line

number two

somebodies walked the woods

in the air, the lines appear, in a grid

cut thru trees, is

possession is $\frac{9}{10}$s of the law

~~stealing~~ theft etc makes up the rest

what men have walked the

woods, carried chains

+ instruments

of exactitude

to own nothing becomes

achievement, not to care

fall 1983

line

number two

a journal of the contemporary literature collection

Simon Fraser University

fall 1983

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Cover from "The North," as reproduced in The Death of a Lyric Poet, by Barry McKinnon.

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from the Preface to _Line_, Number One, Spring 1983:

As a journal of the Contemporary Literature Collection, _Line_ will reflect in its content the range of the collection. The materials it plans to publish--archival items, interviews, essays, review/commentaries, and bibliographies--will be related to the line of post-1945 Canadian, American, and British writers whose work issues from, or extends, the work of Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, H.D., Gertrude Stein, and Charles Olson.

The editorial board encourages the submission of manuscripts, though a brief letter of inquiry preceding a submission can prevent needless disappointment. Comments by readers are also welcome.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Line, Number Two is pleased to feature Barry McKinnon and the Caledonia Writing Series (1972-1980). The Contemporary Literature Collection recently acquired the archive of this publication venture which brought the localism of the "small press" tradition to Prince George, British Columbia. McKinnon's latest book of poems, The the., is available through Coach House; Capilano Review is planning to publish his "Thoughts/Sketches," a series of new poems, in a forthcoming special section on him. The essays/commentaries forming the main body of this issue exemplify the kind of active readership called for in the Preface to Line, Number One. Angela Bowering's essay is an excerpt from her unpublished study of Sheila Watson's writing, "Illuminati in The Double Hook: Figures Cut in Sacred Ground." Robin Blaser's essay on Charles Olson and Alfred North Whitehead has been published in a slightly altered form in the United States by Process Studies (Vanderbilt University), and is published here in Canada with agreement; his latest book of poems, Syntax, is now available from Talonbooks. Shirley Neuman is an editor of Longspoon Press, and the author of studies on autobiography in the works of Gertrude Stein and William Butler Yeats; her essay on Robert Kroetsch's poetry complements her more recent book, Labyrinths of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch, a series of interviews she and Robert Wilson conducted with Kroetsch, published by NeWest. George Bowering, a regular contributor to Line, closes the issue with a Review/Commentary on "recent reading"; his latest book of stories, A Place to Die, is available from Oberon, and a new series of poems, Kerrisdale Elegies, is forthcoming next month from Coach House.

RM
November 15, 1983

BARRY MCKINNON

THE CALEDONIA WRITING SERIES: A CHRONICLE

Literary activity is never separate from the various contexts, situations and circumstances it arises from. In many respects, it is precisely the contexts and materials that really define it. The Caledonia Writing Series, as I look at the history of it now, is a cupboard full of books, a bibliography, a stream of images (in some cases blurred), memory, and anecdote. But whatever happened always seemed human, and any version of the story, by that fact, defies a conventional chronological history. Harvey Chometsky asked me the other day, "Do you remember when we plugged the Dodson in for the first time without a rheostadt and how the damn thing was going so fast it danced all over the floor?" I had forgotten that image: a huge letterpress ferociously opening and closing, dancing a crazy dance--clunk clunk clunk clunk clunk--shifting its own cast iron weight with such speed that we wondered what kind of magic it would require from us to actually print on it. There are many stories like that.

To go back, I left Vancouver for Prince George in the summer of 1969, happy to have a job in the new college there, but also apprehensive and scared. The notion of poetry and the teaching of liberal arts in a town that was initially skeptical to this kind of change (represented by a tax hike for a college with a mandate to establish the liberal arts) quickly made me feel as if I made a mistake in accepting the job. I remember my wife, Joy, crying as we crossed the Fraser River bridge into a hot stinky Prince George, and later that day, my own compounded anxiety after visiting the so-called college which consisted of two portable trailers and an office in an unused gym storage room at the local high school. This was it. But the principal had an obsessive vision that art and culture were going to arrive in the form of the staff he hired: musicians, poets, philosophers, and scholars--and that this raw pulp / logging primary resource city would move, he supposed, from the primitive to the cosmopolitan as a result of these new energies. A

cockeyed notion, but he was enthusiastic enough to alter my instinct to turn around and leave; we were "chosen," as it were. I was also flat broke and the '57 Plymouth wouldn't go another inch.

Within a few months, everything at the college became very chaotic in a different way: a faculty split, a non-confidence vote against the administration, and the local distrust of these elitist hippy-looking imports (I got kicked out of an apartment I rented for having moderately long hair). Finally, the principal's religious and autocratic insistence on a liberal educational philosophy seemed alien to the establishment's notion of real education, which to them meant an emphasis on career and vocational training. You learn Prince George's version of Newton's law; in this case, an equal force driving back. Yet in the midst of those early disparate forces, ideas formed and, in some cases, survived the necessary tests.

Part of my job was to start a student literary magazine and as a teacher, particularly in creative writing, to involve the students in a way that made articulation of their experience reasonable and real (given the context of the skeptical attitudes about literature and poetry most of them grew up with). Loggers' kids, pulp mill workers, housewives, country kids, local eccentrics, and ordinary citizens took the courses, wrote their first college essays, wrote poems and stories and talked ideas over countless beers at the bar in the Inn of the North hotel. For me I don't think it was totally a question of survival (I thought I'd leave after a year or two), but it was necessary to confront the constant pressure, and the task, of going against the odds of the environment and my own inadequacies, to deal with the demands of what turned out to be a handful of very serious students who really wanted a world of language and thought, and wanted me to give it to them. What I was learning to do mostly was to teach, and to deal with both the sense of my responsibility as a teacher, and the sense that I would be held responsible. There were times in the first few months I wanted to quit, but Charlie Boylan (an excellent teacher hired to teach English and Canadian literature and start a student newspaper, and later fired for his politics) bouyed me up with his friendship and confidence. He saw things with a clarity I envied, and could go at the social and political scramble with a wonderful vengeance. He got wind of a new Canada Council scheme to pay writers to read their work, and began immediately to make contacts and organize what was to become a long standing reading series of over 100 readings in 14 years.

The first reading was the biggest test; it gave a measure of the town beyond the redneck-hard-macho surface that Prince George has always been known for--showing that whatever else the town wanted, it wanted also what the liberal arts offered. Charlie

and I visited local schools, sent out letters and posters to schools in the college district and the local media, announcing a free concert by Tom Hawkin (a folksinger well known in the area for his performances in Barkerville), and a poetry reading by Al Purdy (the famous Canadian poet that nobody here seemed to know about). Charlie's bait for a guaranteed audience was the folksinger, but Hawkin didn't show up and Charlie had to give his first public speech to 500 anxious people explaining that ". . . however, we have Al Purdy . . .," then a long moment of silent tension until Purdy lolled onto the stage and loosened them up with jokes about how his two go-go girls also didn't show up . . . so all they were going to get was Al Purdy and his poems. It was a wonderful night: 500 people, trapped, so to speak, in the first official poetry reading in Prince George. But nobody left the hall. A sort of beginning.

A full time teaching load, the poetry reading series, Caledonia Writing Series, contact with writing students and writers, and this urge to make a place for writing and poetry, were to keep me busy for the next 14 years. In 1970 and 1971 I edited a student magazine called 54'40" (i.e. the longitude/latitude lines that cross at Summit Lake, just north of Prince George), a magazine that featured student writing, photography and art. A group of students, in particular, Maureen Morton (a young artist raised in Prince George) and Larry Calvert (a curious Canadian lad who had just returned from Vietnam, where he was a volunteer U.S. army journalist/photographer), volunteered their help and expertise for the two issues. This initial experience with 54'40" gave me my first taste of what it was to edit, design and coordinate the production of a literary journal.

I spent the summer of 1972 working at Talonbooks, and became interested in the various aspects of book editing, book design and production--and also gained a sense of how the various levels of a small press operate (i.e. the financial, technical and political complexities that often interfere or shift aesthetic or editorial intent). David Robinson, one of Talonbooks' original editors and its chief book designer had moved from the 25¢ Talon magazine, produced in his garage, out into the larger world of book publishing and Canadian literature. I found myself complaining about the editorial direction of the press, or lack of direction. My complaints, I suppose, were a result of Talon's move from a small (and therefore independent) to a larger more morally complex and expensive operation. Plant books had to subsidize the poetry. I didn't really understand it and I didn't really want to. Any sympathy I now have for people like Robinson, or anyone else foolish enough to persist against the odds of publishing poetry in Canada, only came after I started the Caledonia Writing Series. (Note: I spent

so much time doing this work by myself that the first person "I" as I use it in this chronicle is, for the most part, accurate. When I shift to the pronoun "we" and "our," I am referring to the many times when others helped out--moments of collective activity with Joy McKinnon, John Harris, Bill Bailey, Harvey Chometsky, and the students who worked during the two O.F.Y. [Opportunities for Youth] summers: Louis Stevenson, Patti Van Nuus, Robert Riggan, Robert Moen, Virginia Marsolais, and others who might have dropped by the old warehouse for a visit, sometimes to find themselves collating, gluing, binding and printing. Many of the books and broadsides could be annotated with a list of personnel.)

I always liked the concept of chapbooks. I'd worked in the stacks of the Sir George Williams Library in 1965-66 and remember digging through the Canadian poetry section to find the Ryerson series, Contact books like Moving in Alone by John Newlove, the McGill series, Delta and Tishbooks etc. For a one man press operation, the notion of producing small books or chapbooks made good sense (i.e. quickly and cheaply printed and a way to get recent work quickly out into the bookstores that take them, and into the mail to writers, reviewers, and friends you hope to get a response from). Ezra Pound's lesson of taking things into your own hands and keeping the overhead to a minimum was good practical advice, as was bill bissett's notion of "printing as a natural extension of writing." Nelson Ball (Weed Flower), bpNichol (Ganglia), George Bowering (Tish, Imago), Gerry Gilbert (B.C. Monthly), bill bissett (Blewointment), Andy Suknaski (Elfin Plot)--were among the models and sources I followed. Up north, the active populated southern centres with "culture" seem remote, so you start a press--start anything--out of necessity. Besides, I was curious about the local, the local voice, and I needed to make an attempt to deal with this place I'd found myself in. The press began.

The first chapbook I printed was Th Book of Snow Poems (Cabin Fever) by David Phillips in 1972 (under the press name 54'40"). I asked David for a small manuscript, probably during some moment of enthusiasm in a Vancouver bar--I can't remember exactly--and at some point got the sequence of poems in the mail. That first manuscript tested my offer. Without grants, budgets or equipment, I was forced into finding ways and means via borrowed equipment, etc., accompanied by the scary sense that I didn't quite know how to make a book completely on my own. (This feeling lasted almost the life of the press.)

David's book was followed by Norm Sibum's first book Banjo (and the first title under the Caledonia Writing Series logo), and On Your Left Jaw, a first book by the young Prince George poet, Harvey Chometsky. They were all printed on the school Gestetner

in editions of approximately 100 copies. The format was fairly standard: 8 1/2 x 11" Gestetner cover stock, usually folded in half for the text, hand sewn spine, or stapled, construction paper cover wraps with offset label stickers for the cover and title pages. With the exception of the label designs printed by commercial printers, all of the work (typing, printing, collating, folding, sewing, gluing, etc.) was done by hand.

My original intention, and one I pretty well stuck with, was to publish a mix of local writers and outside writers, usually better known, who had manuscripts small enough to handle given my full time teaching load. The college at that time, on an informal level, gave me the use of the Gestetner mimeo and later, off hour use of a Gestetner offset press that I convinced them to buy (arguing that they could cut their xerox expenses). Various briefs and proposals drafted by me, and later by John Harris (a teaching colleague who was continuing Repository magazine and his book-publishing program in Prince George), were written to "formalize" a commitment by the college to an active publishing program. Beyond the chapbooks, we envisioned books and anthologies and other printed materials that could be used as textbooks and reference--a press along the lines of the large university sponsored presses that publish literary and scholarly work usually not of interest to commercial houses. Maybe we got naively ahead of ourselves, partly out of an attempt to "legitimize" the activity and get financial support. The Caledonia Writing Series, as a press name, connected the college with the publishing that followed; that connection was loosely defined yet remained because of the donation of space, equipment, and some materials, particularly during two O.F.Y. projects which involved College of New Caledonia students in the summers of 1973 and 1975.

My sense now is that the administration was afraid of a financial commitment and that it began to fear literary activity (which did eventually embroil administrators, students, and various public officials, right up to the provincial government level, in an obscenity/pornography debate, because of the Harris/McKinnon Pulp Mill local short story anthology used as a text in some first year English courses). A story in the Pulp Mill called "Walking Cunt," by Brian Fawcett, probably caused the stir. Most students enjoyed this collection because it dealt with situations, places, and experiences that had some direct immediacy for them. The book was interesting to teach because we could tackle this alienating notion that literature and life only happened in Paris or San Francisco etc., but not in Prince George. Fawcett's story tells of a middle class clump of youths in cars, drunk on beer, ceaselessly circling the main downtown streets for that one girl or woman

("walking cunt") who would "educate" them--a story of sexual disappointment, cruelty, and desperation--really, a moral tale about adolescent male behavior and sexuality. The principal received complaints about the anthology and asked me in the hall one day if the collection was pornographic. I assured him jokingly that the Canada Council had given us a grant to publish the book and it was therefore not pornographic. For him, the issue seemed threatening and possibly devastating, given the paradox of a tradition for academic freedom, which Harris and I were exercising, and public pressure that wanted, in this case, a book banned or censored, or at least taken out of the class. The reaction to the word "cunt," no matter the context, put Harris and me in jeopardy, although no official action was taken. One English teacher insisted that "they" were eventually going to get "us"--and he may have been right. Apropos of that incident, our second anthology, The Pulp Mill (Poetry), published some years later (1980) was kept out of the college bookstore for a week because, as I was warned by a college director, the new principal didn't approve of it. The book had to get "special" administrative clearance before my students could buy it.

By 1977 the college was quickly becoming a "real" college with new buildings and an expanding administration. There was initial and lasting support from Gary Bauslaugh, a sympathetic dean, but the pervasive and final administrative response was that our idea for an integrated college press was not a priority, despite the college mandate regarding community involvement, and despite our willingness to take the responsibility for running it. Even after the move, from a college of trailers and borrowed vocational buildings, one old building was kept, and formed the physical centre for our activity. This building, called the warehouse, was half a block from the new facility, and housed the art department, the drama department, the print shop, our offices, and a few classrooms. It became a central hangout for students, visiting writers, artists and anyone else who didn't feel comfortable in the sterile atmosphere of the new campus.

There were many instances when visiting writers extended their stay and got involved with the press at the warehouse. Poems, short books and collaborations were spontaneously printed over an evening or afternoon. Sex at 31, a pamphlet by Pierre Coupey and myself, began as a collaborative poem-satire-joke scribbled on a cigarette package during a party, and got printed the next day. Likewise, Artie Gold wrote and printed his version of "Sex at 31" during a visit to Prince George (see The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse, edited by Margaret Atwood). Paul Shuttleworth, a beautifully haywire Irish American poet, trying to escape civilization by moving from San Francisco to MacKenzie (a small

company town 100 miles north of Prince George), bought some of the Caledonia Writing Series books in a local store and wrote a kind note to say how much he enjoyed them, and that he was surprised to see small press activity "up here." Over that winter we taught a course together, talked poetics and eventually collaborated on a publication of broadsides called Say That Again and I'll Kick Your Teeth In. The title was a humorous attempt to match the toughness we saw in the local bars, and to satirize the "sensitive" poetry chapbook stereotype. Pat Lane on one of his visits got drawn into an afternoon of collating. He didn't seem too happy about it and asked, "Isn't this what people in mental hospitals do?" We probably took that as a suggestion to quit for the day. There were other times: I remember printing The Second Life with Brian Fawcett, a book complete with a spoof numbering system, and internal jokes. Fond days in our lives.

Harris and I held our classes in the warehouse and hid out there for days at a time (except for momentary visits to the college to get our mail or attend a compulsory meeting). I think now that we were trying to sustain an alternate version or perhaps the original version of what the college was supposed to be, resisting as we did the administrative and educational shifts that had more to do with quantity than quality.

The "systems" approach finally won. The managers took over with their strange administrative language and official behavior. We were eventually absorbed into the system--and driven into our basements and garages after the warehouse was closed. But that warehouse, for a while, from my perspective, was the college: classes, poetry readings, the constant talk of poetry, writing, politics and art; presses running for posters, books, broadsides and student newsletters or ecological manifestoes, etc. We were doing cultural work with conviction. Occasionally a curious dean or director or assistant would walk through to see what was up and jot down serial numbers off a press or ask a few questions. We were obviously suspect, but we had nothing to hide, a fact which really confused them.

Direct financial support, other than our own personal contributions and limited income from sales, came from two main sources: O.F.Y. and the Canada Council. The Canada Council book publishing program was set up to help small Canadian publishers and required an eligibility criteria before individual titles would be subsidized for printing. Once a publishing house became eligible (i.e. a set number of literary titles per year), it could submit manuscripts to the Canada Council. The manuscripts would then be given to a group of readers. I managed in 10 years or so to get about $2000.00 through this program but the procedure always

struck me as paradoxical: presumably an editor who submitted a manuscript had already decided the worth of its publication, but the group of anonymous readers really became an editorial board with power to accept or reject the application for a publishing grant. A further irony involved Birthday by Gerry Gilbert and Carole Itter. The grant application for funding was rejected by the Council readers, but later, the Canada Council Book Purchasing Program, another arm of the Council, bought 100 copies for national distribution. These were not great problems, but created, on the one hand, a desire for independence from granting institutions, and on the other, a desire to expand the operation with the money these grants provided. For me, a Canada Council rejected manuscript usually meant a longer wait before I could print it, or forced an altered, cheaper design. At any rate, the money we did get, at times kept the press going and allowed some purchase of equipment and materials.

The O.F.Y program paid salaries of $100.00 per week for several students during two summers, 1973 and 1975. The briefs to O.F.Y. proposed the publication of books that would have a particular local interest, and that required substantial physical labour because of their size. Titles printed during this period include: Gardening With Alice, a local/northern gardening book by long time resident gardener and short story writer, Alice Wolczuk; Rearview, a series of satiric sketches by Lee Mackenzie about the history of Prince George, and also produced by Lee as part of a B.C. Centennial project; From the Minds of Children, an anthology of children's poetry edited by Virginia Marsolais, a book that began as an assignment in a first year English class; Cottonwood Canyon, the long poem by Brian Fawcett that gives a view and source definition of Prince George in the 50's and 60's; The Kenojuak Prints, a series of poems based on Eskimo prints, by John Pass. Pass's book was the first letterpress book in the series (printed by Bill Bailey and Robert Riggan) and gave us our first experience with letterpress printing, and a lesson in the importance of having proofs edited. The first version is full of typesetting errors. A second version was corrected and printed on the Gestetner offset press, but few copies of this run remain. A box containing the unbound text was thrown into the garbage by mistake.

The catch with O.F.Y. grants was that very little of the grant money could be used for material costs. The $500.00 that we did get bought paper, paid for typesetting and got us started. In terms of the one-man-operation notion, these two summers were difficult. The more people involved, no matter their interest and ability (and this ranged from those with wonderful and skillful enthusiasm, to the few who didn't show up with any regularity, or

who botched the jobs), the more scattered the energies and the more difficult it was to manage the operation. In a sense, we were a group of amateurs trying to run a press along the lines of a sophisticated established press (complete with catalogues, markets, and books that had the potential to be commerical successes, etc.), but borrowed equipment and facilities, and the lack of technical knowledge, made for difficulties despite the group's general sense of purpose.

My practical advice to anyone interested in starting a small press, and who doesn't have a background in printing technology, would be to send the printing out to professionals, unless you stay with simple mimeo or letterpress. My experience with equipment (particularly offset presses), and the physical task of producing a book, alternated between the joy of seeing an interesting design or a clear printed page shoot onto a paper tray and the angry frustration of seeing, in the next moment, those pages hopelessly gnarled into a wad around countless cogs and rollers--and never really being able to know or solve the problems with any certainty or technical accuracy. The Gestetner offset had a gizmo called a two sheet eliminator, which in theory stopped extra sheets from feeding into the press, but no matter how many times I adjusted the simple control screw, there were two fairly constant results: no sheets or lots of sheets. The Gestetner mimeo was much simpler and very workable but limited us to standard white paper stocks and standard typewriter typefaces for the stencils. The offset technology expanded design possibilities--we tried to make the books look "real"--but it required a fairly complex knowledge of ink/water/feed systems that must work in synchronous fashion before clear printing results. My one week course in Vancouver in the Gestetner showroom never prepared me for the years of frustration to follow. Half my time was spent up to my inky elbows digging out wads of paper jammed inside a machine, or adjusting ink and water to eliminate dark ink smears or images washed out from too much water. The process of doing everything (editing, designing and printing), in the long run, might have been more expensive (i.e. wasted time and wasted supplies)--while we learned, haphazardly, how these mysterious machines worked. With the advent of new print technologies, this may be the case even more in the future. But it must be said that the machines brought and kept us together as a small community of writers, and kept us in control of production (even though the end results were sometimes discouraging). We had fun being together, poking our wrenches into the cogs, and theorizing ways to solve or cover the mistakes.

In 1975 I bought a second hand A.B. Dick tabletop for $750.00, a press with fewer adjustments and much simpler to operate, and

quite capable of professional quality work. (I think that Coach House Press printed some of their early books on a similar A.B. Dick.) But in our case, to cut costs, we used paper plates instead of the more durable metal ones, and got hundreds of pages of inconsistent or washed out texts. Rearview, I Wanted to Say Something, Letters From Geeksville and many smaller books were printed on the A.B. Dick.

Earlier, in 1973 we discovered that the college had acquired and stored a Dodson 10 x 15 letterpress from Uncle Ben Ginter's sale of equipment after his short-lived Prince George Progress weekly paper folded. (Ben Ginter is one Prince George character familiar to people in B.C. through the 60's and 70's, and was one local embodiment of the northern dream. He started out, they say, with one D 9 Caterpillar and amassed a few million dollars, which he invested in various enterprises that eventually went bankrupt or into receivership. He became really well known for his Uncle Ben's Brewery that produced a potent 10% he-man local beer.) The Dodson was used from that point on by O.F.Y. groups, John Harris, myself, and the students who took English 165.

English 165, a course in creative printing, ran for a couple of years but was cancelled in 1980, and the equipment sold to another college. I was never given substantial reasons for the cancellation. At the time, one of the college goals and objectives was that each division develop and provide a community interest course for college credit. The printing class, in a sense, was the English Department's "practical" non-academic offering for the community. Space and equipment limitations meant that enrollment had to be kept to a maximum of 10 students, a condition that may have led the administration to revise their stance toward English 165, given the pressure to fill classes in the Liberal Arts Division to the contractual maximum of 35. "Frill" courses, or courses with "low" enrollments were being cut, and as one colleague told me, the administration considered me an amateur printer and therefore, I suppose, unqualified. I would have agreed with the "amateur" assessment, but could have shown, for instance, Connie Mortenson's first book, which she wrote, designed and printed in that class, or Richard Kaulback's unique letter press productions of his poetry, or Alice Wolczuk's anthology of broadsides. The class was practical and useful, particularly for those students in my creative writing class who had first books to print. These students and bibliophiles wanted to know something of the history and basics of printing, and enjoyed the print shop atmosphere of good talk, ink smells, clanking presses--the centuries-old art and joy of printing words on paper. Cutting the printing course was the first clear withdrawal of college support for this aspect of my work. I never

did get clear information about the fate of our old Ginter/Dodson press.

During the life of the press we were always engaged in equipment scrounging--a picaresque activity that led us into some funny, strange and expensive experiences. I remember once sitting in a Prince George bar with Harvey Chometsky and John Newlove in the early 70's. Harvey and I had just looked at a press owned by an old press scrounger named Smiley--and got took, as they say, for $300.00. This so-called press was one of those short-lived aberrations in the long history of printing. I recently saw one in Sandpoint Idaho--a Multigraph; I'd forgotten the name until I saw it there--used as an antique in a store window display. The press involved hand setting type on a grooved drum that was then fastened to a hand crank platen system. Lines broke off, and the type that was left smashed through the hand fed sheets, because the pressure couldn't be controlled. Hours, days and weeks of frustration passed until we abandoned the idea of using it. Anyway, Newlove said he didn't know exactly what we had described to him that day in the bar, but enthusiastically said that we might as well buy it. I thought he would "know"--being an editor at McClelland and Stewart. Interestingly enough, the only remaining evidence of this early "Multigraph period" of our printing activities is a broadside by John Newlove called "The Flower" in an edition of 25 copies on scrap construction paper. Some months later, Lee MacKenzie, friend and neighbor and author of Rearview, got his school to buy this press so that his "slower," "less motivated" students could typeset their own newsletter and thereby learn to spell and compose sentences. I didn't go into much detail about how the press "worked" and Lee didn't want to hear any horror stories and I wanted the 300 bucks he convinced his administration to spend. It never worked; Lee left town and the press sat unused as a conversation piece in the staffroom of the school. That Multigraph might still be there, but I doubt it.

Our biggest equipment find happened in 1974 when an older College of New Caledonia student, Clarence Wood of Barkerville, decided to sell out the contents of his print shop for $3500.00. We made a trip to Barkerville and looked the stuff over: antique paper cutters, an obsolete Verigraph typesetter, two Chandler Price platen presses, an A.B. Dick tabletop offset press, cases of assorted type, boxes of paper, business card stock, typesetting furniture, slug cutters, etc., etc. The college bought about half of the inventory, and Harris, myself and Bob Atkinson (also of Repository press, living and teaching in Prince George) bought and split up the rest. Some of it was quite usable, in particular the 10 x 15 Chandler Price that I've used since to print C.W.S. and Gorse Press broadsides. But

again, some of it was outmoded, worn out and unwieldy. By now we had tons of equipment for the print course, Repository Press and C.W.S.--and obviously some experience in moving this kind of weight around. Some of our presses were moved three or four times to various locations, and each time it seemed we used a different combination of methods: come along winches, rollers, Hi Abs, greased sheets of plywood, dismantling devices and always four or five guys with an ingenious application of muscle to balance and push these top heavy monsters. Ironically, or perhaps understandably, considering some of the junk we bought, the printing quality only improved slowly. The letterpress printing did get better. We taught ourselves out of old manuals and hit and miss experimentation; with practice, patience and perseverance, we eventually got some control and respect for those beautiful moving parts and what they could produce.

Once we got involved with scrounging, equipment started coming our way even though we weren't particularly looking for it. Speedy Printers used to cut our paper stock--but on more than one occasion I came out of their shop with things like antique line cameras, quartz light systems, flip top plate makers, and boxes of scrap offcuts that often became small books, etc. When printers replace a system, they often can't sell the equipment they're replacing. They would say to me, "if you want it get it out in the next hour or it goes to the dump" . . . or, "give me $100.00 for the works." Likewise, The Citizen, Prince George's daily newspaper, tried to give me two huge photo process lino types worth "thousands" but outmoded for their operation. I didn't take them; I couldn't envision a truck or room big enough to hold them, and suspect that they ended up in the dump or at a scrap metal dealer.

Our last big trip for equipment got us out to Ken Belford's homestead near Hazelton, B.C. Ken was given an 11 x 17 Chandler Price Platen press and had some original plan to run it with a water wheel. He moved the press onto the land (near the creek) and left it under a tarp for about two years, taken as he was by other priorities, like building a log cabin, raising a bit of stock and trying to survive. It was seized up with rust and probably wouldn't have lasted another winter. John Harris and I loaded it into his Datsun truck and headed back to Prince George at 35 miles per hour (for 350 miles) with what became a familiar but frightening sway of the truck at every corner we came to. The weight of the press didn't topple us into the ditch, but it did cause enough strain to burn out John's motor. I sold the press to John; he restored it and then more or less gave up this level of printing when his marriage broke up. John Pass bought the press, moved it to Vancouver, and now plans to locate it at Ruby Lake on the Sechelt Peninsula.

The common aspect shared by most Canadian small literary presses is the ironic fact that there isn't a viable or sustaining market for the product. In my case, the editing and press work was so time consuming that the last and very important task of selling the books was often secondary. I've still got book orders in unopened envelopes from Coutt's Library Services that were never filled. The distribution was haphazard and very limited: 30 to 40 people (writers, friends and reviewers) got copies of everything we did; a few bookstores took books on consignment; there were standing orders from a few Canadian universities and colleges. In 1976 Brian Fawcett and I mailed out 100 copies each of Songs and Speeches (McKinnon), Maple Leaf Band (by Peter Huse), and Letters From Geeksville (letters from Red Lane to George Bowering, edited by George Bowering), as part of Brian's mimeo newsletter No Money From the Government, in an attempt to get C.W.S. titles out to N.M.F.G.'s readership. After those mailouts we got many written responses to the books, some reviews, and surprisingly enough, a few generous donations.

More than once I was lectured to on the importance of cleaning up the business end of things. Once Stan Shaffer, a teaching colleague, and I had dinner with Stan's father, Harold--he was then head of the Sir George Williams School of Retailing--and he advised me to push the limited edition idea, stress the rarity aspect of the product, and charge huge prices! This advice was given after I told him that I couldn't sell the books at cheap or even "reasonable" prices. His logic: the higher the price, the fewer I'd have to sell for a return--and that people who wanted the books would see the value and would pay the asking price anyway.

In my years of printing and publishing, I didn't use more than one current account deposit book. As a business, the operation was a failure. Most of the work was given away. Ultimately, I decided to let Bill Hoffer, the infamous west coast bookseller and self-declared antennae of Canadian literature, settle the question of value and price. He got copies of everything we printed and skillfully hunted down bits of information and gossip about books and broadsides for his catalogues. He seemed to know everything; his countless hours of coffee and talk with almost every B.C. and Canadian writer--like turning over a big rock. I printed a broadside ("Shadows" by Ken Belford) and got so tired of typesetting that I ran the poem without typesetting Ken's name. I signed each copy "Ken Belford" in my own handwriting. Hoffer must have checked out Ken's signature somewhere in the back room archive, compared it with the signed copies, and rightfully reported in his catalogue that the signature was a fake etc., and probably upped the price because the hoax becomes part of the artifact's value. He has a great eye.

But it must be said that he was a main support of the Caledonia Writing Series, not only because he bought all of the books and broadsides (the one exception was that he didn't want gardening or cookbooks)--but because of his interest in and respect for our work. Within the bitchy politics of writing and publishing in this country, Hoffer believed our press gave off some light, and that made a difference at points when it seemed useless and unimportant to continue.

I ended Caledonia Writing Series in 1979. My motives were partly practical. The teaching load increased steadily and required much more of my time. We never found a permanent location for the equipment and the prospect of moving it repeatedly (as was the pattern) wasn't too appealing. After the warehouse closed I moved the Chandler Price letterpress from our last location (Studio 2880, a Community Arts Council sponsored gallery with studio space with more house rules than I cared to follow) to a corner in my basement--and decided that there it should stay. John Harris, the one person, friend and partner close to the history and politics of publishing in Prince George, and I began to realize the advantages of getting smaller and smaller as publishers, which is partly an indication of our lessening energy for publishing, but also a tactic born of personal necessity.

The community for writing and publishing that was created and sustained for 7 years (as the Caledonia Writing Series), and the publishing since then, was eroded by forces that weren't always clear, though we knew they were always there. In retrospect, there are many specifics: Professional Development proposals that involved writing or editing were being questioned by college administration. Minimal amounts of money required for advertising poetry readings, or to pay visiting writers for class room visits, was near impossible to get. The Words/Loves Conference of Poetry (February, 1980) featuring Robert Creeley, and attended by 200 writers, teachers and students, was frustrating to organize, and I almost cancelled it, because of the administration's hesitant support.

Once into the 1980's certain cultural, political, and educational shifts did become clear to everybody. The college, of late, via its management hierarchy, has been given, it seems, license to do as it pleases with post-secondary education, and initiate directions that skirt the original mandate for balanced course offerings in the academic, career, and vocational programs. Simply, at present, arts courses have all but disappeared despite the local and regional demand for them. (In the spring semester, 1983, 100 students were on wait lists for English courses. Two English teachers were laid-off that semester.) Since 1978, Spanish, French, the Theatre Program, Printing, Classics, Shakespeare, American

Literature, and Music have been cut as regular offerings, leaving only a limited "core" of standard University Transfer Arts and Science courses for those students who want university training. The nearest universities with complete program offerings are 500 miles to the south or east.

The present push is for a polytechnical, high-tech oriented institution to train students for specialized jobs in business and industry: CAD/CAM (computer assisted design/computer assisted management), Robotics, goals/objectives/system approaches, and computerized learning situations seem to be key concepts for these new directions, directions that have created, in their wake, an educational and institutional environment in which poetry, the arts, and what they could teach, appear unimportant, impractical or out of touch.

In an overall cultural and economic context, the concern for aligning and reshaping education with the micro-chip revolution is perhaps legitimate, but the administration of that process must move with care, consultation, and concern for those who will presumably be served by it. This has not happened here. Since 1980, students, faculty, the faculty union, and the public of Prince George, have fought the often ill-conceived, wasteful experiments and innovations that give the appearance of progress and accountability (some consider these moves "visionary"), but that finally result in human and educational losses that will take a long time to calculate fully. Those who might be held responsible will most likely have moved up in the system.

There have been two non-confidence votes by both faculty and students, an expensive external investigation of the management/staff relations, a self-study critical in its suggestions and recommendations, advisory committee resignations, letters, petitions and demonstrations protesting course cuts and faculty dismissals--a long and continuous storm of controversy. But none of this activity has stopped, altered, or delayed the shape the college has taken, and no one on the outside, in the larger governing centres to the south, seems to know or care about what goes on in this northern outpost. It is a long, frightening and unbelievable story.

My own situation at CNC, in 1983, has not been a pleasant one, but it may give a clearer sense of the system we have struggled with to keep alive what we value. In January I was "laid off" after 14 years of teaching, and defined as "redundant" on the basis of a change in English offerings for career students. A decision was made that these students don't require English courses--at least in traditional formats--and Creative Writing, representing 1/5, and never more than 2/5 of my workload, was also cut. The case went public. There was a public and tough outcry

from those who wanted to fight, not only for my job, but for a more humane, open, responsible and responsive community college. They wanted to keep the teachers, the programs, and the courses that had contributed to the quality of life and education in this community, and to insure educational opportunities for themselves and their children.

Brian Fawcett and Pierre Coupey started a campaign on my behalf and brought pressure to bear from the outside. About 50 prominent Canadian writers, teachers, and poets--most had read here, or knew the press, and felt a personal connection with the principles and issues the layoff embodied--wrote letters to the newspaper, the principal and the college council, condemning the administration for its actions. The layoff was rescinded in May, 1983, and I was given two sections of English, and a job working in a new division of the college called the Developmental Centre, where I administer and mark self-paced English modules and packages for students who have basic literacy problems. Creative Writing was not re-instated. The poetry series is dormant.

My contact with students who are or might be interested in creative writing (students like Meryl Duprey, a marvellous young local poet in my classes for the past two years) is diminished. Gorse Press, by its nature, wasn't designed to print books with any regularity or volume. It is actually a hobby press for letter press work, and isn't effective as a local literary outlet. The college, as a meeting place for local writers, simply isn't there anymore.

I've driven over the Fraser bridge many times since 1969. Coming up from the south, I cross the bridge and in an instant, think of years past, and the countless images a life accumulates: streets, the city, seasons, people, friends--and that first hot day when the future was only a moment ahead, when one's fate is only a dream. Five minutes from the bridge, down through South Fort, I'm at 1420 Gorse Street: two story, clapboard house, built circa 1917, where the poets visit--willow tree out front the kids sit in, this basement where the books sit on shelves, this desk I write from, the press over by the back door.

In a way, you become something of the place you set out to discover--and in a breath, call it home.

*

A SELECTION FROM THE CALEDONIA WRITING SERIES ARCHIVE

*

Barry McKinnon with Daphne Marlatt in Prince George

(Photo by George Bowering)

Cover, *th book of snow poems (cabin fever),* by David Phillips: 1972
(McKinnon's first chapbook published under the press name *54'40"*)

th book of snow poems

(cabin fever)

david phillips

Letter from David Phillips to McKinnon: August 1972

Aug 22/72

barry,

fantastic! got th books yesterday as special delivery came & no one home on friday. am really proud of th book. i mean it, i haven't felt so good abt a book of mine, ever.
everyone's knocked out!

(i am a poet, i am a poet)

i love th print, even tho a little rough sort of.
dwight loves it. janie love's it. Pat was nice to me.

i think yu could keep producing books like this at yr own pace & publish people in a unique kind of way. ie, unpretentious inexpensive & high quality.

why spend a thousand plus bucks to produce a piece of shit, when yu can get Cabin Fever so delightfully.
i like it so so much!

well, a good way to begin a week.

dug yr letter.

& th memory maching pic of yr trully
lookin tough in th summer of '68 (in everyone's life there is a summer of '68)
though if yu can survive such summers yu might get another chance.
i'll be 28 in 8 days.
this summer had its moments too.

& its still summer, but th fall creeps in.

what's going to happen this winter?

i think i'll keep working while yet. like th squirrel, get th nuts stored up.
(on a personal note, some troubles with Pat these days)

but i feel pretty good all in all.

i want to send up a large book (for yr reading pleasure) which sort of parallels your Moving Photo Graph & bp's thing, tho isn't so concerned with history. but its in long sections & maybe is more like bp's in a sense. i like writing th lighter things like Snow Poems, but give into th need for more heavier stuff, tho more reluctant to make it public.
anyway stay tuned for that one.

barry, its good to get th letters & start writing again.
feel really good abt it. makes things more clear. th importance of what we're doing & can share.

when can yu send some more copies?
want to send a couple out & sell a couple/

write soon.

love David

Complex of Birds

this is the first month
background of dirty snow

the dark birds breaking into flight
we hold our hands open, we three

stand among the dark birds walking

what have we to give them
birds of all shape
birds of what hunger

we are not St. Francis
I must remember that

we do not beckon or explain
we are very still so they will know us

the beaks against our palms are not specific
they might touch us any part
as we are present with them
arms outstretched like wings

we do not imitate, begin
with them the year to startle
bleak heart, sullen winter

Letter from Bill Hoffer to McKinnon: February 1974

WILLIAM HOFFER BOOKSELLER • 3293 DUNBAR STREET • VANCOUVER B C V6S 2B8
TELEPHONE (604) 224 - 4121

FEBRUARY 18, 1974

DEAR BARRY/TWO TYPING MISTAKES ALREADY. YOUR LETTER AND PACKAGE ARE DATED DECEMBER 25, A DAY NOTABLE FOR SOMETHING(I FORGET WHAT) BUT DIDN'T ARRIVE UNTIL THIS MORNING.

I'LL SEND YOU THE MONEY, INCLUDING WHATEVER IT WAS FOR THE LAST LOT, AND WOULD VERY MUCH LIKE TO HAVE MORE COPIES OF BROADSIDES, &C. EPHEMERAL/S AND BOOKS, SAY 10 COPIES OF SOME, AND YOU CAN FIGURE IT OUT.

I AM RETURNING ALICE/AND DON'T APPROVE OF GARDENING/OR EVEN THE EARTH. OTHERWISE I'M OK.

TRUE/A LONG TIME. I HAVE BEEN MOVING AGAIN/ABOVE PLEASE FIND THE NEW CORRECT ADDRESS.

FEBRUARY 19, 1974(STILL)

I'M WAITING FOR BPNICHOL/AND LIONEL, WHO THREATEN TO ARRIVE THIS AFTERNOON/WHICH IT IS/AND ACCORDING TO MY HOROSCOPE(I USE ONLY THOSE PRINTED IN THE SHOPPER'S NEWS)THIS IS A TEMPESTUOUS WEEK IN WHICH I AM THE STRAIGHT MAN AND TUESDAY IS THE ONE TO WATCH, (PERHAPS IT'S THURSDAY?)IN ANY EVENT/THE SUN OUTSIDE IS SMALL CONSOLATION FOR THE TERROR WITHIN.

YOUR BOOKS ARE VERY GOOD/I APPROVE OF THEM. THE STORY TO REMEMBER IS THAT IT'S HOW YOU USE WHAT YOU'VE GOT, NOT WHAT YOU'VE GOT, THAT GETS YOU INTO THE GALACTIC FEDERATION. I WOULD LIKE OTHER COPIES OF THE KEN BELFORD BROADSIDE/THE ONE YOU SENT DIDN'T ARRIVE IN MUCH SHAPE. IF YOU KNOW BELFORD, ASK HIM ABOUT HIS BOOK THE HUNGRY TIDE, COPIES OF WHICH I SEEK.

I'M EVEN A WORSE BUSINESS MAN THAN YOU/AND CAN'T HANDLE CONSIGNMENT BOOKS/SO IF YOU HAVEN'T BEEN PAID IT'S JUST OVERDUE. I'D LIKE TEN COPIES EACH OF EVERYTHING POETICAL, BUT NO MUSHROOM BOOKS OR TAX GUIDES.

BILL.

Letter from Paul Shuttleworth to McKinnon: postmarked 5 September 1974

Paul Shuttleworth
Box 460
MacKenzie, B.C.

Dear Barry,

By all means hang on to my manuscript Prayer For Night, there's no frantic rush. I understand your situation. For over a year I've been editing (in San Francisco) AISLING, a quarterly ~~thatxisxleanedxstronglyxtowards~~ that started with the intent of publishing only Irish and American poets. Enclosed is a recent issue and a ½-book.

I will send ~~t~~ some poems to SEVEN PERSONS REPOSITORY as soon as MacKenzie works itself into some poems. I've been here only a few weeks. At the spur of the moment, my wife and I threw up our teaching jobs in California to seek the wilderness. My wife was hired for a Reading post in the MacKenzie High School, so we came. MacKenzie, as I'm sure you know, is not ~~in~~ the wilderness. It is a strange ~~xmp~~ company town-suburb. Be that as it is, I've taken the year off to do nothing but write.

My main project in motion is a book length poem based on the life of western gunman Doc Holliday. It's nearly finished, so shortly I'll try to place it with a n American university press, probably a Southwestern one.

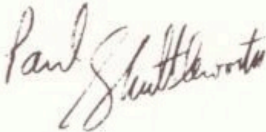
As per your interest in seeing more poems: I have a full length volume of poems I'm trying to place (64 pages) -- enclosed are some sample poems from it. It's entitled CORMORANT; the title poem will be in this Fall's Confrontation (Long Island University). The several sections deal with childhood, Ireland (where I lived for 2 years), the run away Industrial Revolution, animism, love.

Prayer For Night, which you have, will eventually be a section in yet another book. That book will deal with urban collapse: ~~Suddent~~ Sudden Terror.

My wife and I would like to stay in B.C., in this area. But our future will be predicated on whether or not I get a College-university post for next year. I recently completed my MA in Creative Writing at San Francisco State University where I worked with William Dickey & Kay Boyle.

My wife & I'll be coming down to Prince George every once in awhile. I'll try to get in touch then. Do you have a phone #? We won't have a phone for a few weeks.

All the best,



THE NORTH

"the worse it gets, the better" ken belford

somebodies walked the woods

•

in the air, the lines appear, as a grid
cut thru trees

possession is 9/10s of the law
theft makes up the rest

what men have walked these
woods, carried chains
& instruments
of exactitude

•

to own nothing becomes
achievement

a kind of ownership
not to care

Letter from John Harris to McKinnon: August 1975

Aug 31 '75

barry, Joy & clair

congrats barry you are now the proud possessor of a platin press, verityper etc etc & caledonia writing series is entering a new phase of tech-nical sophistication etc. Clarence as I figured went for the deal & we went down on Thurs & cleaned him out. Was a great day in Barkerville & at the good eats. Lynn Dean, Peter Landlauf, Gordon Harris (neighbor in Hixon with Econoline van) Hans & wife, Robin & the Harris's. Things went smoothly. Only hassle was on Friday when I had one hour to get the truck back & Steve Burgess & the boys from the shop had one hell of a time getting the 2 platins & the cutter off. Took them 3 hours. Clarence & his pal with the Ford tractor & bucket in Wells sure know a hell of a lot more abt moving heavy equip than those guys.

2 platins & cutter are now sitting under cover outside at the warehouse. I will have to strip them down one by one to get them in. If I can talk CNC into giving me Rm 7 in the Warehouse there'll be enuf room, but if I can't we should move your platin into your house when you come up here. Of course you will want to take that beauty of a Verityper with you/ I think it has great possibilities.

I have kept away from the LIP deal & the Forestry space & have just told Louis that if he got things going we would move our equipment into that space & he could use it. I simply do not have the time or energy to fart around negotiating with the arts council people etc & I do not want to commit myself to money etc that may disappear if Louis & his people back out. I think the space is Louis'if he wants it/ he's gone on holidays or something & arts council people have been swarming all over the warehouse looking for him.

Ian has written to say that the Malaspina mag (out this summer) is on the rocks & will I continue Caledonian if he edits & does typing, layout etc down there. I said ok though I don't have much hope for Caledonian as a function of CNC A&S budget. Will do it because of Ian & because down there he may be able to get the copy; my ploy is going to be to go to <u>Gordon</u>, not Frank, for money, & to try to get my own budget, so I can order my own paper, cover stock etc & send $ to Ian to hire a typist etc. One of the things that held the C down in the past was that it looked like all other BC educational publications, shitty.

Result of all this activity is that the John Pass book is sitting still. Got all the corrections done & some layout; with luck I'll start making plates next weekend. Tell him not to despair.

Stans got troubles with reading series. It seems all you fuckers want to come to PG in September, inc. you, bissett, belford, suknaski etc. One super-reading????

Here's another adult bed-time story. Schermbrucker is interested in the Giant & hopes to get it into Cap Rev soon. He likes the part where the guy blows down the chimney.

Everyone here fine. Bob negotiating a job with Toulson (BTSD in Fort St James?) Weather continues bad.

Love / John

Cover, *Letters from Geeksville:* 1976
(l. to r. Red Lane, George Bowering, Fred Bing)

Letters From Geeksville

Red Lane to George Bowering

1960 : 1964

Letter from McKinnon to Brian Fawcett: September 1976

tues sept 14 76

dear brian,

thanks for cottonwood - (ya, if you can get it to linda that wld help me out & hows yr $.k I'm in trouble with the press (so to speak) - I owe the bank 600 & only have $200.00 so I'm gonna have to do wome wheeling & dealing. anyway if you can pay for the typsetting (I dunno 30 or 40 bucks - I'll reimburse you (thats a promise). letters from geeksville looks like it will go so I can borrow another 1000.00 wch will be reimbursed by the council. the point is I can print it cheaper than that so with the balance shd be able to pay off thebank etc. & you. what a shitty life sometimes. sorry to have to give you all this financial shit.

please forget abt those drafts I sent you. I've got some work going on now in a notebook - butits stuff I cant look at again for awhile (this fucking typewriter just cant space properly (I didnt mind yr ibm face, by the way, but do understand what you mean by thenoise. see, itdid it again.

I'm feeling drained alreaady by theteaching & just cant get my energy into it. I think I told you , I teach 3 sections of tech report writing (maybe my job is getting to be like yrs. do you really writ tech reports?

while were at it - when do you want to read/ we shd be down (will be down) on thelong wkend in oct. so that will be a bfeak no matter how rushed.

I was thinking today that an nmfg mailout cld be a continuanc e of "the breast pocket poet series". books of say 5 poems along the same format as 2nd life. anyway, keep in touch abt it. those books can get out fast. by the way, I like bowerings allogphones (/O /?) in cap review & the blaser poem (songs?) is magnifecent. I aint heard from him yet - but bill sayshe's looking forward to coming up.

and by the way, thank you for yr letter & enthusiasm for songs. I just want to get on with something new now, or maybe nothing at all.

well, take care.

love, barry

Letter from McKinnon to Michael Niederman (*ed. Applegarth Follies*): November 1976

nov 24

dear mike,

just received yr letter this morning & will reply promptly (if I dont
I wont - or you know how it is.

ok. songs & speeches (there are actually 2 editions - the cheap one
in nmfg & a more exspensive & larger one of 100 copies. but basically
the design is the same (paper differences & size only). cover on the big
ger one is a wrap etc. much nicer etc.

re design: as you know, maps have been used before . olson maximus
---all kinds of books: I can honestly say that I designed my book
without seeing yr work ie. long sault - but can see some similarities
(particularly the use of the drawings/ maps etc. so whatever similarity
there is, arises out of coincidence - or that the idea aint new to begin
with - & that maps literally locate a place (wch is i portant, I think,
for the writers I know. the drawings in songs were done by my 3 yr
old kid - some of them blown up or reduced - andsome of them taken
from the context of alot of drawings on a page. I took what I thot
fit (with that, in some cases, weird coicidence of concerns. shes 3
I'm 32 etc.

ok Im an amateur self taught printer working under theusual conditons
of very little money - equipment that fucks up - etc etc. plus the
lack of time (I teach etc.) but some of the books I like - some
done on scrap paper. I want to do good work plus get it out
fast. cant see this nonsense of having abook tied up for years
as happens with presses I know abt. I've gone thru that experience
(plus a consistent rejection of work that I knew had to come out.
you simply take it in yr own hands & stop bitching (or take on
a new set of bitches (politics of publishing etc etc. so my own work
comes out of the press plus those others I get commited to (mostly
bc writers.

anyway. blah blah. I like what yr doing (& I have seen the Kroetsch
book. I"d like a copy - so can we trade on it ? as you know this
work (small press) is crucial.k the trick is to get smaller. I've
had 2 small cc grants - but mostof the work is unfinanced. the business
end (distribution etc. is fucked. lack of time. & essentially I work
alone. fawcett & I are friends. part of what we might do is
distribute some of the chapbooks from here thru his mag & just take
donations (surprsingly enough - people will send money - letters
so the connections grow - that sense of something going on - ie.
yr package today.

what else?

I'll enclsoe a few things plus a catalogue.

take care. hope to hear from you again.

best,
.k.. barry mckinnon

real estate

if you come any further you'd better leave
your names with next of kin
sign posted outside of
eucleulet b.c.

we swim this sea, into a 20ft. depth crabs
skitter, the fish shine
amidst the kelp & I think, the sea
cares
not for us
nor for the moon that moves it
the moon itself moving.

these
small facts & natural laws for perspective, as neighbors
shout across the bay, argue ownership
& the legal lines
of trespass. yet I know
below the tide, anyone

can swim

PLACE

This is an empty landscape,
in spite of its light,
air, water -
the people walking the streets.

I feel faint here,
too far off, too
enclosed in myself,
can't make love a way out.

I need the oldtime density,
the dirt, the cold,
the noise through the floor -
my love in company.

Robert Creeley

150 copies printed for WORDS LOVES
in Prince George B.C. 2.8.80

I come to the meeting. . .

I come to the meeting
late
    when
they are cleaning up.
I had wanted
                to the tune
                of rain
no better weather
to do it in.
And I had wanted some thing
not so unlike bark
for all the battles
from the bottom
of the spine, up.

One works alone in the shed
when the wrenches spread.

Break any bone you want
but break the back
and no more fight: this
side of the building is white.

I come late to the meeting,
in time
        to wonder
who came,
            who left
and who spoke.

And I among things
that distress children
wanted to know
if he spoke at all.
                    And
if he did,
easily.

Ken Belford

100 copies printed at GORSE PRESS April 1979

the kiss

the kiss stills the broken heart,
stills & closes the wound, the kiss
heals the wounds of desire &
the unfulfilled vision each carries
& collectively fails
does not end it, the kiss
does not celebrate pain as
the only true evidence of devotion, the kiss is
devotion
        & the danger of the kiss is known
in the measure of the world's
legislation against it, we vanish into it

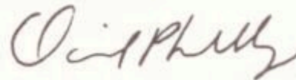
& reappear transformed & the same,
the kiss is not given or received
is no message, it is entered,
unknowingly, the realms of love
bear its weight, weightless in the mind
the kiss is the substance of the world, the body
is luscious with it

the kiss finds us in our hiding place
in our pursuit of it
our passion is revealed & we are
helpless with terror & pleasure

it says to each: you
are the main work of my life, you are my life,
you are my heart, my sentience, my angel
my music, my first word

the embodiment of knowledge

david phillips



100 copies printed at GORSE PRESS april 79

Birth

a freshness, of how
a dog barks, after
the baby comes home
the first day, & I'm tired enough
as if a burden released,
momentarily there is a gift of
what language won't allow

some so closed off, they will not come out
yet today
I await for everything to wake

what is possible

a life,

a pleasure

B. McK

BARRY MCKINNON

71/ 100 copies printed at Gorse Press March 1979

(a draft

for john harris

how I hide
away   or am hidden -- yet
            kept thinking,   this is a useless
way to spend your life   even tho
I was never promised heaven.   that
wind outside from the south oct. 19, 1978
is warm & is a blessing.

barry mckinnon

Printed in an edition of 126 copies at Gorse Press 1.3.79

CALEDONIA WRITING SERIES (1972-1980): A BIBLIOGRAPHY

1972

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Newlove, John. The Flower. Printed on construction paper by an obsolete drum type (Multigraph) letterpress. 8 x 12" broadside. 20 or 30 copies.

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Sibum, Norm. Banjo. Prince George: Caledonia Writing Series, 1972. First book of the Caledonia Writing Series. Gestetner with offset cover sticker. Construction paper cover. 8 1/2 x 11", 14 pages. 100 copies, approximately 12 handbound.

1973

Belford, Ken. don & i slip past.... No publishing data on broadside. Circa 1973. Offset on scrap paper. 6 x 13" broadside. Approximately 50 copies.

Belford, Ken. One Word. Prince George: privately printed by Belford & McKinnon, 1973. Printed for one of Belford's readings in Prince George. Xeroxed reproduction of Belford's

handprinted text, construction paper cover. 20 pages. 25 copies.

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Purdy, Al. Scott Hutcheson's Boat. Prince George: Caledonia Writing Series, 1973. Letterpress with cover photo and title page, photo by J. De Visser. 1 page folded sewn. 223 copies, some numbered.

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Kaulback, Richard. The Dump. Prince George, 1974. Printing project in McKinnon's letterpress printing class at the College of New Caledonia. Letterpress, 2 offset photos, text sewn. 4 pages. 100 copies.

Kaulback, Richard. Sea Wall/Salt Air. Prince George: Driftwood Press, 1974. Printed in CWS print shop with McKinnon. Offset, 3 photos. 5 x 4 1/2", 8 pages. 250 copies.

Kearns, Lionel. About Time. Prince George: Caledonia Writing Series, 1974. Offset, letterpress cover. 10 x 6 1/2", 26 pages. 300 copies.

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Enemark, Brett. The Last Spike. Prince George: Caledonia Writing Series, 1975[?]. Offset. Poem in a folder cover. 100 copies.

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McKinnon, Barry. The Death of a Lyric Poet. Prince George: Caledonia Writing Series, 1975. Offset, with letterpress cover and title page. 11 1/2 x 6", 20 pages. 250 copies.

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Pass, John. Love's Confidence. Prince George: Caledonia Writing Series, 1976. Offset with letterpress cover. 10 x 5 1/2", 28 pages. 500 copies, 50 numbered and signed.

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Blaser, Robin. Kim. Printed by McKinnon for Blaser's reading in Prince George, March 18, 1977. Letterpress. 10 x 10" broadside. Approximately 80 copies.

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ANGELA BOWERING

FIGURES CUT IN SACRED GROUND: ILLUMINATI IN THE DOUBLE HOOK

> . . . what I was concerned with was figures in a ground, from which they could not be separated.[1]

In this essay I use the term illuminati in two distinct but inseparable senses. First, I intend those figures that appear in the pages of medieval manuscripts, illuminating--that is to say, "lighting up"--the script of the text while figuring forth the divine action implicit in the sacred writing which is their ground. Second, I mean to suggest the more colloquial "illuminations" signifying the perceptual enlightenments that occur in a single moment in the mind either of a "character" or of a reader.

Sheila Watson tells us that The Double Hook is not to be read merely as a conventional drama meant to mirror the typical behaviour of "people in a place" acting out their various subjective conflicts and resolutions on a stage set landscape. Rather, the dramatis personae exist in the moment of their making, in the hush that follows their creation. Their figuration is like that of a divine praxis; the action is a sacred one that works itself out through them--but not yet.

In the folds of the hills

under Coyote's eye

lived

the old lady, mother of William

of James and of Greta

lived James and Greta
lived William and Ara his wife
lived the Widow Wagner
the Widow's girl Lenchen
the Widow's boy
lived Felix Prosper and Angel
lived Theophil
and Kip

until one morning in July[2]

The figures are etched or engraved in an eternal and continuous ground which is a field of force, but their existence, uttered in a series of repetitive declarations, feels like inertia despite the reiteration of the word "lived" (inert: Without action; but Latin inert: in: + ars, "without art").[3] Sense and tense fold over and against each other in the repeated verb. What at first feels like artlessness is not. Coyote's language is already tricking us, even as the earth begins its begetting.

Any book begins with words. This book reminds us that it does by echoing the beginning of another book that tells us that the world begins with a word. As God begins by naming the world into being, so this book begins by naming--first the earth, then Coyote's voyeuristic eye; then, echoing the genealogies of Genesis, the figures and their relationships. In principio is remembered by "in the folds of the hills," and back of that lies Hesiod. The beginning, in this book, is the earth, which is to say the ground, the text, the inscribing.

Robert Kroetsch, in an unpublished journal, muses on what "ground" means, saying

> Ground. That word so much in use today. What does it mean beyond the dirt that the dirt farmer uses to grow wheat? Some kind of urcondition, existence itself beyond any naming. The stuff before the stuff that is history or culture or art. That which is before the self, even. The stuff of which "place" is made. By dwelling in place we hope to get back through the naming to the ground.[4]

Sheila Watson's statement about beginning to write The Double Hook "in answer to a challenge that you could not write about particular places in Canada: that what you'd end up with was a regional novel of some kind" should be set beside Kroetsch's meditation. The milieu that one is very much a part of is the ground of emerging being, is language. It is only in language or in the interstices of language, in the "mediating rituals which manifest themselves in what . . . we call art forms" that we are not driven "either towards violence or towards insensibility. . . ."[5] Man is not accidentally, but essentially maker. The beginning of The Double Hook and an article on Wyndham Lewis in which she quotes from his essay The Artist is Older Than the Fish make it clear that she agrees with Lewis when he says "since the artist shares in the work of creation, he too must reach back to the fundamental slime."[6] In another article, she mentions Konrad Fiedler's use of the term form-language or what "Gropius was to call . . . later at the Bauhaus 'the grammar of creation'."[7] Like Lewis, Sheila Watson surveys ground patterns and trains her eye and the eyes of others "to read the arbitrary signs by which mythic objects thrust into the foreground of life, habituate themselves there and generate--or appropriate--ritual patterns and protective coverings . . . 'to meet the terrible needs of life' or 'to work on the psychology of their adversaries'."[8] Her reading of Lewis's art provides Sheila Watson's readers with the instruction that is needed for reading her own.

The grammar of creation on the first page of The Double Hook lies latent in the naming of the figures bound by prepositions, "in" and "under," and by a redundancy that is an insistence on the lamination of language and on the presence of myth, its nowness. The figures are potentiality, a prelude to the breaking into action that is demanded by "until." The preposition holds within it all the tension that has preceded it; these figures are palimpsest; like Gaea's children and like Adam, they are borne out of the folds of the earth. Theirs is a primary naming that gestures toward the not-yet, the unnamed, even the unnameable.

Waiting to be lit up by their release into action, the figures make their appearance as half-emergent figurae. One is reminded of Michaelangelo's slaves, unreleased from the stone. They are the possibility of man and of meaning, an incomplete tableaux vivant. Since meaning resides in action, these figures and their naming are the seed words of action. Lucretius's atoms are called primordia, principia, elementa, semina, also corpora; they are bodies whose combination, motion, order, position, figura bring forth the things of the world. The figurae in this narrative, like Lucretius's atoms, will become a dance of figures who preserve the character of the dance by combining with and reflecting on and repelling each other.

Sheila Watson is image-maker, shamanka, and shape-shifter. Her shapes are shades until syntax makes them move, until action gives them spirit. Their naming is this paradox. Their shaping invests them with a soul which makes them break into the practice of being.

> Greta was at the stove. Turning hotcakes. Reaching for the coffee beans. Grinding away James's voice.
>
> James was at the top of the stairs. His hand half-raised. His voice in the rafters.
>
> James walking away. The old lady falling (p. 19)
>
> (All emphases mine.)

James and Greta lived. James and Greta were. They are placed, "until" the placement of the preposition and the fragmented sentences carry them into a series of gerund-like participles that retain, in the disjointed syntax, the character of nouns and naming. The coupling of noun-verb functions pushes the figures forward into broken gesture that forces the reader to intensify his participation in the language. We are not permitted either complacency or omniscience; we must engage this language as it hacks away at comfortable grammatic form until we become the ground in which it is inscribed, its seed-bed; as we do, our perception is quickened into life.

Sheila Watson's long consideration of Wyndham Lewis is properly the subject of another study, but Frederic Jameson's comment about Lewis's work and, in context, about modernist writing, helps us to see the extraordinary collection of tasks that are occurring at once when the figures in The Double Hook begin to act. He remarks that "the empty matrix of national allegory is . . . immediately seized on by hitherto unformulable impulses which invest its structural positions and, transforming the whole narrative system into a virtual allegory of the fragmented psyche itself, now reach back to overdetermine the resonance of this increasingly layered text."[9]

The typographical shift on the first page of The Double Hook marks another kind of shift that remembers, resonates and reaches outward. The structural trajectories of its sentence fragments cut cross-ways against the grain of grammar, outward into the reader's

eye and thought, vault upward into the architecture of the house, and forward into the narrative of the novel. What happens here is that language, which necessarily takes place in time (we read line by line in time), bends itself into space, extending itself in all directions at once. The reader is both assaulted by and drawn into a narrative that carries the unexpected banality of the almost comically familiar strategies of a domestic quarrel. James and Greta: a couple quarrelling. But an abrupt shift to the sacred is suggested by James's hieratic gesture and by his voice resounding in the vaulted loft--in benediction, perhaps.

This barely formed perception is in its turn undercut by the falling old lady, and we are quickly entangled with death, with matricide "under the jaw of the roof. In the vault of the bed loft. Into the shadow of death" (p. 19). "Under the jaw of the roof" glances backward to "under Coyote's eye," and all of this language action seems suddenly to gather itself inward to be swallowed in death by the form from which it had emerged, from the figure that will say, "In my mouth is forgetting / in my darkness is rest"; "in my mouth is the east wind" (p. 24). The east wind (its Indo-European root meaning "the shining") is origin, and blows westward toward death. The Alpha-Omega paradox haunts all the turns in this book. Invisible, resonating behind "into the shadow of death," lies "the valley of the shadow of death" of the twenty-third Psalm, but here is no comfort except in the half-heard alliteration of "vault" and its shadow "valley" which enclose the mother-murder in circular space which is the birthplace of the narrative's praxis.

The passage we have been discussing begins with Greta "turning," "reaching," "grinding," which faintly echo primary agricultural activity while the nouns "hotcakes" and "coffee beans" literally image breakfast preparations. We can almost see Greta's apron. But the text keeps turning itself and the reader inside out. The necessity of reciprocity, relationship and engagement is relentless in this writing. When, later, we remember that the stove before which Greta here stands turning hotcakes is the same one she turns into an altar for her sacrificial self-immolation, we watch the way narrative and imagery marry domesticity and death, doubling back on themselves. "Dear God," the Widow Wagner will repeatedly say, "There's nothing one can hide," and "How could I know?" It's almost more than one can bear without breaking into wild laughter that confounds darkness with delight. "Truth," as the Sybil said to Aeneus, "is mingled with darkness." And so is laughter.

The density of this many-layered text inevitably involves the reader-critic in such an intimate dialogue that exegesis runs the risk of turning its readers into voyeurs and eavesdroppers. My own critical method, as it attempts to negotiate the dangers of the

double dialogue that I feel must be carried on between the text and its reader-critic and between the critic and the reader of criticism takes its chances weaving itself this way in and out of such compressed language. I have tried to steer my way between the Scylla of appropriation and direction that would affix the vitality of this novel's imagery and syntax to a systematized symbology on the one hand, and the Charybdis of abstract and analytical reading that overreaches and obliterates the text on the other. "Coyote's song fretting the gap between the red boulders" functions chorically here as elsewhere, implying a warning against such readings:

> Those who cling to the rocks I will
>   bring down
> I will set my paw on the eagle's nest (p. 24).

Meaning resonates somewhere between the fixed and settled, and the ungrounded transcendent; spare clean language, fragmented sentences and sense emerge from empty space, peel flesh to the bone, search out the hidden connexions, look for what's occulted and bring it into the light. It is our response, however, that provides answer to the question "Shall these bones live?"[10]

The effect of this allusive and elusive language on the reader-Gestalt maker is much like what would happen if time-lapse photography were spliced with blank film that forced the viewer to complete the arc of the perceptual narrative incorrectly every time the image disappeared. This writing leads us "into the shadow of death" through a sequence of events in which syntax and image undergo rapid and radical metamorphoses so that their shifting significance baffles any definite perceptual locus. As if to resist the impulse to entropy, remnants of narrative that propose the possibility of causal exposition attempt to reassemble or reassert themselves: "Pushed by James's will. By James's hand. By James's words." Will becomes act, becomes words, but James's words explain nothing: "This is my day. You'll not fish today" (p. 19). And when we turn the page, we are astonished to read: "Still the old lady fished" (p. 20). The double take we are forced to here when we confront the old lady's sudden resurrection utterly sabotages common sense. The pivotal word here is "still." It doubles over on itself, functioning as both adverb and adjective. It also serves as a conjunction. James's will, hand and words converge simultaneously in the event that kills his mother, but will, act and words ("you'll not fish today") are instantly joined and undercut by the conjunction that insists that the old lady continued to fish. "Nevertheless," says

the conjunction. Repetition of the word "fished" and the adverbial sense of "still" ("now as before," "yet") even intensify the fishing activity of the old lady. "Still" makes nonsense of Death the Absolute, of the nature of things in time.

The intensity of the double effect of the sentence is not diminished by the series of subjunctive verb forms. The activities of the old lady are ones we are made to image in the passage that immediately follows what we take to be her death.

> Still the old lady fished. If the reeds had dried up and the banks folded and crumbled down she would have fished still. If God had come into the valley, come holding out the long finger of salvation, moaning at the darkness, thundering down the gap at the lake head, skimming across the water, drying up the blue signature like blotting paper, asking where, asking why, defying an answer, she would have thrown her line against the rebuke; she would have caught a piece of mud and looked it over; she would have drawn a line with the barb when the fire of righteousness baked the bottom (p. 20).

The rigor of this language is unmistakable; its energy gathers force incrementally as image after image arises of the old lady fishing, defying an answer, throwing her line against God's rebuke, salvation and creation alike. (God's long finger of salvation here recalls the long finger of Adam's creator in Michaelangelo's painting on the Sistine Chapel ceiling.) Catching a piece of mud and looking it over, she seems to question primal creation itself or to regard it as materia, possibly for artistic creation. When the fire of God's righteous apocalyptic wrath bakes the lake bottom, she draws a line across it with her barbed hook. The inscribing artist is older than the fish, older than the blue lake which is God's signature. The word embeds and couples two others: "sign" and "nature." The old lady's ferocious desire would take her beyond the signatures of nature, beyond God's sacred writing, to origin itself: the Word. The force that arises from primordial slime, from the baked crust of the earth turns against God's creation, makes it conditional, dependent on the necessity of her search. She seems archaic, at least as old as the earth from which and in which her force is figured, and upon which she makes her mark.

The effect of all this, despite the persistence of the conditional and hypothetical verbs and clauses is to make us see what logic and common sense defy. We seem to see beyond logos,

beyond utterance and division and individuation. Further, the shift to more commonplace domestic situations which open the next three passages tends to reinforce our sense of her ordinary reality. Ara is hanging out the washing; Felix is sitting on his porch tipped back on his rocking-chair while thistles crowd out his potato plants which lie baking in the sun; the Widow's boy, presumably engaged in doing chores around the farm when he sees the old lady, walks into his mother's kitchen. And so it goes, as Kurt Vonnegut would say; life as usual. Except, one after another, all three of them see the old lady we know is dead. The grammar of these passages uses present progressive and present perfect progressive verb tenses; the other "characters," viewed as ordinary human creatures, think they are seeing the actual old woman. They provide evidence of the old lady's continued existence and activity, irresistibly and compulsively seen in the world by her survivors, even though the carcass of the old woman lies on the boards above James and Greta's kitchen. Seeing is stopped in time by a grammar that makes the old lady's fishing an eternal act: "Ara saw . . . fishing." Her figure becomes an icon of fishing. The old lady is fishing, has been fishing, and she continues to fish as she has always fished.

> Ara saw her fishing along the creek. Fishing shamelessly with bait. Fishing without a glance towards her daughter-in-law, who was hanging washing on the bushes near the rail fence (p. 20).
>
> Felix saw the old lady. She was fishing in his pool where the water lay brown on the black rocks, where the fish lay still under the fallen log. Fishing far from her own place. Throwing her line into his best pool.
>
> He thought: I'll chase her out (p. 23).
>
> The Widow's boy saw the old lady.
>
> The old lady from above is fishing down in our pool, he said, coming into the widow's kitchen. I'm going down to scare her out (p. 25).
>
> (All emphases mine)

The matter of fact tone that opens these passages does little to soothe our unsettled thinking; in fact it reinforces our uncertainty about the nature of the old woman's existence, especially since the verb tenses here and elsewhere in these passages do not discriminate between the quick and the dead, the animate and the inanimate. Domestic sanity, lunatic compulsion, hallucination and vision are knotted together in language that

overlayers them all, folding against itself and over its reader: the old lady "was fishing"; "was rounding the bend of the creek"; "was throwing her line" (p. 20); "water was running low in the creek"; the old lady "was fishing upstream to the source" (p. 21); Felix "fished himself, letting his line fall"; "[He] fished and came from the creek. Pulled the fish out of his pocket. Slit them from tail to chin . . . Cooked them in peace alone with his dogs" (p. 23). "The hounds came back, yellow forms in the yellow sunlight. Creeping round the barn. Flattening themselves to rest" (p. 25). The dead old lady fishes on "with a concentrated ferocity as if she were fishing for something she'd never found," while Ara thinks, "It's not for fish she fishes," and says, oblivious to the irony of her own words, "I might as well be dead for all of her" (p. 21). The irony is not superficial.

An eerie stillness pervades the whole scene which retains the silence of the word that began the previous passage: "Still the old lady fished." It is so quiet that "Ara could hear the cow mumbling dry grass by the bushes. There was no other sound" (p. 21). As the old lady fishes "upstream to the source," Ara, watching her back in the midst of a silence and solitude made more profound by the cow's mumbling in the dry grass, imagines her coming to "the bones of the hills" and the flats where the herd cows range: "They'd turn their living flesh from her as she'd turned hers from others. . . ." "As she watched . . . , Ara felt death leaking through from the centre of the earth. Death rising to the knee. Death rising to the loin" (p. 21).

Ara isn't sure where water comes from. In a drought-ridden waste-land where Coyote's spittle eyes the earth with prickly pear, what should be a life-giving substance only runs and divides and spins when Ara empties her basin of water onto the dust; or it rises from the underworld as the old lady has risen from death. She is, as James will later feel, "there in every fold of the country. Seen by Kip. Seen by Ara" (p. 43). Seen by Felix and the Widow's boy as well, who think to "catch her for once and all" (p. 23), or "to put a fence right across the creek . . . so James Potter's mother can't go up and down . . . any more." She who would survive the wrath of God's righteousness (p. 26) will not so easily die or be turned into a cow or deer or fish to be caught or fenced out, or in either. However, Ara feels caught, and thinks that the handful of people who inhabit these hills are a lost tribe: "There [are] not enough people here to attract his attention"; God's eye could not spy out the men lost here already . . ." who lie ". . . like sift in the cracks of the earth" (pp. 22-23). Neither will following the creek help a man find his way, "for the creek flowed this way and that at the land's whim. The earth fell away in hills and clefts as if it had been dropped carelessly wrinkled on the bare floor of the world," like the

apron with which Ara has wiped the table and thrown into a corner (p. 22).

Everywhere in the double vision of this book, the earth is a folded figured surface of conflicts that are not centred, but nevertheless seem to gather themselves in a search for seeing, to become that seeing. In the fixed and uncertain transitions of this language, something is occulted, "hid from every living thing" (p. 31). Space itself turns inward and outward. Like the "whole round world" it is moving and unmoving at the same time. Its flat surface folds and slips perilously from our grasp as we seem to see two ways at once--far outward to the peripheries and edges of things where "the hill [leads] up to the pines and onto the rock rise which flatten[s] out and [falls] off to nowhere on the other side" (p. 33), out to the ridges and wrinkles of the rim, and inward to the "hollows" of the earth that are "waiting to catch you in the pits and snares of silence" (p. 42). The clutch of figures that fall into its folds, whose houses, connected by the rutted road, cling to the ragged and crevassed declines, expands and contracts. These figures are simultaneously and alternately dwarfed and magnified in the language which inscribes their relationship to the earth which is repeatedly presented to the characters' eyes and to the reader's eye for decipherment. They are presented as Coyote's "ominiscient eye" would view them from the cleft rock, but the rock too exists "in the folds of the hills"; it is a formal replication of those folds. Like the author of this text who is wearing Coyote's mask, Coyote is both vulnerable to, and manipulator of, the tricky doubleness of things--along with the rest of us. An omniscient "I" sees as if from outside, but it speaks with a double tongue--oracularly, and as one voice among others.[11]

Seeing and knowing are both indeterminate; connexions are made, but they are "fixed and uncertain," like the figures themselves, like the figure of Coyote, like "the source," the spring which Greta prefers to the fixed and uncertain pump that brings water to the surface of the earth. Greta, like her mother, prefers to go "upstream to the source," believing it is a single point, as if vision were fixed or fixated. That it is not is made clear by the way the writing cross-hatches the lines of vision of the various figures who look for direction up and down the slopes of the hills, along the furrowed roads and in the turns and twists of the creek bed. Some of them try to puzzle out how they could have seen the old lady multiplied several times over in different places at the same time. When the Widow's boy tells the group at James's house that the old lady is fishing their pool, Greta denies that she has gone out at all. Ara cannot believe her ears:

> How could we both have seen her? Ara asked. How would we have seen her at both our places? She wasn't fishing downstream. She was fishing up, and I saw her ahead of me and moving on. Greta just doesn't know, she said. Go back down to your own creek, James. I saw her there too. There by the cottonwoods (p. 46).

A few minutes later, Kip, standing on the doorstep, peers into the darkness of the room and announces

> If you want to go down to Wagner's now . . . I saw your old lady climb down through the split rock with Coyote, her fishes stiff in her hand (p. 47).

Whereupon Greta denies the possibility of all seeing: "You didn't see her. . . . You couldn't"; "Ma's lying dead in her bed," she says, freezing James into immobility (p. 47).

The earth extends itself as a backdrop and garment for the creatures that fear its crevices, lie in its creases, disappear into the fissures, get lost in the ground of their being. If God's eye cannot spy them out as Ara fears, Coyote's shifting and shifty eye does. His spittle eyes the earth whose creatures are all eyes looking out of its shadows at each other. Kip, Coyote's servant, sees too much for James's liking. He seems to be everywhere "looking wise. Knowing too much. Like the old lady. Like Greta. Like Angel sitting now in the kitchen. Waiting to catch you in the pits and snares of silence" (p. 42). For James, as for Ara, death rises from the ground as moisture: "mist rising from the land and pressing in. Twigs cracking like bone. The loose boulder and the downdrop. The fear of dying somewhere alone, caught against a tree or knocked over in an inch of water." James's fear of what might emerge as the earth's revenge takes form as crucifixion and death by drowning in the primal slime. He is afraid of seeing and knowing. When words cease, what lies "waiting to catch [one] in the pits and snares of silence" is seeing, and seeing that doesn't speak itself outward is what paralyzes James, transfixes him before a primal scene.

Our "Brother Oedipus"[12] is not freed by matricide because his sister knows and sees. She who has "waited to be mistress in [her] own house," is the duplication of the mother. When James kills the old woman he throws fear as a horse balks and then freezes on the

trail; he is unable to act for fear of "what Greta might do." Greta says nothing, does not even look when James slams the door on the death of the mother. What she does is set his breakfast in front of him. Greta takes her mother's place and the two, in silence, partake of the same unholy meal, "while however his mother lay, he knew, her eyes were looking down where the floorboards had been laid apart" (p. 43). Syntactical disorder here marks psychic, social and sacramental disorder, a gap between things done and the things being done. What was done in the Upper Room is represented in the lower room as predatory symbiosis: anamnesis reenacted as a caricature, unholy irony. Where does the mother lie? Upstairs, downstairs, or in my lady's chamber? Or under the floorboards laid apart upon which or through which she has fallen--onto the table or into the earth, under the threshold where dead kin were anciently buried, where her shadow leaves its stain on the ground like blood, while Greta sits in "her mother's doom as she [sits] in her chair" (p. 113).

The language of the text here weaves itself, ply against ply, to evoke a subtext that manages to call up remnants of prehistoric, tribal, pagan and Christian ritual which resonate in the backward and abysm of consciousness; time is abolished: everything happens at once. Greta is body and blood of her mother; she is her mother's resurrection. James's crime against mother-blood is instantly avenged even while he and his sister sit grinding their penitential pancakes between their teeth. Greta incorporates her mother's corruption and James knows it. Mute with fear, he wants to shout "the whole world's got distemper, . . . You and me and the old lady. The ground's rotten with it." In the absence of a language that will permit speaking about anything more than "hammers and buckles," "water for washing," "rotted posts," "ringbone and distemper," there is only the silence of death and waiting for death. James and Greta have

> . . . lived waiting. Waiting to come together at the same lake as dogs creep out of the night to the same fire. Moving their lips when they moved them at all as hunters talk smelling the deer. Edged close wiping plates and forks while the old lady sat in her corner. Moved their lips saying: She'll live forever. And when they'd raised their eyes their mother was watching as a deer watches.
>
> Now Greta'd sat in the old lady's chair. Eyes everywhere. In the cottonwoods the eyes of foolhens. Rats' eyes on the barn rafters. Steers herded together.

> Eyes multiplied. Eyes. Eyes and padded feet. Coyote moving in rank-smelling (p. 43).

Greta and James, like Orestes and Electra, are both victims of their mother's repressiveness and co-conspirators in her death; like dogs, they huddle together, creep at night from outside to the same fire. Like hunters, waiting for the moment of death, they track their deer-mother with their eyes, edge close wiping the implements of an anticipated cannibalism. But when Greta replaces her mother, James, the hunter-predator becomes, in a sudden reversal, the pursued prey of the multiplied eyes of the whole creaturely world. It is not sufficient to describe James's state of mind as paranoia. He might say with Orestes

> These are no fancies of affliction. They are clear and real, and here; the bloodhounds of my mother's hate.

and

> . . . how they grow and multiply
> repulsive for the blood drops of their dripping eyes.[13]

He will shortly respond, as Orestes does, by bolting, even though he knows it is his own fear from which he flees.

> You cannot see them, but I see them. I am driven from this place. I can stay here no longer.[14]

The split between the "subjective" state of mind and the "objective" world simply is not relevant here. It does not exist. James, like Orestes, has become by his act, outsider, outlaw. In his recognition of his solitariness, the multiplied eyes of foolhens and rats, literally there, become for him, precisely, the form of his mother's unrelenting watchfulness. "Since the fury of the morning he'd not been able to act." Within and without, the furies are real. The culpable state of his being is continuous with its manifestation. He is quite right when he says "Nothing had changed. The old lady was there in every fold of the country" (p.

43). Greta too, taking on her mother's watchfulness with her mother's totemic connexion with Coyote, becomes the manifestation of his culpability as well as his repressor and collaborator. Hearing Greta scrape his mother's chair across the floorboards, hearing "her voice dry in his ear: I've been waiting to be mistress in my own house," imagining her listening at doors, and counting the extra wash, refusing to eat at table, James knows Greta will hound him as his mother does, will drag him under the earth, as fury does. He feels "on his shoulder a weight of clay sheets. He [smells] the stench of Coyote's bedhole" (p. 44). Greta knows this too. She says, later, to Lenchen, "He'll kill me too. He'll shove me down for standing in his way" (p. 67).

Greta's venom, like that of the Erinyes, is the fury of a woman scorned, pitied, disregarded and denied a place in the world. Her vengefulness is inflamed and fed by the repression of the incestuous nature of her relationship with her brother which the imagery and intensity of her own language reveal as she attempts to isolate herself and James from all the other figures in the novel; trying to claim her own place, she hurls her vitriolic words at Ara and later at Lenchen, the girl pregnant with James's unacknowledged child.

> I don't want anyone coming here disturbing James and me. There's been more than I could stand. More than anyone could be held responsible for standing. I've been waiting all my life. A person waits and waits. You've got your own house, Ara. You don't have to see lamps in the night and hear feet walking on the stairs and have people coming in on you when they should be in their beds. I want this house to myself. Every living thing has a right to something (pp. 41-42).

The darkened house, the bedroom that Greta doesn't want her mother's lamp and prying eye trained on, is the objective correlative of, is symbolically consubstantial with her own unconscious incestuous desire to take the place of their mother in James's life--to hold the same kind of power over him her mother holds: the power of the woman denied becomes the power of the phallic mother that would devour and paralyze the son-brother's sexuality. Greta clearly does know the effect she has on James, but she cannot release him from her desire. Her words to Lenchen simultaneously assert her domination of him, her fear of losing it, and her dependence on him, while they expose the necessity of all these things, as well as her incestuous hope.

> Keep on looking, she said. And think what you want. I don't care. It's what I am, she said. It's what's driven him out into the creek bottom. Into the brush. Into the hogpen. A woman can stand so much, she said. A man can stand so much. A woman can stand what a man can't stand. To be scorned by others. Pitied. Scrimped. Put upon. Laughed at when no one comes for her, when there's no one to come. She can stand it when she knows she still has the power. When the air's stretched like a rope between her and someone else. It's emptiness that can't be borne. The potholes are filled with rain from time to time. I've seen them stiff with thirst. Ashed white and bitter at the edge. But the rain or the runoff fills them at last. The bitterness licked up. I tell you there was only James. I was never let run loose. I never had two to waste and spill like Angel Prosper.
>
> She pulled the girl over to the foot of the stairs.
>
> I heard her breath stop, she said. And the cold setting her flesh. Don't believe what James might say. She's not looking still. I heard what we'd been waiting to hear. What James and me had been waiting to hear all these years. There was only James and me, she said. Only James and me waiting (p. 66).

The language here utterly confounds blood relationship. Greta's words suggest kinship and collaboration in the blood murder, conspiracy in the matricide committed because both she and her brother-husband desire to escape the condemning eye of their mother that would usurp Greta's "rightful" place in the household as her brother's wife. Her own intense desire, she imagines, is what James must escape because there is a correspondent desire in him. Her sexual thirst metamorphosizes her own and her brother's desire to escape their mother's domination of their sexuality into a strange, even grotesque symbolic coupling and imprisonment. The prolonged and constrained tension of the rope is stretched tight between them until the emptiness of potholes stiff with thirst, ashed white and bitter at the edge will be filled at last with rain or runoff, and all the bitterness will be licked up. James will heal her sexual and psychic wound at last. Her language is oblique because she is protecting James from the others' knowledge of the mother-murder which she herself has desired. Her protection is also

fidelity to James because James is all she's ever had; she's never had two husbands to waste and spill. Imagery of holes in the earth and rope figure both death and sexuality, speaking the fearful possibilities of noose and grave if the two are discovered, and the possibility of sexual release (now that the mother is no longer looking). Threatening Lenchen, Greta's language negotiates and combines the terms of how the protective, desirous, victimized (and doomed) mother-brother-sister-son conjunction will take place, and how it will be fulfilled. Even though Greta, a few moments later, has a premonition that James will strike her down as he'd struck his mother down for standing in his way, she only half-sees, and does not really see what lies before her because she is helpless to control others or to control what possesses her.

As if in response to her seeing what she will not fully see, and in confirmation of what she has said, Greta, with Lenchen, hears James's words as he lashes out with the bullwhip at Kip's eyes that have spied on his love-making with Lenchen, blinding him: "If you had as many eyes as a spider I'd get them all" (p. 67). James, caught in a net of circumstance and in a network of eyes is a trapped creature, and when he reaches the two women, his bullwhip lashes them, "tearing through the flowers of [Greta's] housecoat," coiling "with a jerk about Lenchen's knees." And then James bolts, thinking to escape the trap in which Greta has become the doubled over form, the duplication of his mother's control.

The intersection of the sacred and the profane, the familiar and the awesome criss-cross in the vision and voices that play across the ground to form another network which reveals that, despite their different attitudes, the voices and inclinations of all these figures are the modulations of one voice, the voice of the earth that speaks from beneath the text to tell us of the old lady's persistent presence. The reader is made to participate in the questing and questioning activity that outlasts death. Syntactical disjuncture and continuous conditional tenses only bait the hook and spread toils that further our interrogation of the text. Ara, Felix, the Widow's boy and Kip, seeing what cannot, in fact, be there, make us know that the facts of the matter are not the end of the matter. More lies behind Greta's psychological and iconographic duplication of her mother than meets the corporeal eye. Just as the figures of the text reconstitute her, so must we, if we are not to "let fur grow over [our] eyes" as Theophil does (p. 58). The old lady is an emblem of seeing, of fishing, even to those most hostile to her. Ara tells William

> You're seeing things all the time, but you never look at

anything here. Sometimes when your mother was going up and down the creek I wanted to call out: What are you looking at? She was the one who noticed.

Greta, polishing the lamp globe, says to Angel,

> I've seen Ma standing with the lamp by the fence. . . . Holding it up in broad daylight. I've seen her standing looking for something even the birds couldn't see. Something hid from every living thing. . . . Holding the lamp and looking where there's nothing to be found. Nothing but dust (p. 31).

NOTES

1. Sheila Watson, "What I'm Going to Do," Open Letter, Third Series, No. 1 (Winter 1974-75), p. 183. This volume is a collection of pieces by Sheila Watson on several subjects; hereafter, it will be cited as Open Letter.

2. Sheila Watson, The Double Hook (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), p. 19. Hereafter, page references to this book will be cited within the text.

3. Throughout this essay, my sources for word derivations and etymologies draw upon Eric Partridge, Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) and on The Heritage Illustrated Dictionary of the English Language, ed. William Morris (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975).

4. Robert Kroetsch, quoted by Peter Thomas, "Keeping Mum: Kroetsch's Alberta," Journal of Canadian Fiction 2 (Spring, 1973) p. 55.

5. Open Letter, p. 183.

6. Sheila Watson, "The Great War: Wyndham Lewis and the Underground Press," Open Letter, p. 64.

7. Sheila Watson, "Myth and Counter-Myth," *Open Letter*, p. 120.

8. Ibid., p. 121.

9. Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 96.

10. Previous critical studies are undeniably concerned with real and crucial elements in the text of *The Double Hook*, but here I attempt to see the book afresh, freed from certain established critical assumptions and attempting a critical method that addresses the text more as archaeology than as explication. That is to say, I have attempted to attend to the text as an illuminated surface that renders its deposits visible.

11. Interestingly, "Sheila" is Irish for "Celia" > Laltin *caecus*: "blind." Its Indo-European root *kaiko* means "one-eyed." Coyote has only one natural eye; the other got lost after one of his many deaths and resurrections and was replaced by a pebble. Odin also has only one eye, as do the Cyclopes, as does Balor, the Fomarion opponent of the *Tuatha De Danaan* of the Irish Celtic myth. Balor, like Goliath, was blinded by a slingstone. The hurler of the stone was an Irish culture hero, as David was a Hebrew culture hero; Lug was, furthermore, a master of all skills: carpenter, smith, warrior, harper, poet, historian, and sorcerer.

12. Sheila Watson, "Brother Oedipus," *Four Stories* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1979).

13. Aeschylus, "The Libation Bearers," *Oresteia*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 131.

14. Ibid.

ROBIN BLASER

THE VIOLETS: CHARLES OLSON AND ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD

"a cosmological reading of a cosmology"[1]

The American poet who has made the most profound use of Whitehead's thought is Charles Olson. On this occasion, when I am to mull over the interchange between them, I am reminded of John Russell's remark as he begins his book on the meanings of modern art: ". . . in art, as in the sciences, ours is one of the big centuries."[2] Out of the gloom, so to speak. Olson and Whitehead are not, of course, alone, but they stand there among the most important figures. And I like to note that Olson many times expressed his view that the finest compliment one can pay to another mind and work is in the use made of them. When he died in 1970, just turned sixty and by his own reckoning ten years short of the time he needed to complete his work,[3] he was well into the third volume of a major verse epic, The Maximus Poems, which stands alongside Pound's Cantos and Williams' Paterson as a major poetic world. Besides The Maximus Poems and the poems that did not find a place in that epic structure, there are the essays and letters which propose the necessary poetic and record the struggle to find it. Olson's poetics are argumentative about the way we stand in the world and how we belong to it (stance and ethos). I wish to emphasize the word 'world' for reasons that I hope will become clear.

For Olson, as for any poet, the poetry is primary, but this poetic places before us the argued ground both of practice and of world-view. Poets have repeatedly in this century turned philosophers, so to speak, in order to argue the value of poetry and its practice within the disturbed meanings of our time. These arguments are fascinating because they have everything to do with the poets' sense of reality in which imagery is entangled with

thought. Often, they reflect Pound's sense of 'make it new' or the modernist notion that this century and its art are simultaneously the end of something and the beginning of something else, a new consciousness, and so forth. It is not one argument or another for or against tradition, nor is it the complex renewal of the imaginary which our arts witness, for, as I take it, the enlightened mind does not undervalue the imaginary, which is the most striking matter of these poetics; what is laid out before us finally is the fundamental struggle for the nature of the real. And this, in my view, is a spiritual struggle, both philosophical and poetic. Old spiritual forms, along with positivisms and materialisms, which 'held' the real together have come loose. This is a cliché of our recognitions and condition. But we need only look at the energy of the struggle in philosophy and poetry to make it alive and central to our private and public lives. We need not, I think, at this point be trapped by that view of which Geoffrey Hartman writes:

> Artistic form and aesthetic illusion are today treated as ideologies to be exposed and demystified--this has long been true on the Continent, where Marxism is part of the intellectual milieu, but it is becoming true also of America.[4]

The reality of Marxism remains, as it began, the other face of Hegel. To put it unphilosophically, the practice of either of these nineteenth-century prophecies in the twentieth century maintains one side of a dualism, on both sides of which the profound place of the aesthetic, understood as the reach of our 'perceptual faith,' in human life is short-circuited.[5] Marxism is an instrument, and an excellent one, for social analysis and the understanding of the problems of necessity for large social bodies, and, perhaps, when the wreckage of its twentieth century practice has been cleared away, it may become an instrument for the founding of social justice. In the meantime, the problem of reality--what do we mean by the real? Part of what is meant is a valuation that includes the world of earth and sky. In the greatest poetry, ancient or modern, the sense of the real is certainly not limited to that other terrifying face of humanism, necessity, an abstract word for the very real limit and terror of poverty and deprivation.[6] The pleasures of art, of philosophy, and of science are joined to us insofar as we are freed from necessity. In Europe and North America, where necessity, as yet, does not widely rule, we have the curiosity that mercantilism controls form, and art, philosophy and science do not belong to the

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. . . ."[9]

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 peartree[22]

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/now spring57/3rd [4th?] spring - White/head 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 choses 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 his 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 creare, '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. (PR II, 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" (PRII, 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 concrescence 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"[84]--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, choses 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, "Touché (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 concrescent 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, Whitehead's italics), Olson draws a line from the underlined phrase "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 χαω Tartaros." We remember that "Prehensions are not atomic; they can be divided into other prehensions and combined into other prehensions" (PRIII, I, XII).

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

cosmogony. His spelling in Greek letters of the word chaos is interesting; it appears to combine the Greek form khaos with the Indo-European root ghaw, meaning hollow. Apart from anything else, this spelling and etymology effectively distance us from the sloppy English notion of chaos as confusion. Tartaros in the Iliad is as far below Hades as the Heavens are above the Earth. These two great archaic imaginings of the depths take us back into the depth where the orders of the human imagination begin and end. An extended example of the way Olson works such translation is found outlined across two pages in Process and Reality at the end of the chapter on "Propositions" (PRII, IX). He writes:

from the induction
(ground for a probability judgment)
the statistical-- is The Actual World
status | locus | thrown down scattered
(strewn)
pavement
(ground)

I
(the world) /
1.) the tePAS

II (God)
the non-statistical (for such a judgment):
the graduate 'intensive relevances'
appetitions (starting
with G (χαω)

constituting the primordial nature of God
thus some 'novelty'
(otherwise none ----
& without it . . .

[opposite page] the condition is
hunger--stretching, straining (intensive relevances)
Mouth 56

Here, the translation outlines an image of the world as it moves from those sections in which Whitehead analyzes the statistical and non-statistical ground for probability judgments. Whitehead discusses the non-statistical ground, which depends upon the theory

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 appetition, 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 χαω, 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 'withness' 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.

SHIRLEY NEUMAN

ALLOW SELF, PORTRAYING SELF: AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN FIELD NOTES[1]

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 Lejeune[2] 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
> lost the stone maul. (17)

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> This won't
> surprise you.
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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

the Other--the seal--he has appropriated:

> dear, I whispered   (words again,
> words)   I wanted to say/I am
> writing   this poem   with my life (74)

The image, "writing   this poem   with my life," is the familiar one of engulfment by drowning in the Other that the I has encountered/appropriated. Behind it, of course, lie centuries of poetry that has imaged the Other as Woman, orgasm as drowning. But in Kroetsch's parodic poem, the I experiences no genuine threat, even when faced most intimately with the Other, for, in fact, no matter how deeply the poem's I plunges beneath the watery depths, he never stops talking, that is, never stops being human. More a Menelaeus than a Proteus, awaiting the opportunity to ask his question, he remains perfectly aware that wearing a seal skin does not make him a seal. His speech reminds both the reader and himself that the I of the poem is a man whose refusal, in the poem's opening lines, of the mirror-image, the ears of which are a man's, has led to his choice of joining the seal herd. Identification with the mirror-image is the "primordial form" of the I, Jacques Lacan tells us. This is Narcissus as "un même": only later, Lacan suggests, does the I objectify itself in the "dialectic of identification" with the image as Other. In Kroetsch's poem, in which suggestions of sexual pleasure and rebirth combine with the speaker's constant inability to forget he is a man, both refusals play. But language, Lacan tells us, transcends both these states and "restores" to the I, "in the universal, its function as subject."[14] Language bodies forth a non-solipsistic, unalienated I. And it is by speech that the I of the poem is enabled not to sink beneath the surface of or with the Other:

> well   I was still a man, I had to talk (73),

he tells us. Even as he re-forms his thoughts to his chosen metamorphosis, he speaks in terms that keep the I subject of the utterance dominant in the dialectic:

> men in their forties
> I shouted after her   are awfully good

in bed (on a sandbank   I corrected myself) (72)

The loss of identity in sexual pleasure (Renaissance image) or as release from sexual threat (Ovidian image), Kroetsch parodies, by a moment of sexual reticence, into language and poetry:

> I dared beyond the
> last limit   of whatever I thought
> I was   where, exactly, I asked, is--
>
> my only question   and when she gave
> herself/took   me out of the seen land
> this, for the gone world   I sang: (74)

"Sang" evokes a bardic tradition in which the poet speaks the history and cultural identity of his people. In the bliss of bardic speech, there is temporary escape, without drowning in the Other, from the solipsistic I into a more "universal" subject.

The poem's opening frees the I from the solipsism of self in a second way:

> I swear it was not   the hearing
> itself   I first refused
> it was   the sight of my ears
>
> in the mirror (71),

it begins. Here Emile Benveniste can be of very particular use. "I swear" he instances as an utterance with unique value. For, where "he swears" is simply description, "I swear" is an accomplishment: the act of swearing consists precisely in saying "I swear that. . . ." The moment in which the utterance posits a subject, I, is also the moment in which it accomplishes the action of the I.[15] Where the speech within "How I Joined the Seal Herd" is in the past tense, the speech of the poem, the "I swear . . .," knows no gap between subject and its action. It also introduces a new level of intersubjectivity: the dialectic is not with versions of the self but with the other partner of speech, you, invoked, in this moment, by the "I swear . . ." formula.

In a more convoluted "escape" from I, Kroetsch insistently and

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.

But even that final silence is resisted--ineffectively--by the speaker's obsessive use of I and obsessive invocation of you, an invocation among the most persistent of the poem's clichés. However, this time, the emphasis negates the I. "Believe you me," "you better believe it," "you bet you me": the repeated call for credence demands confirmation of the speaker's Self and, so doing, draws attention to the possibility of absence. And the speaker himself intimates his absence to himself; many of his utterances are negative or conditional: "If I might say so," "If I am not mistaken," "I may be wrong," "If you know what I mean," "If you see what I mean," "I can't help thinking." And most tellingly, "I've sworn off myself" (87). This speaker almost doesn't say "I," almost doesn't speak.

Moreover, to speak in cliché is to fail to acknowledge the listener the subject invokes. The appropriate response is silence. That silence IS a response has been argued by both linguists and psychotherapists, and, of course, by the experience of each of us. I cite, once again, that therapist through the Word, Jacques Lacan: "the decisive function of my own reply . . . is . . . to recognize [the subject] or to abolish him as subject."[17] Silence is one way of refusing to recognize a speaker as subject. By the time the Sad Phoenician reaches u, the death of the I is nearly complete: "I'm hardly the same myself," he begins the stanza, and he ends it, not a speaker, but "a good listener" (97). Further metamorphosis makes the I a he, neither a subject (I) or partner (you) of discourse but a linguistic sign in which that discourse trades (he). By double-u, "he" is "ready to call it quits" (99); by x, transition from u to y (or from Greek upsilon to ypsilon, that is from u to u), "he" is described as "fresh from the coast/of Ampersand, a cargo to Upsilon bound" (100). By y/ypsilon, he is arrived. "He . . . Who? him" assumes an improper name, one not his own:

. . . Pythagoras, he said
is the name, playing a long shot; he paused
and was more than a little disappointed; sir, she said,
I'll take your word
but I should tell you, . . .
. . . you've just, in that case, wiseacre, died
and she meant it (101)

In "The Silent Poet Sequence" this death of the I undergoes one more metamorphosis. This time, the I speaker OF the poem does not, until the last lines, speak IN the poem because he, in his

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; doing 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. They 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 Québecois 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: MacMilliam, 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.

GEORGE BOWERING

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 dont 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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