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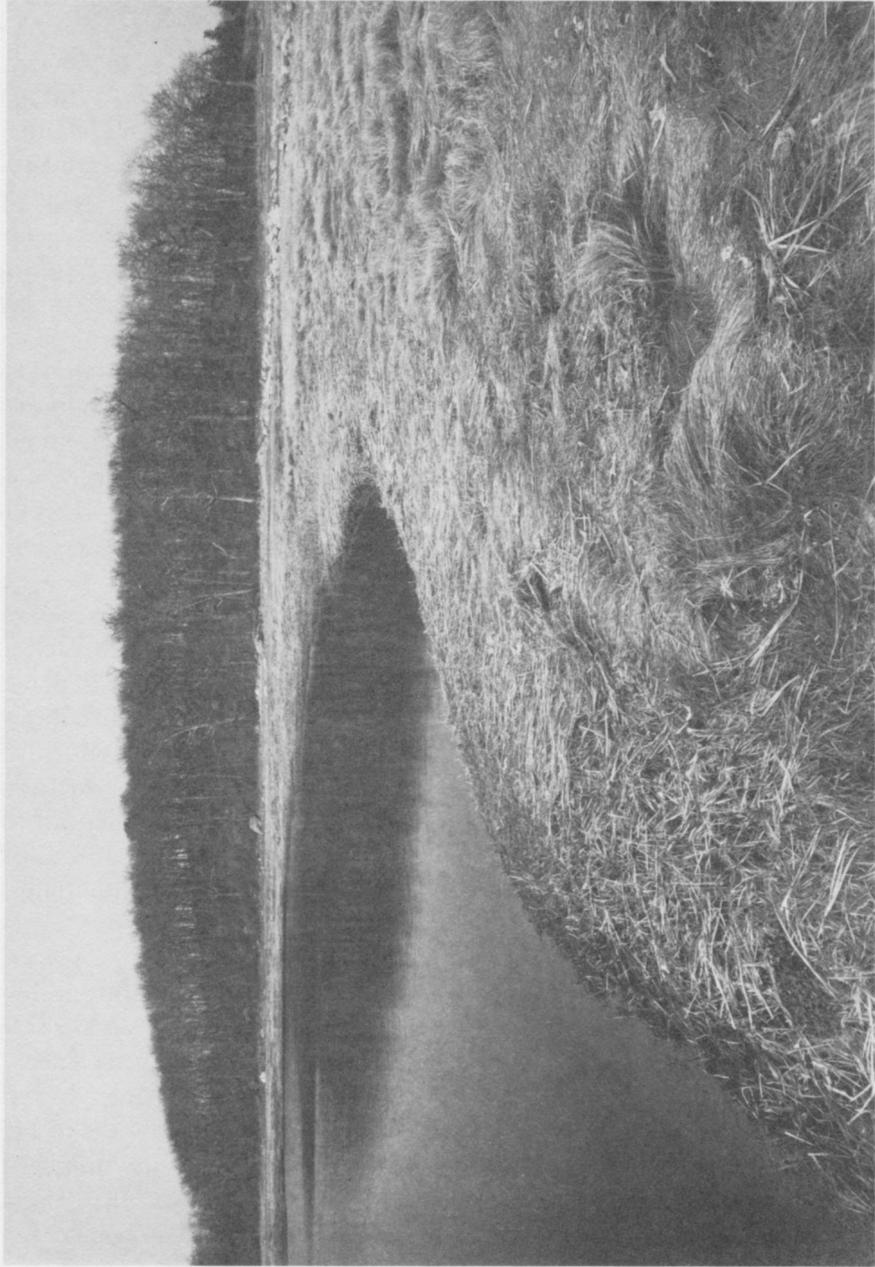
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Mound and Marsh

Charles Olson and the Postmodern Advance · *George F. Butterick*

CHARLES OLSON was always very pleased by the fact that the only time he was ever given a psychological test—when he was invited to participate along with twenty-three other poets, including William Carlos Williams, Robert Lowell, and the like, as part of an examination of creativity conducted by a Harvard graduate student—the results of the test confirmed that he had a “high tolerance of disorder.” The experiment was administered in 1950 by Robert N. Wilson, working under Olson’s friend and fellow Melville scholar, Henry A. Murray, father of the widely known Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), and consisted of an interview and modified form of the TAT, in which visual patterns are explored and narrated. Not insignificantly, it is also known as a “projective” test although Olson experienced it after his well known “Projective Verse” essay was already in press, so there probably was no connection.¹ But this quality—a “high tolerance of disorder”—I would offer, may be one of the chief characteristics of the poetry written since the Second World War which we know as “post-modern.”

Postmodernism is a critic’s term; it has no popular use or necessity. It has its limits, as most descriptive terms of its order do—to such an extent that I recently came upon an interviewer asking Amiri Baraka about a “post-postmodern” art!² It is, like the designation Black Mountain Poets, a term of convenience that has no absolute bearing on reality. It is like the Middle Ages—or even middle age, for that matter—unlikely to be defined with satisfaction to all. I introduce it into the present discussion only because it may be useful in order to distinguish Charles Olson from his immediate predecessors, and, most importantly, because Olson himself used it, and used it about himself.

Most generally, “postmodern” (with or without the hyphen) is used to distinguish the new energies appearing in American culture following World War II, from an exhausted modernism which had outrun its course. The term itself has gained increasing critical acceptance in recent years, until by this date it seems to be a fixity in literary history. A prominent literary periodical declares itself in its subtitle to be a “journal of postmodern literature,” and there have been any number of essays and symposia on the subject. The writings of critic Ihab Hassan and David Antin’s essay “Modernism and Postmodernism: Approaching

the Present in American Poetry” in *Boundary 2* come most readily to mind.³ Even a California bookseller specializing in recent American writing offers his wares in catalogues designated “Modern & Post-modern Literature.” The term has been surveyed with all desired thoroughness in two recent articles in the journal *Amerikastudien*, published in Stuttgart for the German Association for American Studies, so there is no need to do that here, even if there were time.⁴

The term was first used, apparently, by the historian Toynbee, although Olson—and this is not generally known—may have actually been the first to use it in its current application, and the first to use it repeatedly if not consistently.⁵ I will take the time to document this because in so doing we can have a better understanding of what it might mean to be a “post-modern” poet.

As Olson uses it, the designation serves not merely to advance beyond an outmoded modernism, but it seeks an alternative to the entire disposition of mind that has dominated man’s intellectual and political life since roughly 500 B.C. As early as *Call Me Ishmael*, published in 1947, Olson felt that logic and classification betrayed man. “Logic and classification had led civilization toward man, away from space” (p. 14). Now Olson sought to restore man from his egocentric humanism to a proper relationship with the universe, in the same way he says Melville had, and, before that, early man: “Melville went to space to probe and find man. Early man did the same: poetry, language and the care of myth” (p. 14). His classic statement is in “Human Universe,” his finest piece of theoretical prose, the one he called the “base” of his cultural position and “the body, the substance, of my faith” (*Letters for Origin*, p. 69). There he explains how logic and classification intervene between man and the universe, “intermite our participation in our experience.” And the only way out is to restore mythological participation in the laws of nature through a language which is “the act of the instant” rather than “the act of thought about the instant” (*Human Universe*, p. 4). The result is an intensified syntax which fuses man with natural processes. In an effort to break free, post-modern poetry requires almost a total and systematic disordering or disorientation—not so much of the senses, as Rimbaud proposed—but of syntax, at the same time accompanied by a demand for a re-orientation to a new, a “human universe.” As we shall see, the expanded syntax is a manifestation in language of the post-modern demand out of which any advance is made.

The earliest occurrence of the term “postmodern” I am yet aware of

in Olson's writing comes amid a discussion of the modern era as "the age of quantity" in a letter to Robert Creeley, 9 August 1951, where he writes without further definition or elaboration: "I am led to this notion: the post-modern world was projected by two earlier facts," and goes on to cite the voyages of discovery of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries which made "all the earth a known quantity" and the development of the machine in the nineteenth century. The term, however, appears more elaborately and significantly in another letter to Creeley some days later, on August 20, where Olson distinguishes "modern" man from the "post-modern" in the following manner: "the *modern* . . . feel[s] he does *not* belong to . . . just, quick, call it, the universe." In other words, he is in familiar terms, alienated, or "estranged from that with which he is most familiar." Whereas, Olson continues, "my assumption is any POST-MODERN is born with the ancient confidence that, he *does* belong." It is this same "ancient confidence" that enables Olson to begin "Human Universe" with "There are laws," or to write those words which Allen Ginsberg said first attracted him to Olson: "I am one/with my skin." Indeed, it is the same confidence that enables Olson to name his hero, Maximus.

Olson continues to use the term "post-modern" in his letters to Creeley and to Cid Corman from this time (1951-52), in his "Special View of History" lectures from 1956, and in essays like "The Law," which he saw as a sequel to "Human Universe" ("Human Universe" itself was almost entitled "The Laws"), from 3 October 1951. In it he explores the question, "how did other men than the modern (or Western) ground the apprehension of life," and in response, he writes of the first half of the present century as "the marshalling yard on which the modern was turned to what we have, the post-modern, or the post-West." Earlier in the piece, he had summarized what for him are the characteristics of the Western inheritance which makes up modern man. First of all, our history can be viewed as a closed "box," from roughly 500 B.C. to 1950 A.D. As in "Human Universe," the fault lies with the three "great Greeks," Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato, who together invented the reason which has dominated man and "from whom," writes Olson, "it is always my argument, the 'West' followed." As a result of the development of abstract thought by the Greeks, the poet writes, "it is my impression that intellectual life in the West has been and still to a great degree stays essentially *descriptive* and analytical." His conclusion is a general renunciation of the West in its roots: that

Socrates (the generalizer) and Thucydides (the proponent of history as “truth,” an abstract) “date exactly together,” and that “the division of FORM from CONTENT . . . follows” therefrom. And in this essay “Definitions by Undoings,” from as early as 1952, it is clear that the “post-modern” is likewise opposed to “the Western tradition,” for much the same reasons.⁶

Now, it is nothing new to reject Western culture. It goes on all the time—and to such an extent that the time has certainly come to reaffirm its accomplishments. Indeed, Olson himself—in railing against . . . this time it was the East, or those contemporaries who sought their practice or ecstasy principally in the East (he railed at whatever gave him energy, of course, as any high-spirited man)—pointed out that anything the East had to offer, whether it was calm or selflessness or a sense of the kalpa (an endless but measurable eon) the West also, or already, had. (I believe the subject under discussion was self-effacement as an exercise in spiritual discipline.) But it is also true that the post-modern demand is that the West curb its excesses and interferences which divide man from nature and from himself.

“Post-modern” occurs again in Olson’s writings in the review “The Materials and Weights of Herman Melville,” written for the *New Republic* in August of 1952, where Olson writes of D. H. Lawrence as “the one man of this century to be put with Melville, Dostoevsky and Rimbaud (men who engaged themselves with modern reality in such fierceness and pity as to be of real use to any of us who want to take on the post-modern . . .)” (*Human Universe*, p. 112). The term and the same four authors, as precisely those who make possible our or any “post-modernism,” occur again a short while later in an important autobiographical statement written on Election Day, 1952, while awaiting the returns of the national elections in which Adlai Stevenson would lose to Eisenhower—a time when a former politico and New Dealer might very well reconsider his own identity! It comes in the piece in which his famous phrase, “archeologist of morning,” used to title (post-humously) his collected poems, also occurs:

. . . I find it awkward to call myself a poet or a writer. If there are no walls there are no names. This is the morning, after the dispersion, and the work of the morning is methodology: how to use oneself, and on what. That is my profession. I am an archeologist of morning. And the writing and acts which

I find bear on the present job are (I) from Homer back, not forward; and (II) from Melville on, particularly himself, Dostoevsky, Rimbaud, and Lawrence. These were the modern men who projected what we are and what we are in, who broke the spell. They put men forward into the post-modern, the post-humanist, the post-historic, the going live present, the “Beautiful Thing.” (*Additional Prose*, p. 40)

As a final example of the extent of Olson’s use of the term (there are many others that can be documented)⁷ and for some further sense of Olson’s own understanding of how far the term could take him, he writes in a note from the time of his *New Sciences of Man* lectures in early 1953: “we are now in a stage which may best be called ‘post-modern,’ in order that the theory of *openness* may be free even from the very gains which made the openness possible—free from all argument, & thus already into that stage of *will* (which is *after*, or at least *more necessary* even than understanding) from which LAWS can come into existence. . . .” The term thus had a currency for the poet, like those terms *archaic*, *istorin*, and *myth*, among the others we will touch upon briefly in order to delineate his accomplishment, his advance into the post-modern.

In his admirable survey of the term in American cultural history, Michael Köhler points out that “post-modern” appears to have been first used by Toynbee in a chart in the 1946 abridged edition of his famous *Study of History*. There Toynbee assigns the date of 1875 for the beginning of the new era he calls “Post-Modern,” that following the “Modern” period of 1475-1875.⁸ Köhler also notes that this is exactly the date that Olson cites when he writes in “A FIRST DRAFT of a READING list in the new SCIENCES OF MAN” from 1955, “It is not yet gauged how much the nature of knowledge has changed since 1875. Around that date man reapplied known techniques of the universe to man himself, and the change has made man as non-Socratic (or non-Aristotelian) as geometers of the early 19th century made the universe non-Euclidean.”⁹ And indeed Köhler is quite right in noticing the similarity, for—although he does not say this, does not fully make the connection—the year 1875 is precisely the same one Olson chooses to identify the beginnings of what he calls the *New Sciences of Man*, those same sciences he believed provided the methodological alternative to humanism and modernism.

The coincidence is too great to be overlooked, and led Köhler to

wonder if there wasn't some indication that Olson had drawn the term "post-modern" directly from Toynbee. There is, however, no such evidence. *A Study of History*, whether in its original multi-volume form or its more popular abridgement, was not among the books in Olson's library, and Olson mentions Toynbee only three times, to my knowledge, in his writings, in each case disparagingly, as a type of historian to be avoided.¹⁰ Of course, Olson might have read Toynbee early—though not in college, as many had done, since the first volumes of *A Study of History* were not published until 1934, the year after he had received his MA from Wesleyan; and there is no indication the work was part of the assigned or recommended reading in his graduate courses in history at Harvard. Still, it is odd, even uncanny, that of all the dates available to mark the beginning of an era, the two earliest users of the term "postmodern" in English should choose the same one to accompany or illustrate their term. Another observer might have chosen 1914; or 1863, the date of the Salon des Refusés in Paris, which some give for the birth of the Avant Garde; or, as Olson himself elsewhere, 1897, Brooks Adams' date for the beginning of the New American Empire (*Human Universe*, p. 135). But 1875? That's an extraordinary coincidence, inescapably close.

Although it would seem at first a coincidence too highly improbable, both writers hold different reasons for choosing the same date. Toynbee, as explained in his *Study of History*, offers the date exclusively in political terms, for the general onset of nationalism and the spread of industrialism.¹¹ Now, Olson may have been *encouraged* by Toynbee (if at all), but he gives his own reason as—with a specificity so typical of him—the date for the founding of the science of archeology, the core of the so-called New Sciences of Man, which he identifies as having had its start with the excavations at Olympus under the German archeologist Wilhelm Dorpfeld, Schliemann's collaborator and successor at Troy—the first, apparently, to exercise the rigors of classification while preserving the larger context, and thus, the first to apply the methods of exact science to man himself.¹² It is not that Olson uses the year 1875 to mark the birth of postmodernism as such, but of the tools that make possible a post-modern advance. He writes in his plan for Black Mountain College in 1956:

It was archeology . . . which broke loose the birth of new knowledge around 1875, it was the digging up of the past not

the mere recording or repeating the history of it. It was the objectification, the literal seeking and finding of *the objects* of the past of man which took down all generalization with it, made the specific pin or gold piece . . . *the evidence* of the oral existence of man. For example: the mythological as the matter will remain nothing but removed tales of somebody else unless any one of us achieves a means to take seriously what goes on inside ourself. And you can't do that by simply sitting around in wonder and fantasy and trouble over what happens to one or what one dreams. You have to have the experience of hard objects, of panning, of what does wash out when all the water is out of it.¹³

So that although Toynbee may have used the term "post-modern" as early as 1946, it appears Olson came to the designation independently in 1951, through his own observation and understanding of the world.

But before exploring further the grounds for his rejection of modernism and suggesting the qualities of post-modernism which characterize Olson's poetry, let me first say a bit more about what these New Sciences of Man were, that he saw as the means to advance man into post-modernism.

Recognizing that the occasional summer sessions at Black Mountain in the past had elicited far more support in terms of tuition-paying students than the regular program, the total enrollment of which at that time wavered at 35, Olson, in an attempt to save the foundering school, proposed in 1952 a series of what he called "institutes." These were to be in the crafts, pottery, theater, the natural sciences, along with his own special child, an institute in what he called the "New Sciences of Man." This was to be held at the college in the early spring of 1953, and was originally to include geographer Carl Sauer, who Olson invited to be the "governing lecturer" of the series, ethnobotanist Edgar Anderson, archeologists Robert Braidwood and Christopher Hawkes, and Carl Jung, although only Braidwood and Marie Luise von Franz, sent by Jung in his place, finally came, for a week apiece that March. In inviting Christopher Hawkes to come—whose book *The Prehistoric Foundations of Europe* he found not only informative but methodologically valuable—Olson summarizes his intentions regarding the Institute: "this Institute is planned as as thorough an attack upon the state of real knowledge now as the few of us who stand on such grounds can make it. What I want

to do is to bring together here three or four men who can, together, and for such as attend, examine three sciences simultaneously—what I think you, of all men, will follow me in, if I put them this way: (1), the science of place, or what Sauer had called ‘the morphology of landscape’ . . . ; (2), the science of culture, or, the morphology of same [defined in a similar letter to Braidwood as “that discipline man displaced evolution by”]; and (3), the science of mythology,” about which he adds: “the least familiar, perhaps, but you will know Jung and Kerényi’s attempt to give circulation to it: it might vastly & quickly be said to be what art and religion have previously divided between themselves” (letter to Hawkes, 3 January 1953).¹⁴

Olson himself was to pave the way by delivering a series of at least eight background lectures in the five weeks of February and March before the invited speakers came. He gives the titles in another letter to Christopher Hawkes, 2 February 1953 (also in one to Corman the same day, and to Creeley on February 23):

The Cave, or, Painting
 The Cup, or, Dance
 The Woman, or, Sculpture
 The Valley, or, Language
 The Plateau, or the Horse, or, War
 Lagash, or, the Hero
 Thebes, or, the City
 The Sun, or the Sum, or, Self

—although all do not seem to have survived, or survived intact. But what we do have of the lectures—which Olson describes to Creeley, 23 March 1953, as “a sort of researching made public”—reveal the enormous labor he put into the program (nowhere hinted at in Martin Duberman’s brief account in his *Black Mountain: A Study in Community*).¹⁵ Everywhere present in the lectures is Olson’s energy and capacity for research, his Goethian scope and wide grasp of information, the sheer boldness to attempt such a venture. Not least, there is displayed Olson’s belief in the New Sciences themselves. He tells his audience at the beginning of his third lecture, “my joy of science is such, I am apt to forget most people have a double-trouble: they are either captive of its mechanisms (unable to see how Heisenberg restored science to man) or they are full of the old religion-art suspicion of it as robber of the lustre

of the daydreams of man . . . My joy of the sciences of this Institute is this: that it enables any of us to inhabit man in his story backward & forward as close to exactly as any of us actually inhabit ourselves." It is of consequence that Olson does not shy from or reject science like a romantic humanist, but freely acknowledges its usefulness as a "tool." He never had any objection to the scientific method, so long as that was understood to be "a stage which man must master and not what [it is] taken to be, final discipline." Logic and classification are only means to an end not "ways to end, END, which," he insists, "is never more than this instant, than . . . you, this instant, in action." (*Human Universe*, p. 5)

The resulting series of lectures Olson hoped to publish as a book, as he wrote Jonathan Williams on 1 March 1953, under the title, *The Chiasma* (or intersection). They were his most ambitious attempt to be comprehensive in prose after "Human Universe" and prior to *A Special View of History*, and in many ways go beyond those later lectures in scope and clarity of address. The lectures push back to Cro-Magnon man (they are continued almost fifteen years later in Olson's letters to John Clarke, published as *Pleistocene Man*), and while many readers are aware of Olson's interest in the Maya or Sumerians, far more profound is this interest in the origins of man himself, in an effort to bring him beyond the modern. The formula seems inescapable: the deeper man returns to his archaic, primordial, pre-rationalist condition, the further beyond modernism he advances.

The science that Olson discovered to take him beyond modernism was mythology, assisted by Jung and Kerényi's suggestion in the title of their book together, *Essays on a Science of Mythology*, that mythology could indeed be a *science*.¹⁶ The term or the notion stopped Olson at first; he resisted it, as evidenced in a letter to Creeley from 25 October 1950, where he rejects the phrase, "science of mythology," as "crap." But what he could not reject was that myth, in the definition he found in the introduction to the Jung and Kerényi book (p. 7), from Malinowski's *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, was a "reality lived." Mythology, as Malinowski saw it, was "the assertion of an original, greater, and more important reality" through which a man's "present life, fate, and work" were governed, and the knowledge of which provided him "on the one hand with motives for ritual and moral acts [or for the poet, poems], on the other hand with directions for their performance [his poetics]."

This was followed by Olson's discovery around the same time of

classical scholar J. A. K. Thomson's identification of mythology as "muthologos," or "what is said (of what is said)," which also had the advantage—in Thomson's presentation—of linking that with the "history" Olson had always been interested in, and being at the same time a definition that corresponded to the one he knew from Jane Harrison (myth as mouth, *mythos* as *muthos*)—which got in narrative, the story, the spoken equivalent of act, art as *dromenon* or enactment—so that his aesthetics of the "instant" could emerge intact.¹⁷

These, then, are the principal sources for Olson's understanding of myth, in addition to Freud and Frazer earlier, and what he knew genetically, instinctively, in his blood (his mother was said to believe in leprechauns—although that has been said in America about most Irish mothers or grandmothers¹⁸). These sources of understanding supply and support him until the end. In an essay entitled, directly, "The Science of, Mythology," written 15 January 1953 in anticipation of the New Sciences of Man institute, Olson says: "I propose that mythology is a word to use for the present to characterize an observable series of phenomena as decisively as physiology is taken to cover the matter of our body's functioning . . ." He continues: "the care of myth is in your hands—you are, whether you know it or not, the living myth—each of you—which you neglect, not only at your own peril, but at the peril of man. For when men lose their mythology, they are as dead—simply, that it is what used to be called the soul of them, and, by the law of the soul (the palpable force of it), if you lose it—like if you lose your body—you are not alive." Later, Olson will insist that mythology is the same "hard" science as any of the taxonomic sciences such as physics (*Muthologos*, I, 46). Some ten thousand pages of his own notes survive as evidence of just how rigorous a study mythology could be and the demand he made of it.

In speaking of the New Sciences to his audience at Black Mountain, Olson says his own specialty is the "science of image." Image—and image in its narrative form, story—is the alternative to logic and classification—which is why the poet concludes "Human Universe" on a myth. Image is unique and indivisible, it defies comparison, which, Olson writes in a first version of his "Human Universe" essay, "has lain . . . at the root of humanism as one of its most evil characteristics." "Image," he says further, "denotes a much more active process, deriving as it does from the root of the Latin verb 'imitare,' to imitate, and thus is closely joined to the implicitly dramatic action of the concept 'to

mime,' and bears always in the direction of direct representation of an original object or act, not, as symbol goes, in the contrary direction, toward generalization, towards an abstract sign, figure, or type to stand in the place of . . . the original object or act."¹⁹ Olson had become a "specialist" very much like he says Ahab had (*Call Me Ishmael*, p. 12), concentrating all space, not into "the form of a whale called Moby-Dick" like Ahab, but into Gloucester. Gloucester is an image of possibility for a city the way Maximus is the image of possibility for man.

In many ways Olson was his own myth and his own image. He was, as many know by now, a man of unavoidable physical presence. It might be said he was obsessed, preoccupied with size, ruled by it, for there was no place he could go without his own. One can readily imagine the mixed feelings of the young Olson reading Thomas Wolfe's story, "Gulliver: The Story of a Tall Man," in a June 1935 *Scribner's* magazine, which begins (p. 328): "Some day some one will write a book about a man who was too tall—who lived forever in a dimension that he did not fit, and for whom the proportions of everything—chairs, beds, doors, rooms, shoes, clothes, shirts, and socks, the berths of Pullman cars and the bunks of transatlantic liners, together with the rations of food, drink, love, and women which most men on this earth have found sufficient to their measure—were too small." And that man, that Gulliver, was only six foot six! In his notebook (entry for 9 July 1935), Olson records his reading so far that summer: Malraux's *Man's Fate*, Auden's *Poems*, Dorothy Sayers' *Nine Tailors*, Hemingway, etc., and adds: "Of all this the most important is an unmentioned short thing—Thomas Wolfe's 'Gulliver—The Story of a Tall Man,' " which he describes as "achingly true in exposing the hell of a tall man's life."

Jonathan Williams tells a story of going to a movie theater one night with Olson in Asheville, N.C., the city outside Black Mountain—the Isis Theater, no less—to see a film called, yes, "The Bride of Frankenstein." And at the end, as the screen went dark and the lights came on, and he and Olson stood up in the center of the theater preparing to go, Williams noticed the rest of the audience, good Asheville citizens, tradesmen and their wives, farmers from the hills, were eyeing Olson peculiarly. Wide-eyed, unable to take their eyes off him, they inched further and further away, making their way without further hesitation to the doors. It was as if they were witnessing—and suddenly participating in—a continuity of the movie, the image from the screen become live in their midst!

Or the picture of Olson moving through the vast enclosed space of a crowded airline terminal, every head turned to follow him, with his top-knot and overcoat cloaking his shoulders like a giant Samurai, head after head, looking up from newspapers, schedules, mother's laps. No wonder he responded to Eric Havelock's description of the Mycenaean hero, the model for the oral prince, as a "conspicuous" public figure.

It was not an unattractive sight, his size in person, just strange and awesome, and Olson took advantage of it as he did the size of his voice. Certainly the poems reflect this quality and this authority. It would be all too peculiar, too precious, almost too perverse a thought, for so large a man to incise only haikus, a sonnet, a rondeau. How well he responded to Melville's cry, "Give me a condor's quill! Give me Vesuvius' crater for an inkstand! . . . Such, and so magnifying, is the virtue of a large and liberal theme! We expand to its bulk." (*Moby Dick*, chap. CIV) Maximus was an attempt to live up to his full potentiality in size.

It was perhaps only a fluke that one of Maximus's manifestations, James Merry who wrestled a bull on Dogtown Commons, was exactly 6'7", Olson's size. But there can be little doubt that Maximus himself is named in part autobiographically. There were indications all along that this might be so. Who else does Olson seek to begin his story of America with, when taking his first steps toward the proposed narrative (alternatively a long poem) to be called *West*—which itself evolved into *The Maximus Poems*—but Paul Bunyan. And how uncomfortably obvious is the name Bigmans for a hero, prototype of Maximus, from a man who bought his clothing by mail from an outfitter called King Size. How immoderate, then, is the name Maximus itself, how immodest? With a name like that, how is a hero to avoid all the worst qualities of a Mohammed Ali, who also called himself "The Greatest"?

It should not be imagined that Olson, a man who could "lift an arm/flawlessly" and who walked with a spring, would feel because of his unusual size alone that "man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar." Nor would he be so overweening as to think that a writer's subject is his single human life alone. Instead, "size" is something all men might be capable of. He asks his audience at Black Mountain in one of his *New Sciences of Man* lectures: "What is your experience of your size? do you, or not, move among the herd of men with the sense of yourself as not yet filling out your size? do you, thus, have the feeling of being smaller, both than yrself and than how others appear to you? . . . am I right that most of our time we take ourselves

to be smaller than others, to be smallness in face of the world?" Of course he does not mean mere physical size. Again, to Melville scholar Merton Sealts he writes (7 March 1952): "one of the central preoccupations of man today—one of his central necessities—is exactly this problem of *hero*: which is, any time, man's measure of his own *possibilities*—how large is he?" With Maximus, Olson allows his possibilities to stay enormous. "I am not named ['The Greatest'] /for no cause."

Olson had already discussed this matter of size in "Projective Verse," how the content of the poem changes for the poet, "the dimension of his line itself changes" (as we will see in our discussion of syntax to come), and how the "projective act . . . leads to dimensions larger than man," (*Human Universe*, pp. 59, 60) leads to, indeed, a Maximus. And could he have been speaking of anything but his own hero when he writes in "The Gate and The Center" of the *size* of the earliest Sumerian kings, saying: "I have this dream, that just as we cannot now see & say the size of these early HUMAN KINGS, we cannot, by the very lost token of their science ['the old human science of archetype figures and archetype event']," we cannot, he says, "see what 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 energy taken up" (*Human Universe*, p. 21). This is precisely the will Maximus exercises when he "compells" Gloucester to "yield" itself, to be a polis once again, a "coherence not even yet new" (*Maximus II*, 15; I, 11). Maximus, it must be granted, is Olson's attempt at a post-modern hero.

Maximus fulfills Olson's mythic ambitions. He absorbs the disorder, grows large on it. Maximus is saved from the presumption of his name by his ties to Gloucester and to an historical namesake, Maximus of Tyre, that both relieves him of egotism and allows him to participate in the past. He is a man, not an allegorical Everyman or Red Cross Knight; or if allegorical only in Keats's sense that a man's life, to be of any worth, must be a "continual allegory." It is Gloucester that gives Maximus dimension, a Gloucester of his own creation. Maximus is a proposition, a proportion to be filled, a challenge thrown ahead from the moment of its naming. Maximus is the sum of man; he grows by what all men—Lou Douglas, John Smith, John Winthrop, Enyalion and the other heroes of the poem—contribute to him. He is a model not a mirror; an "image," not of a man, but—the poem "Maximus of Gloucester" (III, 101) is careful to say—"of man." He is a magnification, a metaphor for human possibility. All men can be Maximus if they

practice themselves like William Stevens, if they “make things,/not just live off nature” (I, 31), if they resist.

And he succeeds, even though in the final poem of the series—“my wife my car my color and myself”—the forces are finally equal to the hero, have caught up with him. Maximus yields back to the man, the heroic is pinched down to the human by the pain of having been alive and the bewilderment of being about to lose that life. The components of the poet’s life are put to rest, at ease in their simplicity. This does not mean any need to bemoan like a sad trumpet the poems as a failure. It is such a commonplace that *all* modern long poems have been failures, including *The Wasteland*, *The Bridge*, *The Cantos*, *Paterson*, *A*—if that is ever a helpful way to talk about them. They are only failures because we no longer know what success is.

Maximus is a creature of language; the “Man in the Word,” Jonathan Williams’ editorial note to the first volume calls him. He has no life outside the poem and our memories of it. Among the six thousand or so pieces of mail preserved among Olson’s papers, not one addressed simply “Maximus, Gloucester,” ever reached him. Maximus is only as large as the language he can speak. He remains unbound by the fallacy of the sentence as a “completed thought.” Instead, he extends the sentence—or the poetic line—increasingly onward until what must be said *gets* said, completes itself—often with another sentence (a sentence within the “sentence”), as in “A Later Note on Letter # 15” (*Maximus* II, 79). It may help if we think of the grammatical sentence, the one of words, in terms of a prison sentence—a time-conditioned event, “doing time,” a stretch, not of the pen, but in the “pen.” The reader is released from the sentence, that cell of language, only when his “time” is up, when the meaning has been fully served. Thus the many unclosed parentheses, the proliferation of commas and relative clauses, dashes, colons in the poems (in “A Later Note,” three open parentheses and three colons in eighteen lines propel the poem). The syntactical unit is as large as needs be. “The lines which hook-over should be read as though they lay out right and flat to the horizon or Eternity,” Olson advised the readers of his *Selected Writings* (p. 158).

This is no longer a condition or question of traditional syntax but of parataxis, the recording of the order of events as they occur in nature, even mimetically, as in the “Hotel Steinplatz” poem we will shortly look at in greater detail, tracing the fluctuations of the falling, blowing snow, at the same time the poet reveals his interiority through a medita-

tion told in terms of the Norse “End of the World.” Or the wonderful example of the late *Maximus* poem (III, 155-61) snatched from the flow of event, written between one o’clock and three one June morning in a checkbook, all the poet had in his pockets at the time, while standing under streetlights near the Blynman Canal or “Cut” in Gloucester, being inspected by prowling police cars curious as to the great shape in the shadows.

Syntactic strain forces the reader to perceive the world as Maximus does, to make his discoveries. It compels (his verb) us to participate in his world of language until Gloucester, too, is our own. Not of course the Gloucester of the Massachusetts coast which this very day may be having intermittent showers over its narrow streets and wharf pilings and back-lying hills, or where the smell of the frying batter General Mills developed for its Gorton’s fishsticks is as pervasive in the air over Main Street as the gulls. That Gloucester might be for many just as Edward Dorn writing in 1959 thought he’d find it: “I would be bored to sickness,” he predicted, “walking through Gloucester.”²⁰ But the Gloucester of which I speak is a polis of the mind, built and preserved by the rhythms of knowing. The obsessiveness of Olson’s syntax holds to the turns of his mind as closely as that mind does to Gloucester, archeologically, exhaustively.

Much of the difficulty in Olson’s poetry—and who would have it any other way—derives from just this torsion. This is not the occasional practice of ellipses or enjambment or syncopation that Olson—like most poets, even the most formal—is *also* capable of. It is an effort to drive against the limits of reality itself, where the language is done violence to, and with it, inherited, conformist linearity. Syntax yields or gets broken, broken through, as in the “Footnote” to “John Burke”: “And past-I-go/ Gloucester-inside/being Fosterwise of/Charley-once-boy/ insides” (*Maximus* I, 144), or in “AN ART CALLED GOTHONIC”: “We trace wood or/path/will not/hasten/our/step-wise ad-/vance” (*Maximum* III, 170)—where there are conscious attempts to write Yana and Gothonic in English, to press for an alternative.

But also the English—or American, actually—itself is stretched, the words written practically on top of one another in their tumble forth to get free: “I said to my friend my/life is recently so hairy honkie-/hard & horny too to that ex/tent I am far far younger/now than though of course I am/not twenty any more, only/the divine alone interests me at/all and so much else is other-/wise I hump out hard &/crash in nerves

and smashed/existence only” (*Maximus* III, 197-98). Or the episode of the toy steam shovel (or any modern toy or goods or product) in the poem for Jack Clarke, “Golden Venetian Light” (*Maximus* III, 213):

that model toy steam shovel I bot the Waiting Station for Chas Peter’s
1st Christmas Gloucester (age almost 3) and I stood naked in a
rage both fr. tiredness (& from damn) and the goddamn toy
it wasn’t one it was a goddamn literally practically *exact*
model crank-crank & all that shit in the world: it was too much
both for him and myself, and his mother like any mother
doing that thing all from love, that somehow
the goddamn thing might satisfy. Bullshit, it won’t if it don’t, and
forever!

Now, *that’s* speech! (Is that, by the way, what Wordsworth meant by “the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation”?) It is not, of course, where the poetry, sheer poetry, lies—and there is control, masterful control and lightness otherwise—but the point is, the verse is open enough, at any given point, to include the sudden warps or excrescences or rages of being.

At the same time, Olson’s language gives up neither its commonality nor its semantic intent. There is no instance in Olson I am aware of where the words do not “mean” something. To achieve a more accurate view or reality, word order is dislocated, the troops (I use military terminology here, conscious that not only “parataxis” but “avant garde” originally had that usage), the troops of words are ordered to fall out or are deployed in guerrilla position to wage a revolution of language closest to man’s given shape, where language itself is a double helix. Indeed, there is that late *Maximus* poem (III, 117-21) written in a swirl on the page, literally, visually, until, totally caught up in itself as the poet by his own cares, it ends in a snarl of woe. In another poem (*Maximus* III, 110), two lines of language are crossed over one another, demanding a simultaneity, and were it not for an initial capital on one, there would be some question which to read first.

I do not mean to suggest that this heightened, strained condition is unrelieved throughout Olson’s long serial poem, or that such is most naturally satisfying to man. We lead lives of sufficient regularity to sleep once every 24 or 36 hours, eat while awake, have a pulse, and the like. It’s just that reaches are called for that the old grasps or forms can not allow.

Olson himself repeatedly uses images of strain and contortion in speaking of how poems got written. In "Poetry and Truth" he describes a block of moveable type, with the printer as "under your words in order to make the letters of them. Which always delights me," he continues, "as a problem of creation. In fact . . . I would go so far—if you will excuse my Americanism—to think that you write that way. That you write as though you were *underneath* the letters, And I take that a hell of a lot larger. I would think that the hoof-print of the Creator is on the bottom of Creation, in exactly that same sense." (*Muthologos*, II, 34) He describes the Rose of the World poem, reproduced in its holograph spiral in *Maximus III*, as an attempt to "go widdershins [i.e., counter-clockwise], & write both inside in . . . & R[ight] to L[eft]," and another late *Maximus* poem (III, 197-201) as "written as though *below* low water."²¹ Paul Blackburn had long ago accused him of twisting the issue: "He sd, 'You go all around the subject.' And I sd, 'I didn't know it was a sub-/ject.' He sd, 'You twist' and I sd, 'I do.' He said other things. And I didn't say anything." The point is, it is not a subject until the poet makes it one. There are no preconceived, predetermining forms to be accommodated, no preferred categories. Forms reveal themselves only by the act of the poem: "nothing is possible without/doing it. It is where the test lies, *malgré*/ all the thought and all the pell-mell of/proposing it. Or thinking it out or living it/ahead of time" (*Maximus III*, 190). It is a *willed* organicism.

Often the poem contorts and twists itself, enters into digressions, all to escape anticipated patterns which are simply too facile and belie the complexity the poet knows to be in the world. It might be said that such a poem creates its own difficulties, which it then must seek to resolve, Harry Houdini-like. For example, in one not necessarily successful but somewhat curious and noticeable late poem—the next to last poem in *Archaeologist of Morning* (p. [238])—even something so egregiously ungrammatical and confusing as a double negative is allowed and sought advantage of. The double negative appears to sustain a paradox raised earlier in the poem: that neurosis, termed characteristic of the old Norse, the pre-Hesiodic Greeks, and the earliest Celts (and this must surely be an irony, further throwing the poem into complexity), is (such neurosis is) a prerequisite for what the poet calls, probably with further irony, "modern Non-Neurotic Man, the Neue Klasse of/ freedom." And as proof or illustration, quotes "a lady/Poet who calls herself/an Artist,"²² who, by the very stridency of her protest—"I *am* free, I *am* an Artist,

I am the/ Poetry”—reveals her chains. Her claims—ordinarily, altogether attractive, and actually, in her original poems, basic feminist outcry—are rendered shrill and unconvincing and, indeed, in terms of what seems to be the subject of the poem, at the least, high-strung. But the point is, it is only the totally absorbing sweep of these last lines that offers the poem (all that has gone before) any integrity and resolves the uncertain paradox proposed by the opening stanza. So much is held in abeyance, suspended, until the poem—by an accumulated argument of images and facts—has the authority to reveal, and only then, the truth it bears.

Such syntax is what in Donald Davie’s terms might be called “subjective,” that is, one “whose function is to please us by the fidelity with which it follows the ‘form of thought’ in the poet’s mind,”²³ but goes beyond Davie’s definition in one decisive sense, because the “form” may not yet be in the poet’s mind. “Who knows what a poem ought to sound like? until it’s thar?” It is still a question of where the poet acquires “form” for his thought. Postmodernist poetry does not accept preconceived forms, like fourteen lines, into which its cement is poured. Rather, it is intent, like all time arts, upon discovering the space of the world for itself. As early as 13 July 1953, Olson wrote to English author Ronald Mason: “The quarrel is with discourse—and thus, up to a certain, but extreme point, with traditional syntax. Because it is not possible to say everything at once, is no reason, to my mind, to lose the advantage of this pressure (or compression) which speech is [,] which it wants to be: that it rushes into the mouth to crowd out to someone else what it is pressing in the heart & mind to be said.”

Syntactic flexibility occasionally yields sprightly economies and syn-copations, such as this syntactical sharing in lines from “Letter # 41”: “I run back home out of the new moon/makes fun of me in each puddle on the road” (*Maximus* II, 1), where instead of subordination into clauses, there occurs a “Siamese” sentence, joined head to tail, the object of the prepositional phrase in the previous sentence becoming the subject of the subsequent one. Although sometimes the openness leads to periphrasis, and eventually, perhaps, to a mannerism. Occasionally it is only the poet’s great will or vivaciousness that creates a gravity enough to hold meaning in sway, or where the wheels do leave the road, pulls them back on, as in this passage from “Poem 143. The Festival Aspect,” speaking of the god Ganesha: “Through the mountain/through the bole/of any tree through the adamantine/he passes/as though it were nothing. Only

the God himself/of whom he is the frazzled stalk/in each of the coolness, and ease, of his power/is more than water . . .”—which Olson then saves by saying, “Water is not equal/to the/ Flower” etc. (*Maximus* III, 74-75), bringing the poem to a satisfying end. Of course, some of the poems don’t make the turn. They end in a heap and rust there. Most notable is the mightily ambitious, cosmogonic “[MAXIMUS, FROM DOGTOWN—IV],” an attempt to bring Hesiod into American (with some Old Norse support). The poet exhausted himself by the time he got to Love in the poem.

Individuated syntax is the linguistic consequence of *'istorin*. *Maximus*, as a verb—as the verb Olson once said he was—is the *'istorin* of the sentence. In “Letter, May 2, 1959” (*Maximus* I, 145), there is the actual pacing out and recording of the distances on the old Meeting House Plain of Gloucester, now covered by modern settlement. The poet jots the figures on an air-letter from a Scottish editor he pulled out of his pocket, and writes them in the poem along with soundings from the earliest known chart of Gloucester Harbor by Champlain, both as examples of mapping as narrative and of “finding out for yourself.” This is truly physiological writing; not only the famous “breath” of the projective poet, but the total body of man gotten back into his composition, making of his verse a “human universe.” Poems are written with our bodies, not our tongues, our calloused thick or uncalloused tapering fingers, or rhythmically bobbing heads alone. Olson wrestling the lectern at Beloit is a metaphor for the act of writing itself. If there are roughnesses, they are not only non-Euclidean, but because creation is a spasm. To live second upon second, as Olson well knew, added up to “40 hours” each day.

This brings us once again to the postmodern demand. Postmodern poetry categorically includes more—dream data, imparted messages, chance occurrences (and reoccurrences), fortuitous rhymes, misspellings, frustrations, the blanks Pound said should be left in for what we don’t know, stanzas, vulgarity, allusions, direct confessions, philosophical waxings, personal waning, aesthetic gossip. It demands more of the reader, proportionally. The syntax itself exhibits the postmodern “high tolerance for disorder.” Such poetry is not to be mistaken for gross randomness, pilings, that abuse our trust. It is even intended to test our faith in the representative power of language. One practices the *'istorin* of the sentence—to find out for oneself. The meter is the measure of the man not of the line.

A late *Maximus* poem written in the Hotel Steinplatz while in Berlin on a visit to give a reading, will serve as a last illustration (*Maximus III*, 179-80). The poet, in full loneliness on Christmas Day, two days before his fifty-sixth birthday, and having recently suffered a minor heart attack, watches the falling snow outside his window. The observed external phenomenon mirrors the poet's internal condition, the snow-swept, noble anguish of it, extending to the archaic depths of the mythological. Even there, gazing out the window, it is not all a fixed flow: the snow hesitates, is blown about and transformed into rain, before thickening back to snow again. It is an astoundingly rich occasion, and all of it cinematically captured—but not frozen—by the poem. Before the gloomy winter afternoon, the poet stands as Odin, who had sacrificed himself for poetry by hanging nine days on Yggdrasill, the World Tree, his side pierced by a spear, like Christ on the cross. The pain in the poet's side from his overstressed heart recalls both Odin's wounded side and that of Christ, from which blood and then water ran, a sure sign of his death (on this day commemorating his birth). The wet snow evokes the dew sprinkled on Yggdrasill, itself constantly gnawed and torn by the animals of creation. Above all, there is no self-pity, only the grandeur of the mythic reenactment.

There are two simultaneous tracks in the poem—a technique that appears already in “To Gerhardt, There, Among Europe's Things,” although here more interwoven. There is a twin reel of syntax that not only allows the time element in—the archaic time of the Norse Eddas concurrent with the suffering, snowing present—but “proprioceptively” fuses external and internal conditions. That is, we have “the universe flowing-in, inside” (*Additional Prose*, p. 19). Description banished, uniqueness is restored. It is a total mythological experience.

The internal conditions are the poet's feelings, but also the primordial recesses where the myths from the Eddas remain active. The poet's feelings are both bodily (the pain of recent illness) and psychological (alone on Christmas in a strange city, his health uncertain, the death of his wife less than three years before still haunting him). But it is from other depths—call it the archaic, or the unconscious, if one wants to use so boring a term—that the poet speaks and that *Maximus* lives. The narrative moves to incorporate the words of a seeress whose story is told in the old Norse *Baldur's Draumar*. Sought by Odin, called up from the dead and forced to answer his questions, she cries, just as the poem has it, “who is this man who drives me all the way/ who drives me on down

this weary path?/Snowed on by snow, beaten by rain [no wonder the poet recalls her and identifies with her] /drenched with the dew, long I lay dead.” Her identity is taken over wholly by Maximus, without further differentiation, making him an Odin to himself,²⁴ yielding the anguish of the cry, this poem itself. At that moment the snow gives way.

The narrative, although it progresses—both syntactically and semantically—remains non-linear. The shifting, mimetic syntax carries the poem, allows Maximus another manifestation of his nature. The poet is fully absorbed by the scene, and merges—without differentiation of voice—into the mythic, chanting words of the seeress, assuming her experience as his own. At that moment, in the grip of that power, with the realization of what has been wrung from him—as abruptly as it all began, he emerges, like Rimbaud, “on the other side of despair”—the snow having suddenly ceased. Here at last we have the true “mythological man” in an “archeological present,”²⁵ a post-modern man completely possessed by myth, completely repossessed of his mythic life, his myth-hood (and his method).

There will always be Battles of the Books, and the battle of the Ancients and the Moderns, the struggle of any age or individual to gain self-identity. Postmodern, then, is rather an assertive term. It seeks to put distance between the preceding generation (as what cultural generation does not) at the same time to adequately engage the problems of one’s own lifetime. When Olson taught a course at Buffalo designated in the catalogue as “Modern Poetry,” I for one was curious to see who he would include. Would he begin with Whitman or Pound, would he have anything to say about Lowell or Roethke or would he include only his friends, Duncan, Creeley, Dorn, would there be a new orthodoxy? I was greatly satisfied when he announced, “modern is how far any of us in this room has gotten.” He meant, of course, modern in the sense of contemporary, in its etymological sense of “right now.” It was clearly another form of “you, this instant, in action,” which is the essence of “Human Universe” and indeed of Olson’s entire philosophy. It was probably then he drew so hard on his Camel that there was left an inch of ash, or tucked his tie into his shirt so it wouldn’t interfere, or tied his sweater around his waist, or swiped at his nose like a boxer, or wagged his eyebrows, or any of the characteristic gestures that meant we were going forward, that we were making the advance.

NOTES

- 1 See Robert N. Wilson, "The American Poet: A Role Investigation," Ph.D. diss., Harvard, 1952; also his "The Poet and the Projective Test," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 16 (March 1958), 319-27.
- 2 Kimberly W. Benston, "Amiri Baraka: An Interview," *Boundary 2*, 6 (Winter 1978), p. 307.
- 3 *Boundary 2*, 1 (Fall 1972), 98-133. Also valuable is Richard E. Palmer, "Postmodernity and Hermeneutics," *Boundary 2*, 5 (Winter 1977), 363-93.
Since this paper was first prepared, a critical survey by Jerome Mazzaro has been published under the title *Postmodern American Poetry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980)—only it deals exclusively with Auden, Jarrell, Roethke, Ignatow, Berryman, Plath, and Bishop, surprisingly enough (Olson is mentioned in the preface)—until one realizes the author is accepting, Randall Jarrell's application of the term (discussed in note below) as accurate and complete.
- 4 Michael Köhler, "'Postmodernismus': Ein begriffsgeschichtlicher Überblick," *Amerikastudien*, 20 (1977), 8-18; and Gerhard Hoffmann, Alfred Horning, and Rüdiger Kunow, "'Modern,' 'Postmodern' and 'Contemporary' as Criteria for the Analysis of 20th Century Literature," *ibid.*, 19-46.
- 5 Randall Jarrell actually used the term in a review of Robert Lowell's *Lord Weary's Castle*, "From the Kingdom of Necessity," first published in the *Nation* on 18 January 1947. He used the term accurately, in its intentions, but he applied it only to the surface patternings of Lowell; there was no sense of a sweeping anti-westernism or de-rationalism at root, or of the primordial as a value replacing those previously dominant ones. He used "post-modern" only on the lesser scale of then-immediate literary history and not to describe the radical consciousness-change (along with considerable stylistic changes) that Olson and contemporaries Duncan, Creeley, Snyder, O'Hara, and Ginsberg proposed and embodied. Jarrell writes: "Mr. Lowell's poetry is a unique fusion of modernist and traditional poetry, and there exist side by side in it certain effects that one would have thought mutually exclusive; but it is essentially a post- or anti-modernist poetry, and as such is certain to be influential" (*Poetry and the Age*, New York: Knopf, 1953, p. 216). But in Olson's poetry, the "mutually exclusive" (or as Olson would prefer it, using Blakean terms, the "contraries") triumph. Still, Jarrell's essay, which also includes such terms as "open" vs. "closed" verse, is fascinating in this light, offering possibilities for exploring the entire subject of modernism vs. postmodernism, and should be explored at greater length.
John Berryman reaffirmed Jarrell's use of the term the following year in "Waiting for the End, Boys," *Partisan Review*, 15 (February 1948), 254-67—which, incidentally, includes a curt dismissal of Robert Duncan's *Heavenly City Earthly City*.
- 6 *Boundary 2*, 2 (Fall 1973/Winter 1974), p. 7.
- 7 In addition to the pieces already cited, including *Special View of History*, pp. 25 and 47, there are mentions in at least another letter to Creeley from ca. 20 October 1951 and in the unpublished essay from 1952, "The Methodology is the Form."
- 8 Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. I: abridgement of vols. I-VI by D. C. Somervell (London: Geoffrey Cumberledge, Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 39. Köhler picked up the suggestion from Harry Levin's essay, "What Was Modernism?" in *Refractions* (New York: Oxford, 1966), p. 277: "Today we live in what has been categorized—by whom but Arnold Toynbee?—as the Post-Modern Period."

9 Quoted in my notes to *Additional Prose*, p. 83. Similarly, in his "Draft of a plan for the College" from 1956, OLSON, no. 2 (Fall 1974), p. 51, Olson writes: "It is not yet gauged how much the nature of knowledge has changed since 1875. It has changed so much that one can call man's present knowledge non-Socratic or non-Aristotelian or non-Platonic as decisively as any scientist today speaks of the universe as non-Euclidean."

10 In "Human Universe," *Human Universe*, p. 12; the unpublished essay "History" from 1952; in Olson's 1954 review of the German cultural historian Ernst Robert Curtius, *Human Universe*, pp. 155 and 157; and in "On History," *Muthologos*, I, 15.

11 See pp. 13-14 of vol. I of the unabridged *Study of History* (London: Oxford, 1934)—although the term "Post-Modern" itself does not occur there and will not occur in the unabridged text until vol. VIII, published in 1954, further lessening the chance of Olson's having seen it in Toynebee.

12 In the poet's notes from 1953, "1st Draft of Possibilities for THE INSTITUTE OF THE SCIENCES OF MAN," quoted in *Additional Prose*, p. 83.

13 Olson, no. 2 (Fall 1974), p. 54.

14 Earlier, Olson had included psychology as one of the "New Sciences." The Institute is described in the *Black Mountain College Bulletin*, 10 (November 1952), p. 18, as follows: "Four sciences will be central to the concentration: Archeology, Culture-Morphology, Psychology and Mythology. The presentation of the Institute is designed to demonstrate that these sciences, and the disciplines which modify them, are a unit."

15 New York: Dutton, 1972. See especially pp. 341-43 there. Olson's principal New Sciences of Man lectures along with related materials have since been published in *Olson*, no. 10 (Fall 1978).

16 C. G. Jung and C. Kerényi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Pantheon, 1949).

17 See J. A. K. Thomson, *The Art of the Logos* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1935), pp. 17-19, 237, and Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 328 and n.

18 Maximus, at least, believes in them. See *Maximus II*, 199: "wealth (money) is buried/in the hole in the earth/and all I had to do/was scratch with my fingers/and the little people come out/& passed me \$1.37 worth of change/whenever I wanted it."

19 In Albert Gould Glover, "Charles Olson: Letters for Origin" (Ph.D. diss., SUNY at Buffalo, 1968), pp. 263-64.

20 *What I See in the Maximus Poems* (Ventura, Calif. and Worcester, Eng.: Migrant, 1960), p. 7.

21 See my *Guide to the Maximus Poems of Charles Olson* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 609 and 720. Also p. 68 there, for the identification of Paul Blackburn as figuring in *Maximus I*, 68.

22 Identifiable as a San Francisco poet named Mary Sirchuk, whose poem "Freedom for a Woman," Olson had read in *City Lights Journal*, no. 3 (1966), pp. 141-45, an issue which also included his "Song of Ullikummi."

23 *Articulate Energy: An Enquiry into the Syntax of English Poetry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), p. 68.

24 Previously the speaker had been Odin, speaking as Odin, now he speaks *to* Odin (Odin who sacrificed "himself to himself," one of the profundities of Old Norse exegesis—see *Havámál*, 138). One also wonders, in looking out the window, the double windows aligned with his own eyeglasses, whether Olson also sees a reflection of himself, snow-streaked, adding still another plane of meaning and placing the poem in the long tradition of mirror-images.

25 "I said of Melville that his importance is that he comprehended man as mythological in an archeological present" ("Beginning of 3rd Institute," February 1953, and cf. *Human Universe*, p. 115). This quotation and all others from unpublished writings by Charles Olson among his papers in the Literary Archives, University of Connecticut Library, are published by permission of the Library. Portions of Olson's letters are quoted by permission of the Estate of Charles Olson.