is the final poem but also the first poem of the sequence; they do not operate by the conventions of speech utterance.

I will be more specific. "Mile Zero" is subtitled "being some account of a journey through western Canada in the dead of six nights."¹⁹ It has one set of poems for each of its six nights. Each

set consists of two poems, of which the second is bracketed and connected to the first by an arrow which enters the first at some point. Thus while reading conventions tell us to read forward in the text, from first poem to second, the graphic convention tells us to read backward, from second poem to first. The second poems make absolutely no autobiographical or intersubjective statement by themselves; they generalize the journey in historical, symbolic and mythic terms. Their language is the most minimal, most elliptical, most discontinuous, of Kroetsch's poetry to date. But, embedded in them, are cryptic clues to reading the sets of poems.

. . . allow

self, portraying
self (24),

the poet tells us in the poem the title of which, "Weather-Vane," suggests that the breath of men's mouths may blow from more than one direction. The first poems in these sets "allow self" on several levels. Their questor is an I. Their details of the journey "ouest/or quest or" (23) are the experience of what becomes myth and symbol in the second poems of the sets. The I who recounts the journey names himself (disingenuously, I must add). On Day 1,

I AM A SIMPLE POET
I wrote in the dust
on the police car hood. (21)

But before naming himself, he allows entry of self in another way by inserting passages which let us see possibilities for the poem's development:

I looked at the dust
on the police car hood.
I looked around the horizon.
(Insert here passage on
nature--

. . .

try: One crow foresaw my fright,

leaned out of the scalding
air, and ate a grasshopper's
warning . . . (21)

By a further process which creates relations and lacunae between the poem's various constituent texts, some of these first, personal poems carry footnotes. The speaker in these notes is not the I "implied" speaker of the poem they annotate, but Kroetsch in his own person, acting as critic and diarist of his poem, telling us why the poem exists as it does, why he cancelled certain lines, what those lines were, identifying the point at which the original version of the poem failed, why, by whom pointed out, naming the absence at the center of the poem: "And yet, is not the mother figure the figure at once most present in and most absent from this poet's work? The concern with nostos is related to a long family history of losses. . . ." (23).

We are, of course, again meeting the poem as the writing of the poem, but in this case the autobiographical gesture is not displaced. What has been rejected or suppressed from the poem, made absent, is in fact present in it. "Mile Zero" is the poem as it has been present in its author's mind, not simply the artifact sent into the world apart from its author (though it is also that). The "Collected Poem" is the autobiography of the poem, the autobiography of the poet writing the poem:

the story of the poem
become
the poem of the story
become

"Collected Poem" (24)

Autobiography here is created in a dialectic that no longer rests on speech utterance but is generated between different generic conventions of writing. It is a dialectic of form which extends from the sets of two poems to the collected six sets and to the poem's thematic and symbolic statement. The night journey, the journey west, or, in the words of one of the poems' titles, "The Descent, as Usual, into Hell" (23), is literally ad mare usque ad mare, from Champlain's arrival at Québec to the poet's arrival at Mile 0 of the TransCanada at the Pacific. But because each set of poems points backward from poem to antecedent autobiographical experience as

well as reads forward from autobiography to poem, it is also the journey back, in time, in place. The westward journey is also the return, the end is also the beginning:

think you think
the globe round (24)

"When you get to the/beginning," the second poem of the last set tells us, "stop." Journey exists dialectically with genesis, the poem with its autobiography.

Kroetsch was working on "Mile Zero" when he claimed Field Notes was his autobiography. For all the success at inscribing a dialectic of which autobiography is one term, and in treating that autobiography more directly than before, a certain unease with the I remains visible in the number of its manifestations in the poem: Kroetsch refers to himself as "Kroetsch," "crow," "the poet," "'I' the 'implied' speaker," and "I the poet behind the 'implied' speaker." Saying "I" in so many ways is certainly a ruse which lets him escape the conventional attributes of the autobiographical I but it is also the most strenuous and least convincing of the freedoms of the poem. I think the clue to these manifestations is to be found in the poem's signature, "1969/1981 Binghamton/Winnipeg." Traces of the diachronous experience out of which the synchronous intertext of the poem has been created appear in the variation in self-references.

In the most recent continuation of Field Notes, "Delphi: Commentary,"²⁰ Kroetsch goes some way to solving this problem by approaching it through a different problem. One of the autobiographical assumptions he resists is that which begins "Know thyself" and leaps forward to a conclusion of quite a different order, "I can only know myself." That is an I from which Kroetsch would free himself. In "Delphi" a further movement away from this isolation of the self is suggested; the experience of selves in the world (the world as space, the world as time) is inscribed in a double set of double texts, their configurations on the page usually shaped by their positioning vis-à-vis one another, the spaces between them, the ways in which they are enclosed or surrounded by each other. Four texts contribute to the larger "intertext." Fragments from Pausanias' second century A.D. account of his visit to Delphi in his Descriptions of Greece and from Sir James Frazer's commentary on Pausanias stand against one another; the second set juxtaposes fragments from "The Eggplant Poems," a posited "missing" or "abandoned" poem by Kroetsch, and his "commentary," a relatively straightforward narrative, though again with lacunae, of a day with

his daughters at Delphi, a narrative in which the I poses few of the linguistic and phenomenological problems of the earlier work. Each set of text and commentary makes a further "intertext."

I will not dwell at length on a poem so far available only to those who have heard Kroetsch read it, but I do wish to note some ways in which the poem extends the metamorphoses of autobiography he has been experimenting with earlier. The poet manages here, as elsewhere, to resist the unity of the Self by making absence present in the poem:

"The Eggplant Poems," I said, is a poem for which we have no reliable text. In fact, I haven't quite, you might say, wrapped it up. You mean, it doesn't exist, Laura said. Now wait a minute, I said. Is there a difference between a Greek poem which is lost and a poem of mine which I haven't been able to, for whatever reasons, complete? Yes, Laura said. Yes, Meggie said. We have references to the lost Greek poem, I presume, Laura said, or we wouldn't know it once existed. True, I said. True enough. But I can tell you about "The Eggplant Poems." The eggplant, I might add, is closely allied to the potato. Both belong to the nightshade family. As for the poem itself. . . . (Kroetsch's ellipses)

The I of the poem is extended in various ways into space and through time: Frazer's commentary extends Pausanias'; Kroetsch's "commentary," the story his daughters will take home of the oracle's speaking, extend "The Eggplant Poems"; poems and commentary extend Pausanias and Frazer. The poem effects genuine synchronicity in that the discontinuous texts, in their resonances and their resistances, are present as fragments of the emotional, physical and intellectual experience of this day at Delphi; they are ways in which the poet knows himself and others, ways also in which his knowledge of Self and others is limited. For "Delphi: Commentary," Kroetsch coins the word "Autobiographillyria" to suggest that the poet, wily, wandering, has

returned home to the Self elsewhere.

Saying "I" in the intertext of "Delphi" allows Kroetsch to be directly autobiographical. But the intertext also permits the "release from I" which was part of his gloss on the autobiography of Field Notes. It does so in two ways. The stress on I is no longer solipsistic; the presence of others is no longer alienating. Narcissus and his image as subject of the poem give way to the interstice between them and the space, site, in which both exist as the material of the poem. Kroetsch has also moved from the convention of the poem as speech utterance which he used in "How I Joined the Seal Herd," and in "The Sad Phoenician" and "The Silent Poet Sequence" to the idea of the poem as intertext in "Mile Zero" and "Delphi." That is to take the speech act of talking about oneself and to discover for it one set of writing conventions, to move towards autobiography.

NOTES

1. This paper was initially invited by the Association of Canadian and Québécois Literature to whose members it was read at Learned Societies, 1983 at a session, titled "Je est un autre," on autobiography in Canada.

2. In his Je est un autre: L'autobiographie de la littérature aux médias (Paris: Seuil, 1980).

3. Yeats's phrase for "subjective man," in Autobiographies (London: MacMillan, 1966), p. 294.

4. Gérard Genette, "Complexe de Narcisse," Figures I (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p. 21. All quotations from Genette are my translation.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 28. Genette uses "naufrages," which has the double sense of "shipwrecks" and "the shipwrecked."

9. Emile Benveniste, Problèmes de linguistique générale (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), I, 261. My translation.
10. Philippe Lejeune, Le pacte autobiographique (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 22. My translation.
11. Tzvetan Todorov, Les genres du discours (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p. 59. My translation.
12. Robert Kroetsch, Field Notes 1-8 a continuing poem (Don Mills: General Publishing, 1981), p. 95. All further references to Field Notes will be indicated in parentheses in the text.
13. Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson, Labyrinths of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982), pp. 207-209.
14. Jacques Lacan, "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience," Ecrits: A Selection, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 2.
15. Benveniste, I, 265.
16. Roland Barthes, A Lover's Discourse: Fragments, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), p. 8.
17. Jacques Lacan, The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis, trans. Anthony Wilden (New York: Dell, 1968), p. 64.
18. Thus The Prelude becomes part of the poem's "intertextuality" in the usual sense. The relation between autobiographical inquiry and the "found poems" in the seed catalogue make the particular Kroetschian "intertext."
19. Robert Kroetsch, "Mile Zero," The Canadian Forum, May 1982, 21-24. All further references to "Mile Zero" will be indicated in parentheses in the text.
20. Robert Kroetsch, "Delphi: Commentary," will be published in Open Letter, Summer 1984. Quotations in this essay are from a ms. copy provided by Robert Kroetsch; they are used with his permission. I am, naturally, very grateful both for the copy of "Delphi" and for permission to quote.

RECENT READING

Samuel Beckett's Company (Grove Press) is a development of The Unnameable, and similar to Ill Seen Ill Said, which followed immediately. His familiar use of the voice that cannot seem to refuse to go on is again heard here, but this time whispering in the second person, alternating with a third-person narrative in the present tense. That is, the voices are coming from outside, now. The language, though as usual playing with philosophical puzzles, is simple and clear, elegant finality.

Readers of Beckett will expect to find a human figure physically reduced and restricted, and a situation that is not described and therefore not easy to picture. That is, the mind in examination of itself is in the territory wherein the deep truth is imageless. In this instance we have "one on his back in the dark," with a voice prompting him to remember scenes from his own life, from birth to the last time he could walk.

A reader has to be careful with his guesses when it comes to late Beckett, but this reader understands the unnamed figure (he is tentatively assigned an initial, then left unnameable) to be just before or after the point of crossing from the company of the living to the company of the dead, including the creator, which last is both author and God. Beckett's suggestion is that there comes a time when there is little stimulus to tell a fading sentience which side of the line it is on. The creature lying on his back in the dark may be on his death bed or in a graveyard.

We are told at the end that one's sense of one's life is a fable that eventually cannot be sustained. As usual Beckett has a horrifying tale to tell of the intelligent mind in the twentieth century, and as always the writing is entirely delightful.

People who have for years enjoyed their lonely search for reading material by and about H.D. have greeted the recent deluge

of H.D. material with mixed feelings. New Directions has reached an agreement with H.D.'s daughter Perdita, and it appears that there will be a continuous flow of previously unpublished and out-of-print writing. We are also at last seeing the emergence of writing about the woman whom many consider to be one of the small handful of major Modernist poets in English. One hopes that such writings will proliferate, especially as the first biography, Janice S. Robinson's H.D.: the Life and Work of an American Poet (Houghton Mifflin) is such a disappointment.

It is a disappointment because we learn little about the work and can never find clear images of the life. Robinson has decided that the only interesting part of H.D.'s life was her romantic relationships with some men, notably D.H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, and Dr. Freud, and that the only thing worth tracing in her writing was the expression of the poet's feelings about those loves. It is a kind of academic Harlequin Romance.

We have, admittedly, always seen H.D. trying to make fiction and poetry out of her life. Now we have a biographer trying to turn art back into only a life. One would rather have been served a story of the domestic days of H.D., and no discussion of the writing at all, save in passing. In her determination to convince us that the most important thing about H.D.'s art is its encoding of trysts and dalliances, Robinson often offers maxims about Imagism that have never been mentioned by critics and poets, and remarks about criticism that have no chance of validation given the normal tests of poetry.

Robinson's book gives us added reason to look forward to succeeding biographies, such as the one being written by Barbara Guest; it is also ample proof that if you want to see what H.D. made of her life, you might best choose to read Tribute to Freud, or End to Torment.

For years people have been telling me that as I am a fan of post-modern fiction I should be reading John Fowles. I have always resisted doing so because the people who were doing the suggesting were readers who did not know about one's favourite unfamous writers; that is, their idea of the reflexive novel came from Pynchon or Barth, or Fowles.

But a friend gave me a copy of the most recent Fowles book, Mantissa, (Collins) and it is so luxuriously, so simply sexily printed and produced, that I gave in to the seduction and read it. After the first 40-page chapter I felt as if I had enjoyed myself but was suspicious of both it and me. Wasnt this just some slickly-rendered Borges trick done up with pornographic speed? But it was so easy to

read, and I went on. I am glad that I did.

There is a name for a book that resembles a novel in length but is basically an extended dialogue between two figures, but I don't remember it. Peacock and Huxley would assemble about six characters and make them representative of the intellectual and social life of the times. Fowles toys with one's familiarity with that technique, then blows it up. His figures are not characters, except when they pretend to be; they are a British novelist and Erato, the muse of lyric poetry and fiction. The subject is artistic inspiration and base confusion in the mind of the author, between the muse's gift and the trollop's surrender.

Fowles, who here calls the attempt to describe unthinkable, creates a marvelous quick entertainment, getting off wonderful shots at commercial novelists and stupid politicians, but saving his most impressive and complex fusillade for the kind of person who would try to write things like The French Lieutenant's Woman or Daniel Martin.

Allen Ginsberg comes in for a most tenuously assorted reception these years, from the various elements of the critical trade and political spectrum, and in the single mind of his reader. Plutonian Ode and other poems, 1977-1980 (City Lights), will not, he knows, entirely please any of his readers. Every five years Ginsberg combs his notebooks and wraps a collection for City Lights's "Pocket Poets Series," offering a representation of the sorts of things he has been writing in verse in the latest installment of his ambulatory visit to the planet earth.

This volume contains the famous title poem, an element of the citizens' resistance to the Rockwell Corporation Nuclear Facility's Plutonium bomb trigger factory in Colorado. It is learned and resourceful, a fine combination of affective rhetoric and artistic accomplishment. Sounded, it will get your protest group angry and determined, and it will please your ear that hankers for the kind of inevitable beauty you found in Shelley or Keats.

There are similar poems here, composed in the long musical lines Ginsberg is best at--hear "Eroica," composed to famous European music in Dubrovnik, near the rumours of war. Or a litany called "What's Dead?" There are also exercises in the other modes that Ginsberg likes to try, pop-music lyrics, sexual ballads, metaphysico-asian chants, etc. I suspect that faithful readers skip over these, knowing that Ginsberg can still raise up the dirty clouds with his large bardic strophes.

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