

## CHAPTER 4

### **The Shorter Poems – Olson’s Projective Verses**

Olson’s early poems are evidences of a difficult beginning; they began by opposing the world and enacting change. They were overwhelmed by tasks resisting their masters and by the urge to introduce innovative poetic means. This may be one of the reasons for the brevity and stiffness of these poems. As the poet Olson worked against himself, these poems worked against themselves and since their energy not yet being liberated, they are free to enter the ‘open’ field of larger forms. These poems provide valuable hints to the prediction of Olson as a great poet of emergence. They serve as a prelude to “... all that Olson will want to say about posture, stance toward reality, methodology for living, apperception of history, and the fullness of living in his later, better-known pieces” (Bollobas 66). These poems are the manifestations of Olson’s innovative projective techniques and theories.

Olson had to break with Pound in 1948, which prompted him to review his indebtedness and lack of self-reliance. Still, his gratitude to him and Williams are obvious in these poems. These poets endowed with him the kind of apprenticeship any beginning poet requires. Even though Olson leaned too much on writers like John Flinch, his classmate, Melville,

Dahlberg and Cagli for direction of work, decision making and encouragement in his later stages, he could uphold his identity as being genuine. “In each case, however, the love has been covert, & the work posed as my own. The price I have paid is the *resistance* to them, which has racked me – the pathetic struggle to keep my own ego above their water” (Creeley, *Pieces* xxiii-iv).

Olson’s poem “The Kingfishers” brought his masterpiece essay “Projective Verse” into existence. Edward Halsey Foster perceived this essay as an exposition of what Olson has accomplished in the above poem. Olson commenced his poetic career in 1948-49 and it was before his major publications such as “Projective Verse” and *The Maximus Poems*, before his trip to Yucatan and even before his tenure as a faculty in Black Mountain College. The poem would have been counted as mere ‘juvenilia’ had Olson not come to poetry as a grown up man, someone whose genius had been exhibited in two careers. Donald Allen’s anthology, *The New American Poetry* has become a milestone in literary history due to the editor’s varied choice of poets. Olson was the first in this collection and his “The Kingfishers” turned out to be the first poem. Many readers might have felt some adherence to their own lifestyles in the opening assertion of the poem: “What does not change / is the will to change”. After composing this poem, Olson analyzed it in relation to T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, the most accurate image of the age. In his letter to Robert Payne, Olson wrote,

“I had locked myself in for three weeks in an attempt to do a 1<sup>st</sup> long poem. Yesterday I put it together and looked it over, compared it to THE WASTELAND, and decided, as a practitioner of the gentle craft, I better do more work at the last” (qtd. in Paul, *Olson’s Push* xv). It was a time when his “stance towards reality” gathered momentum. The poem is a condensed version of Olson’s ideal - form as obediently extending from content and thus it turns into a reliable manifestation of the unbending complexity of its author. For people unacquainted with the flow of Olson’s energies, “The Kingfishers” may develop interpretive problems. Many consider it as a “literary polemic” that is anti-Eliot in tone. “Unfortunately, this argument begins to cohere if Olson’s widely expressed cultural opinions are totally ignored” (Merrill 65). The poem is political only in the broad sense of what Olson intends to do with *polis*. Davenport praises Olson’s depicting of “a paradigm of the process of continuity and change” and claims “The Kingfishers” as “the most modern of American poems, the most energetically influential text in the last thirty-five years, a courageous endeavor to resuscitate a poetic form worked to death between the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, the poetic meditation upon ruins” (250).

A careful reader can sense the power of energy and American modernism in “The Kingfishers”. An initial look may create the feeling that it is fragmentary that fills out space in a visual way and only word clusters

create action in the field. One will often be reminded of Pound's "ideogramic method", Williams's "field-of-action poetics" and Eliot's "collage architecture" as perfected in *The Waste Land*. It is 'open' and wide and it will stay as eternal truths of a modern thinker. Olson's voice is prophetic capable of evoking curiosity in a very basic manner, and he could be followed throughout the process of meditation. Olson wrote: "Each of these lines (of the poem) is a progressing of both the meaning and the breathing forward, and then a backing up, without a progress or any kind of movement outside the unit of time local to the idea" (*Selected Writings* 23). Meanings are revealed through the progress of syntax and breathing. The reader and the writer explore the field of thought through action and process.

"The Kingfishers" lacks any sort of preconceived pattern or does it elaborate on any preconceived ideas. Olson elaborated his rationale for composition by field – "And must stay in that state in order to accomplish what I have to do" (Merrill 84). The poet's intention to leap forward into unknown spheres gives a distinct form to his poetry. Burton Hatlen's essay entitled "Kinesis and Meaning: Charles Olson's 'The Kingfishers' and the Critics" offers an analysis of "contemporary intentional criticism" that often fails to deal with modern poetry like "The Kingfishers". He suggests the curious readers to consult eight interpretations of the poem by different critics. These writers disagree on the way they read many individual

passages and their interpretations of the poem as a whole. Hatlen finds fault with the inability of the critics to come to a rough consensus of Olson's intentions and demonstrations and says that it is the inadequacy of intentional criticism that failed to explain post modernist texts like "The Kingfishers". His attempt is to demonstrate that the poem must be read not as a sequence of images or symbols that brings forth a meaning that the poet intends to communicate, but as a verbal action or kinetic event. Once the verbal action takes to effect, it permits us to think beyond the sterile debate between alternative interpretations.

The poem is quite complex and the major puzzle appears in the opening session itself: "... Fernand, who had talked lispingly of Albers & Angkor Vat. / He had left the party without a word" (*Selected Poems* 5). Fernand continues;

... "The kingfishers  
 who cares  
 for their feathers  
 now?" (*Selected Poems* 5)

The identity of Fernand is not clearly interpreted by most of the critics. Guy Davenport suggests the possibility of this character being "Fernand Leger", but does not give any evidence to why Leger is included in this poem. George Butterick, in conversation with Olson in Gloucester in 1968, learned that Fernand had been "a mutual guest at a party given by friends

in Washington” (qtd. in Maud 25). Later Butterick found out Fernand as John Germand who worked as associate curator at the Phillips Gallery in Washington and was a painter in his own right. Varied opinions prevail regarding the significance of Fernand. Sherman Paul observes:

These verses tell us that Olson opposes all that Fernand represents. They comment ironically on the text, for intellectuals like Fernand lack the will to change. Both Fernand and Olson acknowledge the Heraclitean flux, the lapse in time of the meaning and force of tradition, the decline and fall of civilizations. (*Olson's Push* 14)

The readers perceive the genuineness of Fernand’s concern, the depth of his disillusionment with the present and the urgency of his appeal. Sherman Paul finds Fernand carrying some “negative capability” within the poem and as a representative of “sentimental intellectualism” (*Olson's Push* 10). For Merrill, Fernand is someone highly concerned with preserving an “endangered heritage” (72).

Section 2 begins and concludes with what Mao has said: “I thought of the E on the stone, and of what Mao said / La lumiere” And

Mao concluded:

nous devons

nous lever

et agir! (*Selected Poems* 7)

Here also critics differ in their speculation of Olson's invocation of Mao at this point. Davenport says that Mao, like Cortes, was exterminating a civilization with comparable cruelty out of ideological blindness. Sherman Paul disagrees with Davenport: "Mao is an example of the very thing Olson advises: he does not (necessarily or wholly) destroy civilization, as Davenport claims, but renews it by going outside its traditions, in this instance by bringing western thought (Marxism) to bear on the East" (*Olson's Push* 16).

For some critics, Mao carries a negative valence, a figure of "destructive change", a representative of "fact standing over against myth" and "the man of power" whom Olson most detested. For Sherman Paul and Robert von Hallberg, Mao carries a positive valence and is a representative of the indispensable creative change.

Olson's "The Kingfisher" does not symbolize anything. These birds existed even before the poem. The poet gained inspiration for this poem from Gernand's riveting questions at the party,

... "The kingfishers  
 who cares  
 for their feathers  
 now?" (*Selected Poems* 5)

and "The pool the kingfishers' feathers were wealth why / did the export stop?" (*Selected Poems* 5) gave him the poem. Hatlen discusses the poem

in a way that lets us to accept the poem as it is, without projecting into it any unnecessary interpretive schema, and without assigning any value to the images and their movement. Hatlen's essay insists the readers and critics to "resist the pull of the meaning" and to concentrate on what the poem *does*, "how it works as a linguistic event", and not on "what it means" (120).

Olson is accused of rephrasing Heraclitus Ephesus' (a philosopher who advocated the principle that all things are in a state of flux, coming into existence and passing away) "change alone is unchanging" or "the will to change is itself changeless" (Paul, *Olson's Push* 11) for his opening lines "what does not change / is the will to change". But this is the most discussed line of the whole poem. Fielding Dawson finds this as a legendary opening line that achieves oblique perfection through the monosyllabic spacing of breath (126). "It sets the tone of the poem, offers the axiom on change and continuity as the paradox of life, a dogma of living," says Bollobas (75). Olson had Pound and his associates in mind in the opening line – the "memorable line rallying his generation" (Paul, *Olson's Push* 10). It is a line of meditation that unfolds the activity of thought. This being in 'ideogrammic' form, permit's the poet to explore the field of thought and to cluster and continue with that tension that the many elements haunting his mind in their momentum have evoked. The advantage of such form is that it exposes thought and when one enters this



form, he will automatically become participant in its activity and discovers that its extent of field makes the poem large and important. A poem is an action and Olson's primary concern is the movement of its thought that makes him to further action. The line has mesmeric beauty that inspires for contemplation and concentration. "The subject of this meditation process shall be human history, its continuity and reality, the possibility for a renewal through knowledge" (Bollobas 75).

The rest of the opening lines constitute a chunk of six lines, each of them almost with the same length. These lines can even be read as prose since the line breaks are too mute. We encounter with "he and what he is upto with the birds" even though his identity is not revealed. "He woke up fully clothed, in his bed" (*Selected Poems* 5). He is fully clothed which means he is ready but since he is in "yesterday's clothes", he is tied to the past. He could remember the birds being loose and putting them back in their cages. The material world is displaced in the same way like the world available to memory. The birds themselves cannot think of flying to freedom since one of them has a "bad leg". Not only that, they were "got back in their cage". The thrusts and pulls hint that the birds and the cage symbolize something, but the hints remain only as hints.

The mystery behind the next unit, the Fernand passage, also remains unsolved. The language, the fragments of conversations heard at a place, becomes more interactive and spontaneous. Here, the stage is a displaced

world. We feel like reading a scene in the middle of an avant-garde novel. It is dislocated that the scene lacks a specific context. Because we feel like having some organic unity, we feel like making a link between “he” and Fernand. All identities seem to be dissolving and at the same time interpenetrating in the absence of a clear context. By using his poetic skill, Olson has made extraordinary a bit of descriptive writing, which would have remained perfectly ordinary.

In the second section, the scope of ideogram becomes broader and wider – there is an evocation to “E on the stone”, a reference to Mao’s speech at the Communist Party, an encyclopedic description of the kingfisher and Olson’s own views on the nesting practices of the bird. The poet juxtaposes two things – the stone and its message – with what Mao said, and thus, reverberating a collocation of the unchanging and the changing, old and new that is inherent in the poem from the very beginning. Mao, “celebrates the eastern light, the dawn, the opening of a new world, intersects with the image of the kingfisher, flying west toward the setting sun. The east versus the west, the old versus the new, human intension (the will to change) versus animal instinct” (Hatlen 120). The movement of this passage creates and preserves a tension between a movement towards what does not change and a forward movement into the new, the same tension existing throughout the poem.

The poet carries himself into a complex speculation in Section 3

through the themes of “perishability” and exhaustion of civilizations. Two possibilities can happen behind the appearance and disappearance of civilizations – “natural death and murder”. When people’s attention get distracted, natural death occurs, and murder is committed as a consequence of some conquest.

When the attentions change / the jungle

leaps in

even the stones are split

they rive

Or

enter

that other conqueror we more naturally recognize

he so resembles ourselves. (*Selected Poems 7*)

Everything that Olson suggested about – change and continuity, death and rebirth, attention and conquest – finds place in section four. “Not one death but many, / not accumulation but change, the feed-back proves, the feed-back is / the law” (*Selected Poems 7*). Critics say that these lines derive from Plutarch, the Greek biographer, historian, essayist, and moralist; and Norbert Wiener, an American theoretical and applied mathematician. Here a counterpoint is created between Plutarch’s dialogue “On the E at Delphi” and Norbert Wiener’s *Cybernetics*. Ammonius in Plutarch’s dialogue talks about the “ridiculous fear of one death” even though they have died so

many deaths and are still dying. Olson deconstructs this idea into a single phrase – “Not one death, but many” and juxtaposes this ancient philosophy with the technological word “feed-back”. Olson came upon this word in Wiener’s *Cybernetics* first published in 1948. Wiener’s complex definition becomes “the feed-back” which proves, ‘the feed-back is law’ to Olson. His interest in this term lies in its epistemological application, the kind of technique that man uses in obedience to the forces of nature. As Merrill puts it: “In a universe of process, of incessant change, man must assume a posture that will tap rather than obstruct the inherent energy of that change” (78).

Olson speaks in a Poundian manner in the concluding section. It is brief, visually orderly and almost regular in its quatrains.

I am no Greek, hat not th’advantage  
 And of course, no Roman:  
 he can take no risk that matters,  
 the risk of beauty least of all. (*Selected Poems* 11)

These initial lines do not exemplify Olson’s indifference in learning the classical languages. Olson was a tutor of Greek at Black Mountain College for some time but did not like to be affiliated to any sort of classical tradition. He stepped out of it, and found Rimbaud as one of his great models along with Melville, Dostoevsky, and Lawrence. Olson recognized Rimbaud’s modernity quite early and put him against Pound. Sherman Paul

had great adoration for Olson for his escape from “the Western Base in which Pound was trapped” (Paul, *Olson’s Push* 28). He commits himself to the earth and rocks, and all that “was slain in the sun”.

The final line is a gist of the central image of the poem, the metaphor of life feeding on death and also the seeming paradox of continuity and change.

I pose you your question:

shall you uncover honey / where maggots are?

I hunt among stones. (*Selected Poems* 12)

The question here is to ‘us’ even though the poet himself poses it. “I” fuses death and rebirth, literally in the same way the whole poem does. The slash mark contrasts sweetness against death, in the same manner that the slash mark in the opening line opposed changeless to the changing. The question mark holds the two opposing forces in balance. The proposition that Olson adds to the question does not form its answer in any way, but has a note of finality to it. Thus the poem ends in a note of resolution that maintains its suspense. It is not clear whether the speaker can find what he looks for “among the stones”. Perhaps the search itself may be the point.

Olson’s poem “The Praises” is inseparable from “The Kingfishers”; both the poems are cut from the same material. It completes the circle of thought “The Kingfishers” left vacant. The original draft of ‘Proteus’ has the part that became “The Praises” following sequentially after “I hunt

among stones”. “This is a powerful and complex poem on the nature of knowledge after the destruction of the tower, on the power of understanding, and also on the relationship of power and knowledge” (Bollobas 90). Olson belonged to an intellectually elite class and he never wrote for a large audience. His poems can be considered as a poetic response to arbitrary political power and unjust expansionist policy. In this context Robert von Hallberg says, “In 1950 Olson published ‘The Praises’, arguing that only elites preserve knowledge, and that knowledge and political power are essentially identical” (*Scholar’s Art* 23).

Olson begins the poem in an oracular manner: “She who was burned more than half her body / skipped out of death” (*Selected Writings* 174). It is not clear if this was a newspaper item or Olson’s personal knowledge. The woman here stands as an extreme example of the mathematics of life and death. Both the poems, “The Praises” and “The Kingfishers” came into existence under the influence of Proteus, and both share some questions in common – “The flow of life – how can it be measured? What are the laws of change and continuity? How can we fix the real in its flux?” (Maud 110). Olson lures his readers into a hermetic circle and he makes every reader an interpreter from the very beginning. Olson’s intention is that the reader should grasp the thematic meaning of the first sentence which proclaims that someone endangered by actual destruction overcame death, that is, the poem opens with a ‘death threat’. The poet uses diction and

syntax of the poem in such a way that he makes the readers believe that his knowledge is limited.

The tone of “The Kingfisher” is edgy throughout and the beginning itself is with a ‘hangover’. Olson just wanted to stir himself up into beginnings and solutions were not too handy for him. He kept some extra energy for the poem “The Praises” that he did not make use of for his earlier poems. For example, “whence it arose”, as it exists in isolation in “The Kingfishers” when it was published, was supposed to follow lines, “where the dry blood talks / where the old appetite walks” (Maud 136). The lines lost their menacing characteristic once they were picked up for “The Praises”. It is love that arises from “the throne of bone” now. “And you, o lady Moon, observe my love, / whence it arose” (*Selected Writings* 177). The following lines stress the “physiology of action and will”.

..., that mere pea of bone  
 where the axes meet, cross-roads of the system  
 god, converter, discloser, he will answer,  
 will look out, if you will look, look! (*Selected Writings* 177)

The “god” reinforced here is “converter, discloser” and this passage stresses the physiology of action and will, “... for the pea of bone is none other than the pituitary gland, whose secretions controls other glands and influence growth” (Maud 112). This feeling of “god in us”, “the counter of events into experience” otherwise called the “soul tissue” that discloses

“ourselves to ourselves in consciousness”, is capable of answering our queries. This proclaims our self-reliance and our confidence in our will to change.

The mission of human knowledge is to continue with the process of active inquiry and to influence actions. It should not be utilized to achieve complete understanding and to decode secrets and hidden mysteries and illogical riddles. This belief is the basis of Olson’s concept of the social role of a thinker. The purpose of successful intellectual career like “Apollonius of Tyana” is to influence men of political supremacy (*Selected Writings* 154-55). Every action must proceed from an ideology; otherwise it will be empty and merely materialistic.

sd he:

to dream takes no effort

to think is easy

to act is more difficult

but for a man to act after he has taken thought, this!

is the most difficult thing of all... (*Selected Writings* 175)

Olson reaffirms that thoughtful action is always the ideal one.

Whatever considered as secretive and valuable must be passed on as such without any loss and should never be considered as a riddle to solve.

What has been lost



is the secret of secrecy, is  
 the value, viz., that the work get done, and quickly,  
 without the loss of due and profound respect for  
 the materials. (*Selected Writings* 177)

Destruction follows, once the secret that is not contained is dispersed:  
 “dirty time comes, mu-sick and pejorocracy with too many having too little  
 / knowledge, and the mob takes over” (Bollobas 93). Olson talks of the  
 need of interrelationship between knowledge and action. Action must  
 follow from thought and knowledge, and it is important to keep both in  
 action. It is also mandatory to act after taking time for thought, and  
 knowledge should be passed on for “use”.

The poet uses extremely generalized and deliberately subtle  
 language in the poem and it is also meant to disclose a particular context of  
 history – “... the historical landscape of the years just after the war has  
 been eroded and wrenched until its original contours can be imagined only  
 where the terrain was particularly distinctive” (Von Hallberg, *Scholar's Art*  
 27). The poem justifies political eliticism with an ironic reference to post  
 war American foreign policy.

at is necessary is  
 containment  
 that that which has been found out by work may, by work,  
 be passed on

(without due loss of force)

for use

USE. (*Selected Writings* 178)

Creeley, in “Some Notes on Olson’s *Maximus*”, comments: “It is a sense of *use* which believes knowledge to be necessarily an *active* form of relation to term ... it is knowledge used as a means to relate, not separate” (*Quick Graph* 168-69). Olson is more concentrating on the word “containment”.

Robert von Hallberg sees political resonances in these lines. He quotes George F. Kenner’s speech in 1947. “In these circumstances it is clear that the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies” (*Scholar’s Art* 28). He also refers to Olson’s contempt for American expansionist military policy. Olson adopts the language of the contemporary politicians and their advisors. He believes in rational and cultural containment that could challenge American foreign policy, which “attempts to contain its nemesis than its own essence” (Von Hallberg, *Scholar’s Art* 27). The duty of the poets is to keep away from all corrupt dirty politics and to preserve their culture secure and potent.

Commenting on Olson’s belief in the strength of the policy of intellectual containment, Eniko Bollobas says, “I think [it can] be traced back to Pound’s controversial stand against Americans fighting on foreign land” (94).



were published and this is the mature product of his poetic career. This volume is a collection of 21 poems of which only half were new and the poet creates a new organism that carries new messages and meanings. The collection is an epitome of the poet's artistic refinement in which the poems deal with some aspects of distances, gaps and separations in varied phases of life. The poems are variations of a single theme, and thus, they attain integrity. The poet renders immense attention to every phenomenon associated with distances. A serious reader can sense an authoritative distillation of poetic themes and obsessions in this major collection. The poet declares that there has been a kind of palpable breakage or blockage in our culture, and a severe fracture between deliberation and accomplishment. Thus, the poet's mission here is to take care of the distance between figure and meaning. "The Kingfishers" leads the volume with a strong assertion of the process of change. The poem evokes a sense of loss and separation of distances that are the deliberate intruders between us and our world of reality: "Man is estranged from that with which / he is most familiar" (*Special View* 14).

Through *The Distances* Olson tries to communicate with the 'dualisms and dichotomies' that he has introduced in his critical essays. These dualisms are complex and they take various forms. For example, between thought and action, word and image, past and present, form and meaning, time and space, life and death, consciousness and the

unconscious, and thus goes the list. Merrill states:

The poems urge a complex healing process; Olson wants us to be aware of these unmanageable gaps, to be able to explain historically these civilization disjunctions, the desire to go back intellectually to those roots and origins where the gaps do not yet exist, and to recharge the energies through which original unities can be reestablished. (98)

“In Cold Hell, in Thicket” is a thematic representation of the distance as such, the distance built of abstractions and boundaries, and these seeming parallels can be united by men brought through creativity commended by the environment. The poet makes use of the methods of “The Kingfishers” successfully in this poem. It is a quest for knowing and understanding man’s possibilities for identifying his ways in the “thickets” of the world. It is a live image of the plight of human beings imprisoned in the “Hell” and the “Thicket”, and the desperate struggle of man to find a way out of it.

The poem is an attempt to know the world and the self in a projective way, as Olson comments, “living out” in one’s personal life. In this context, Creeley said in “A Quick Glance”, “The whole area of how we now live, or can live, is part of Mr. Olson’s attack” (*Quick Graph* 155). The problem is delineated in the form of question in the first part.

In cold hell, in thicket, how  
abstract (as high mind, as not lust, as love is) how

strong (as strut or wing, as polytope, as things are  
 constellated) hw  
 strung, how cold  
 can a man stay (can men) confronted  
 thus? (*Selected Poems* 15)

The opening situation presents man dealing with a thicket world with the following parameters: “it is abstract (nonphysical, no particular), strong (a world supported by beams or a frame resisting pressure), strung (with a web like interior, of wires and threads intertwining), and cold” (Bollobas 95). Under these circumstances, he feels confused, numb and helpless – he is easily “tossed up and knocked down”. Olson wonders if man could ever raise himself above this hell of chaos. “God, that man, as his acts must, as there is always / a thing he can do, he can raise himself, he arises / on a reed he raises his...” (*Selected Poems* 15). The speaker is in the ground of an old fort when it snows lightly. He is in the midst of a thicket where the snow slings in clear patterns. The “Cold Hell” of the title represents the emotional numbness that he experiences as he views the reminder of death and bloodshed. He could not easily comprehend the huge size and multiple contours of the fort. The poet is in a mood of frustration in the beginning as the fort remains unchanged and it could not engage his perception. He fails to attribute a new vision and meaning to it and he expresses his feelings of obscurity and embarrassment that haunts him throughout. This image

makes the poet's confusion quite clear; he is tortured for being non-specific and is totally disappointed in his present condition.

How shall he who is no happy, who has been so made  
unclear,

Who is no longer privileged to be at ease, who, in this brush,  
stands

Reluctant, imageless, unpleasured, caught in a sort of hell,  
how

Shall he convert this underbrush, how turn this unbidden  
place

How trace and arch again

The necessary goddess? (*Selected Poems* 16)

The second part of the first section reestablishes the poet's urge to understand how the outside objects adversely affect his interiors. The confusion is frustrating and his speech becomes abrupt and nervous.

The branches made against the sky are not of use, are  
already done, like snow-flakes, do not, cannot service  
him who has to raise (Who puts this on, this damning of his  
flesh?)

he can, but how far, how sufficiently far can he raise the  
thickets of

this wilderness? (*Selected Poems* 16)

He asks whether it is possible to change the awkwardness of “these black and silver knivings” or to build some wagon or other vessel “fit for moving” (*Selected Poems* 16). “If the creative gesture of ‘trace and arch’ is not carried out here in space, then the dimension of time takes over, accumulating ‘dissolving bones’ in the embrace of mud” (Bollobas 96).

Part 3 begins with a rebounding question upon the self – “Who am I?” It is a quest for identity. The answer to this puzzle and the earlier question, what the fort really means to him involve the realization of the self’s innate complexities:

As in this thicket, each  
 smallest branch, plant, fern, root  
 -roots lie, on the surface, as nerves are laid open-  
 must now (the bitterness of the taste of her) be  
 isolated, observed, picked over, measured, raised  
 as though a word, an accuracy were a pincer! (*Selected  
 Poems* 17)

Even though man’s awareness of his spatial identity is bleak with its “ego-deflating reductionism” (Merrill 107), Olson considers this as one positive aspect of the advantages of space as man gains entry in the universe of objectism as a particle. He states in “Notes for the Proposition: Man Is Prospective”:

Man as object is equitable to all other nature, is neutron, is on the



one hand thus no more than a tree or pitchblende but is, therefore, returned to an abiding place, the primordial, where he can rest again as he did once with less knowledge to confirm his humilitas. (3)

The opening line of the Second Section, “ya, selva oscura” is an allusion to the second line of Dante’s *Inferno*. The speaker of that poem is also confronted with a difficult situation, that is, he finds himself in a “dark wood”, incapable of extricating himself from a rough and stubborn thicket, that will make his descent into hell. The speaker of the poem makes a discovery:

... but hell now  
 is not exterior, is not be got out of, is  
 the coat of your own self, the beasts  
 emblazoned on you...(Selected Poems 18)

He will never be escorted to his own salvation. The boundaries are not clearly earmarked for heaven, hell and purgatory in the modern world. Other than what the speaker is exposed to in this world, there isn’t much estrangement or deeper obscurity. He “stands so awkward where he is” because “his feet are held, like some ragged crane’s / off the next ground.” He “looks down in utmost pain” bearing in mind the remnants of the old fort’s meaning. What becomes visible to him is a battlefield, where men die, boys and immigrants fall and nature being totally ignored. “...that men killed, do kill, that woman kill / is part, too, of his question” (*Selected*

*Poems* 19). The speaker is reminiscent of Carlyle's "Teufelsdröckh", the imaginary German Professor in the second and last part of Section II. He realizes where exactly the hell and heaven are located:

that a man, men, are now their own wood  
 and thus their own hell and paradise  
 that they are, in hell or in happiness, merely  
 something to be wrought, to be shaped, to be carved, for use,  
 for  
 others (*Selected Poems* 19)

This revelation, in no way, could reduce the intensity of his numbness at the moment, but it supports him to make a trial of the initial phase of clarification within, that is symbolically presented as the "first step across the field," the very same place where his feet came to a halt for the first time.

He shall step, he  
 will shape, he  
 is already also  
 moving off  
 into the soil, on to his own bones  
 (*Selected Poems* 19)

The poem ends with the speaker freely moving towards self revelation utilizing the excitement that he gained from a wilderness. The thicket has

now grown larger behind him. “The terms of this confrontation, the fear and resolve to meet it and transform its particulars into understanding, lead him to a larger epiphany” (Paul, *Olson’s Push* 104). His existence itself is his struggle with such wilderness. “He will cross / And is bound to enter (as she is) / a later wilderness” (*Selected Poems* 20). Here, we sense the motive behind the poem. The poet dramatizes the different phases of his logical argument through the metaphors of wilderness, fort and movement across snowy fields. They come face to face with the meaninglessness of a historical monument and are carried away by all its power to negate with his previous knowledge. Although he is still under the clutches of uncertainty, otherwise in a state of enriched understanding, something that emerges from within makes him to move again and to wait for the oncoming encounter of mere nothing.

“In Cold Hell, in Thicket” is noted for its use of the language. It has the quickness of pace and if constant attention is not rendered to the bizarre forms, one may overlook them. The poet achieves one of his dictums of Projectivism: “One Perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception” (*Selected Writings* 17). The argument of the poem may often appear to be incomprehensible, but the reader can swiftly get familiarized with the passages that make them meaningful. The opening question of the poem lacks “defined reference,” but it carries apparent sense – how can a person remain, balanced in a certain sort of confusion?

The question is the product of some desperation and the questioner is under a severe urge to be a witness to experience. The speaker introduces the issue dramatically and the reader finds himself as a supervisor of the oncoming event. Another peculiar feature of this poem is Olson's use of parenthesis. In the opening section he uses it in the very conventional manner whereas he starts experimenting with it in the following sections he uses both open ended and closed brackets. Parenthetical expressions appear as insertions on the main poem and they serve as distinctive models of his projectivism in practice.

*Archeologist of Morning*, published in 1973, is a collection of all the poems Olson authorized for publication, other than *The Maximus Poems*. Merrill calls this collection as “an intriguing sobriquet” (134) that has its origin in Olson's essay “The Present is Prologue”, where Olson finds it embarrassing to call himself as a poet or a writer. “If there are no walls there are no names. This is the morning after the dispersion, and the work of the morning is methodology: how to use oneself, and on what. That is my profession. I am an archaeologist of morning” (*Additional* 40). Most of the poems in this collection tend towards Olson's Sumerian ideal, “the will to cohere” (*Human Universe* 21). One peculiar aspect of this collection is that it doesn't have any pagination and Olson explores the advantages of the typewriter to the maximum – a typical ‘projective’ or ‘open-field’ technique. It lacks the finishing touch of *The Distances*. It is an instance of

a comprehensive appreciation of Olson's range. Olson was highly innovative in his outlook and he was obliged to experimenting with the maximum extent he could "stretch the very conventions on which communication by language rests," (*Human Universe* 56) and he executed it in a very straightforward manner.

Olson is at his 'straightest' in the opening poem "Lower Field – Enniscorthy". The poem is free of projective principles and it is more pastoral. It is a vivid description of the Virginia landscape with the liberal use of comparisons, rhymes and similes.

The sheep like soldiers  
 black leggings black face  
 lie boulders  
 in the pine's shade  
 at the field's sharp edge:  
 ambush and bivouac (*Archaeologist*)

Olson had a very modest beginning as a poet with small poems like "Lower Field – Enniscorthy", "A Lion upon the Floor", "Troilus", "Only the Red Fox, Only the Crow", "Pacific Lament", "In the Hills South of Capernaum, Port", and "Name Day Night". These poems are "chiefly exercises, somewhat stiff and formal, mostly in tutelage to Williams and Pound, and still dependent on Elizabethan music and /metaphysical/ discourse" (Paul, *Olson's Push* 4). Often, these poems lack "the charged

emotions” that Pound insists on poetry and his major concern is with the visual shape, format, and design of the poem. Olson’s poems are not virtually independent on their own; they have certain kind of indebtedness intrinsic in them, though they address his occasions. “Lower Field – Enniscorthy” is an exercise aimed at the attention of the readers, the attention prerequisite of stance, in which the direct presentation of the landscape is impaired by the introduction of a simile, namely, “The sheep like soldiers”. This simile and the closing lines: “Report: overall / the sun” are borrowings from Pound, and Olson’s indebtedness to imagism and Williams are also apparent in these lines.

This is a typical literary poem even if one might witness instances of ‘projectivism’ here and there. The poetic devices make its content effective. The static scene is charged by the metaphysical way of comparison of the sheep and soldier. Expressions like “ambush and bivouac” add metaphysical tension to it. The words like “muck” followed by “mud and squawk”, “sky” and “sty” add favorable environment for the “convocation of crows”. The third stanza, “A bee is deceived / takes the rot of a stump / for honeycomb,” stands for a “blatant pathetic fallacy” (Merrill 136). “Two black snakes cross / in a flat spiral” is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden that proceeds to the final mystery in the last two lines that is a metaphor from the military, referred to in the first stanza. The ‘Report’ can mean military’s official “morning report”. The greatest achievement of the poem

is that it offers tremendous relief to all its explicators.

An initial look at the second poem “A Lion Upon the Floor” seems to possess immediate affinity to Wallace Stevens’ “Poetry is a Destructive Force” and it has a tendency to yield effective energy to those who are unfamiliar with Olson’s “stance”. Olson modifies the famous nursery rhyme “Sing a Song of Six Pence” to employ his favourite device – serial opposition. His method is to juxtapose and intersperse the stanzas with his idiosyncrasies.

Begin a song

Power and the abstract

distract a man

from his own gain

Begin a song of six cents (*Archaeologist*)

Olson was influenced by Keats and the words like “Power” and “the abstract” are probably are from Keats’ “Man of power” and “irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Merrill 136). The reader gets distracted once he diverts his attention from song to abstraction. “Power and the abstract” is one of the distractions of man that curtails his natural size. The song is noted for its typical didacticism. In “Begin a Song of Six Cents”, Olson Americanizes the English currency pence to cents, and it is symbolic of the bodily sense that Olson highlights in *Proprioception* (*Additional* 17-9). This sort of sense, otherwise called “objectism” is “a thing among

things” that is devoid of the “lyrical interference of the individual as ego” (*Human Universe* 59).

The poem is an attempt to rouse the majestic lion that is lying quite helplessly upon the floor. “Power and abstract” are instrumental in making the lion visually impaired and physically disabled. The poet starts his “serial opposition” at this point. “Let the salt in / begin / cut the heart open”. The purpose of singing a song is to let the salt in and to start cutting the heart open, so that blood will flow from it. The reference here is to the severe physicality of Aztec sacrifices which was brutally awesome. Aztec rituals epitomize a means of existence in collaboration with the cosmic powers. Olson doesn’t look at things from any ethical point of view, his approach is rather aesthetic and he finds the ceremonies as a means of expressing nature’s intricacies. Man has lost his bond with nature and “Power and abstract” are his major opponents. He insists on ‘renaturalization’ to accomplish the reestablishment of a proper stance to nature. “. . .the blood will run with the sun / the wind will put the belly back / and the rain the roar below” (*Archaeologist*). Man will achieve a passive nature, so that he becomes obedient to natural forces and he eagerly waits for the lion to spring.

“Troilus” is more didactic in its output. The poet explains love; not the sentimental love of Troilus and Cressida, where Troilus, the son of King Priam of Troy, is being deserted by his lover Cressida, the daughter of



Calchus, a Trojan seer who defected to the Greek side. Troilus represents everyone being forsaken by love and this ideal is the poet's major concern throughout the poem. The poet looks at the present world devoid of love: "Love is not present now, / has flown". Thus the poet transforms everyone into Troiluses, for all are being deserted by their lover – nature, whom man has turned into a "whore". Love has flown even from human relations and "man and women breed by kiss and glance". The poet puts a pertinent question: "Why should love live / when all that should enforce it fails". This poem can be read as a sequel to "The Human Universe" where Olson gives a vivid account of the "scientific process" in which man turned nature into a whore. Science deprives women of all respect that ought to be bestowed upon her, and thus, makes every Troiluses disvalue their Cressidas. The result is that "All nature falls". The message of love is "blown along the path papers, dust / cloth ...". For the poet, love appears to have nothing to do with finality and its consequences are presented as a process in which objects are formed and these objects are articulated through the medium of attention and presence. Genuine love alone is capable of bringing back man to "that feature nature wore / before man turned her, woman, whore".

The closing lines recapitulate the significance of love. "The way, love is / the way!" The poem has impressive rhyming patterns and is stylized in a non projective manner. Still, it bears some pre-conceived

notions of the forthcoming innovations, like “breath” as “what we inherit”, the poet’s own confusion with the concept of love as an abstract entity, man’s subjecting of nature to prostitution and the final premonition – “love is the way” even though it is unattended.

Next poem in the sequence, “Only the Red Fox, Only the Crow” adheres more to Horace’s “carpe diem” where he expresses the idea that one should enjoy life while one can. It is a continuation of the love motif of the previous poem. Here, those who are dead and gone, whose life in this earth is gone forever, direct the living on the essential priorities. “You who come after us / you who can live when we are not / make much of love” (*Archaeologist*). The narrator presents his perspective by glorifying the life on earth with the plight of the dead.

You to whom the spring can return  
when we will merely correlate a worm  
enjoy the envy  
in this blind glance (*Archaeologist*)

Life on this earth is beautiful whereas for the dead, the charm of life is only a thing of the past. Like Shelley, Olson reiterates on the common human weakness of “pining for what is not”. The speaker cherishes the sweet memories of the fascinations of physical love. Love is the conqueror of time that bridges generations, and links the living and the dead.

And when, on summer field

two horses run for joy  
 like figures on a beach  
 your mind will find us,  
 as we have found,  
 within its reach. (*Archaeologist*)

The dead find the living as “envoys” and they insist on the living to “make most of love”. Olson thus gives a hint at his later imperative concerning resistance to death.

A close look at the early poems of Olson easily reveals the formal conflict between the traditional and projective drives. Not sure of whether being in the “open field”, the poet often attaches himself to comforting traditional landmarks. Olson adds his own propositions to the Old Testament Commandments in the persona of Jesus in “In the Hills South of Capernaum” and thus renders a “restatement of the moral dicta of Jesus” (Aiken 29). The poem is a skillful dramatic construction that resuscitates Jesus Christ and makes him comment on the “Mosaic decalogue” (Merrill 140). It is an attempt on the Christian intensification of the Commandments with an Olson touch. Loyalty to the familiar and the natural is considered as a major injunction. “Take the natural for base / assume your nature as a bird his or the grass” (*Archaeologist*). These lines anticipate the very same ideas in “The Human Universe”:

When I look at the filth and lumber which man is led by, I see

man's greatest achievement in this childish accomplishment – that he damn well can, and does, destroy destroy destroy energy every day. .... Man was made himself an ugliness and a bore. It was better to be a bird, as these Maya seem to have been, they kept moving their heads so nervously to stay alive.

*(Human Universe 63-4)*

Even though the poem is inclusive of all the common Olson themes, it is highly derivative and contrived, and fails to project the ethical intensification it is supposed to convey. Olson's early poems insist on natural physical being and resistance to death and poetry serves as an option on behalf of them. "Fuller being: the life of the body, the senses, gusto, love; location in the world: ground, roots, salt; new attentions – these are his demands" (Paul, *Olson's Push* 5). With this objective, he looks to Jesus and transposes his words to his own ends. The poet would bravely face death, be perfect without any double allegiance, take the natural for base and teach as one having spiritual authority. He aims to achieve this in poetry and to find a way to decline the world of power and abstraction without surrendering his public concern.

"The Story of Olson and Bad Thing", written in early June of 1950, goes close to Olson's major preoccupations that would find their fulfillment in "Projective Verse", "The Human Universe", and "The Resistance". The poem is a gathering of the fragrance of violets and it

celebrates “the smell of Olson’s life.” The opening line introduces “Bad Thing”, an “unparticularized enemy”, which came at night and ate the heart. This enemy faces strong opposition in the form of man’s stubbornness, especially the stubbornness of Olson that “smelled of violets”. Olson’s father was a victim of this stubbornness that made him yield to death not because of the “breakdown by nerves” but by the breaking of blood vessels. While ruminating on his predicament, the poet realizes that his fate will be different from his father’s because of the immediate revelation of a stubbornness – “my time is quantitative and must thus, be turned to space”. Olson, as evident from the essay “Notes for the Proposition: Man is Prospective”, strongly trusts in “antithesis to time, secrets of a humanitas eased out of contemporary narrows” (2). “The easing of space” forms Olson’s basic defense against “Bad Thing”.

The poem combines assorted energies in the opening part, which are perceived as an integrated whole, once viewed through Olson’s “stance towards reality”. “The violets Bolyai senior” forms a leit motif throughout the poem that solicits our obedience and invites through their “smell of life” otherwise called the life in us, “that which we are in the hands of”. Bolyai, the [Hungarian](#) mathematician, was of the view that men spring up like violets on the hillside during spring when they are in demand, and thus, confirm the “creative aim” of universe, as Whitehead calls it. Ann Charters writes that Olson specifically cited Whitehead as one among such

hillside violet:

So it comes out like those violets of Bolyai Senior on all sides when men are needed, that we possess a body of thinking the order of Whitehead's to catch us up where we wouldn't naturally poke our hearts in and to intensify our own thought just where it does poke. (*Olson/Melville* 84-5)

Olson's father, who "broke his blood vessels" revealing "where the fragrance is," forms another example.

"Part 2" deals with the limitations of human race and how the creator "damned the race with". "It wasn't only stupidity / the creator damned the race with. It was shortness of life (what Bad Things feeds on, knows how to nibble at)". Men could manage to overcome this damnation by following the authority of a different regimen: "And that which we go by / in the running, breath, breath, which can, as the flesh can, give off / the odor of, same flowers" (*Archaeologist*). Contradictory to the "smell of violets" – an environment best suited for men, stands its negative counterpart – "the whole stink" that evolved from "original sin". Olson has only contempt towards the western society that stinks and at present, it possesses, "The sweetest kind of essence, violets / is the smell of life". Violet's fragrance transfigures into a sort of "antirationalist touchstone" in Part 3.

Of the brains, which always, always wants

what it can't have because they ain't

Answers, I mean,

which have no smell at all (*Archaeologist*)

In "Part 4", explicit tactics are employed against the atrocities of the "Bad Thing". Time comes up with a very solid solution for the present turmoil. "The only trick, the only way you save your thing, or whatever, is / obey, obey, until you've squeezed out of, out of me, out of me who / is yr onlie enemie ...". The poem continues by glorifying "violets". "The sweetest kind of essence, violets / is the smell of life" (*Archaeologist*). The question here is to squeeze the smell of violets out of time. "The smell of these flowers" is a serious business and the speaker does not want to answer how the flowers gained their fragrance. It doesn't matter even if it is reproduced by the humans. Nature, "does it everyday", "by way of woman". Fragrance is something different and the poet is under the impression that "only those with / the nose for it" alone can squeeze the "smell of violets". As in "The Story of Olson, and Bad Thing": "It is still something, the fragrance, that only those with / the nose for it can smell and / CAN GIVE OFF" (*Archaeologist*). The poet muses over the appearance of the elite, who was "among distant tribes" as presented in Part 3: "And why he, after he pushed through so many tribes, / had eaten little more than prickly pears, / and sucked reeds for water," (*Archaeologist*).

The way the elite came out was curious to watch, that he emerged from a point, what the natives address as “the place of the heart”.

... he carefully took the things he had made (despite Bad Thing, and his bothering) and instead of disposing them in so many ways that would occur to you, he merely set them out there

where the rest of the causes of confusion are. (*Archaeologist*)

It is the lesson of “objectism” that the ‘quester’ learned in “the place of the heart”, which to him is the means to get rid of the difficulties in his finished work and thus have his art “twin” rather than imitate nature. The rest of the poem is framed on this “objectist” background. The poet makes a call to “return to space” which means restoring what was once being “familiar” to man, and thus liberating him from time and discourse which is a distraction for men from taking his “place alongside the things of nature” (*Human Universe* 60).

The poet laments over the lost values in “PART LAST” of “The Story of Olson, and Bad Thing”:

And because there is no soul (in the old sense),  
because there is not (at the old stand, there, now, they sell  
gold from teeth,  
& from burned bones, fertilizers) (*Archaeologist*)



Everything that belonged to the past is looking forward to their turn to “be born out of”. The poet expresses his optimism once he announces, “There is birth!” The poet urges the readers to follow the “smell of violets” and appreciate “why there is so much blood / all over the place”. He in turn will speak like “broken grass” that is under flood and desperately “tries to breathe, to breathe!”

*Y & X* constitute Olson’s first book of poems published in 1948, and it contained five poems which were later included in other volumes. These poems were written at a time when Olson ended his political career to embark on a new venture in poetry, which was three years immediately after World War II. They have typical Olsonian themes, but are yet to attain his formal inventiveness. It was the period right before his Black Mountain stay, before “Projective Verse” essay in particular. They act as witnesses to Olson’s intellectual maturity – “they record the steps of his becoming aware and conscious of his choice of vocation and of all that this choice entails” (Bollobas 69). Poems like “The K” and “The Green Man” are catalytic of Olson’s becoming a poet, his emerging and development. Apparently, these poems seem to have been influenced by Olson’s friendship with Corrado Cagli, the Italian painter who lived in the USA during World War II, and the various issues related to it. Two poems, “The Moebius Strip” and “Trinacria”, represent Cagli’s drawings, and they are noteworthy for the reality that Olson identified – his “recognition of a

world-in-motion where outside is inside and militant resistance is the requisite stance” (Paul, *Olson’s Push* 6). “The K” and “La Preface” celebrate Olson’s friendship with Cagli by the way of tarot that he taught Olson. Olson met Cagli, the refugee from Fascist Italy, in 1940. He recalls this encounter in “La Preface”: “It was May, precise date, 1940. I had air my lungs could breathe. / He talked, via stones a stick sea rock a hand of earth. / It is now, precise, repeat” (*Selected Writings* 160). Along with Creeley, Cagli was also a partner in Olson’s emergence and the emergence of a new generation. Another reason for the publication of this book was Olson’s rejection of Pound.

Three of the poems in *Y & X* directly deal with the themes of emergence. Olson called “The K” as his “go away poem” from politics. It “optimistically marks the start of a new direction for Olson, for Truman, for the nation and ultimately for civilization in quest of that state of attention that is possible only when man is totally involved with ‘that he is not familiar’ – a human universe” (Merrill 147). Olson declined two government positions in January 1945, once he decided “to write like for ever”. This poem is Olson’s response to Truman’s assumption of office. It begins with Olson’s revelation, “there is a tide in a man”, the recognition of which brings about the obedience to the inner voice otherwise called the “life within” that Olson himself was undergoing. This calling acquires cosmic dimensions – the tide “moves him to his moon” so that, he becomes

the fuller being expressed by the “tumescant I”. Disciplined self concern had the potential to lead him to a new crest that is tumescence as much as a crust. Whatever tumescant his egotism is, the new crest would remain public.

The following stanza is a premonition to the poet’s future, and the “affairs of men remain a chief concern” for him who is gradually withdrawing from the world. The poet is worried of a premature death because of “the small fatal male life span” and he is under the impression that he “shall not see the year 2000”. The poem gains its inspiration from the ‘tarot pack’ and the spirit of vocational crisis the nation and the poet share. It is a witness to the tides of man and the nation which are under the spell of “lunar” forces far beyond human consciousness. Such an echo of fatalism emerges when he says: “I shall not see the year 2000 / unless I stem straight from my father’s mother, / break the fatal male small span” (*Selected Writings* 159). The poet is often haunted by the fact that the Washington custodians of the affairs of men were uniformly mean. Once he withdrew from a public career as a politician to poetic vocation, he bids farewell to the world of “romans, hippocrats and christians”.

Full circle: an end to romans, hippocrats and christians.

There! Is a tide in the affairs of men to discern

Shallows and miseries shadows from the cross,

ecco men and dull copernican sun. (*Selected Writings* 159)

Olson's interests were varied – from studying literature at Wesleyan, to literature and history at Harvard, from literature to politics at Washington, and finally from politics back to literature. He wanted himself to be out of Washington, even out of the terms of Washington history – “he wanted a clean slate, but needed an alibi for so broad an erasure – Truman sufficed” (Von Hallberg, *Scholar's Art* 6-7).

The poet's inner vision to restore a human universe flows on the tide with intense interest and it spreads the miseries and shadows of “eccomen and dull copernican sun”. During this juncture, “Our attention is simpler / The salts and minerals of the earth return”. Attention is a word of greater importance to Olson and it “implies a state of complete fidelity to the objectist stance, a state of absorption so complete that no room remains for abstractions or references” (Merrill 147). He claimed it as the chief source of our very existence as human beings, and while talking about the case of tigers, Olson points out that they do not have anything to do and are not involved with attention. That is, if one pays attention, “the experience outside is definitely identical with the experience inside” (“Under the Mushroom” 49).

“La Preface” embarks Olson's poetic career and it forms the opening poem of his 1948 brochure. It also discloses Italian refugee painter Corrado Cagli's influence on him. Cagli talked by way of stones and his

knowledge of English was too little. When Olson met Cagli for the first time in 1940, the month when the Germans started invading France, like prehistoric cavemen, they began without any language. This was an advantage for both of them: “the tricks of language drain the humanity from experience: Jews are labeled Displaced Persons, then DPs, then they are bones” (Von Hallberg, *Scholar's Art* 8). There was a visible diversion in Olson's attitude when both of them met again after the war. Olson's interests had been “dehistoricized” and he was working on a book about human psychology –*Bigman's Organs*. Cagli being a witness to Hitler's concentration camps had made many drawings. For him, the moment of history is a pile of bones. The poem is a response to World War II, an event that is contributory to the final breaking down of human civilization. The poet portrays history by referring to the Altamira cave paintings of Buchenwald. The poem can be interpreted in comparison with Yeats's “The Second Coming”, where the poet says: “Things fall apart; the center cannot hold, / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world” (Parini 1115). Olson is of the notion that new life can be built on this devastated land of power and ego: “The dead in via / in vita nuova / in the way” (*Selected Writings* 160). Both Cagli and Olson were born in 1910 and they were of the firm belief that guns can be transformed into arms capable of establishing a new horizon. These two new heroes shall lay hands on the corpse of Buchenwald so that a refined Osiris will exorcise the great repugnance of

genocide. “Open, the figure stands at the door, horror his / And gone, possessed, o new Osiris, Odysseus ship” (*Selected Writings* 161). The new men no longer need any gun and want to proclaim that, “We are born not of the buried but these unburied dead / Crossed stick, wire-led, Blake Underground” (*Selected Writings* 161). They are already witnesses to the birth of “The Babe / the Howling Babe”.

“The Moebius Strip” and “Trinacria” are directly related to Cagli’s drawings and are noteworthy for the sense of reality that they establish “Olson’s recognition of a world-in-motion where outside is inside and militant resistance is the requisite stance” (Paul, *Olson’s Push* 6). “The Moebius Strip” is rather strange, but a powerful poem with its sensual struggling energy which creates the final impression of self-contained active absorption. The title is an allusion to the finite boundlessness which is characteristic of the moebius strip providing a new space-time terrain for the different activities of the individual who inherits it. The various elements of the strip like the terrain, the figures, and even the poem itself are topologically continuous and connected, and their movement is portrayed in the concluding lines –

Their bare and lovely bodies sweep, in round  
of viscera, of legs  
of turned-out hips and glance, bound  
each to other, nested eggs

of elements in trance. (*Selected Writings* 163)

“Trinacria” is a formal invitation to come into the open field. The poet explicitly states that fighting “behind a shield” is a cowardly act, a “separate weak of the world” that disdains all available energies which “sprung from no dream”. If a person is unaware of the significant goings within him and is just concentrating on the actions “outside”, then the reality he possesses is only “half slain”. Whitehead’s epistemological notion that one should visually and bodily apprehend the world lies behind the poem. In *Proprioception*, Olson states that “one’s life is informed from and by one’s own literal body, which provides the DEPTH implicit in physical being” (*Additional* 18). The warrior who fights behind a shield, who fights only with Whitehead’s notion of “presentational immediacy” is going to be “whirled by sons of self” and would not win any “fleece”. The poet introduces his concept of a proper martial stance once he says:

Join sword and shield, yield

Neither ground, contend

And with one stroke behead

The three, the enemy (*Archaeologist*)

“This” is Olson’s “bull-fight” poem and it views “attention” from a dramatic perspective. The poem is noted for a vivid description of the arena.

... : very fast, high, sharp

rockets, a crazy trumpet

of a band, few

people, sloppy

cowboys picadors matadors bulls (*Archaeologist*)

The poet could not distinguish between the bull fight and attention. “This” is an “instant declaration of that which you know is all / that constitutes both what you are and what is going on at all time”. In this bullfight, the bull “is / involved” without any fear and his only interest is in confrontation, while “the men” who claim to be “so much more animal”, too “are involved” in a mood of “pretential courage”. The bull’s experience is quite transparent and it is “so very clever”; it is not clouded, whereas the man’s by fear. Both could perceive the intensity of the “attentiveness” that plain danger bears:

*this bull and this man (these men) can*

*kill*

*one another (Archaeologist)*

The poem elaborates on Olson’s Mexican experiences and it denotes the beginning of his sojourn and he addresses a Mexico quite familiar to the readers. This extraordinary re-enactment of the bullfight concludes with “you / have been / asked”. As Sherman Paul remarks: “Mexico asked him to change his life – to seek life – and he did, which is why Mexico is of such moment in his emergence and why his Mexico (Yucatan, of course, is



different) is life-giving, unlike the Mexico of many writers who preceded him” (Paul, *Olson’s Push* 61).

Olson expressed his disagreement with Pound in one of his letters to Creeley from Lerma. “Ez sounds so flat, when, he is just talking, when, he is outside the Cantos, say, that walker of his, than which there is, yet, no better” (*Selected Writings* 83). Whether Bohemian or not, he rejected the social protest with his special view of history. He is under the impression that “Ez is a traitor as Dante was, to Florence” (*Selected Writings* 84) and he also condemns the archaeological establishment for their sole interest to discover more about the economic and political life of ancient Maya. He shares the view that Pound sold out art for material benefits. The next poem in the series, “Issue Mood” is a “custard-pie” version of Olson’s dissent with Pound. The poet admits that his mind

still go funny, in the face of

him on money

Like

people say, right in the face of

(prat): not chuman not chuman not

Hoomin (*Archaeologist*)

Pound is a comically bizarre character on matters of money and he is like a pie in the face. The economy of the world is deteriorating and it is “HARD METAL vs. NATIONAL DEBT”. Olson, being a “newt dealer” remarks

that “the creature” still breathes and asks his “Poet-Economist” friend:

Comes

the revolution, does

this laborer lose

this labor of

his arm?

Or this Lake,

Maracaibo, its

oil? (*Archaeologist*)

Revolutions and movements are only abstractions and the realities are “oil and the works of man’s hand”. He raises the fitting question – who has actually gone wrong? It is followed by a question of identity of Pound, “who / be thee? be thee / one of the Innocents?” Pound is a spokesperson of Bohemia. But Olson could not agree with his ways of reforming society. Pound’s habit is “to look to society to make it new” and this exemplifies the kind of moral and ethical degeneration on his part. “The Cause and Cave”, is an expression of the psychological estrangement of man illustrated through one of the “fiercest imperatives” of literary world – Othello’s intention to murder Desdemona. Olson unfolds his favourite theme: “Man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar” (*Special View* 14) as a parallel to Carl Jung’s ingenuity. Jung’s theory says that there are two phases to human personality – “the logos” related to

masculine clarity of consciousness and reason, and “anima” which refers to the presence of feminine figure in the unconscious mind. Man is artificially “halved” dividing his conscious and unconscious self as Jung has stated. Both logos and anima co-exist in a healthy integrated psyche, a clear manifestation of the Heraclitean union of opposites, and Olson considered it as the core of reality and art.

The beginning of the poem, “The Cause, the Cause” is a paradigm of the union of logos and anima by means of:

the rods and cones of, a pigeon’s or, a rabbit’s  
eye, or be  
who, man, is that woman you now dream of, who  
woman, is that  
man (*Archaeologist*)

In the iconography of Venus, pigeons and rabbit are considered standard and they suggest something of the quality of love’s vision (Merrill 152). In visual anatomy, rods constitute one of the rod like cells in the retina of the eye and sensitive to low intensities of light and like anima, extend the range of sensitivity irrespective of being crude in sound details. Cones act as parallel to the logos in such a way that their role is to choose fine details, create discriminations and identify varied colour patterns. In the second part, the poem re-emphasizes the distinction between masculine and feminine principles by saying “his sort of looking out by cones” and “her

rods”.

The poem is based on the ideal that any psyche is a combination of both masculine and feminine qualities and the gender determining factor is merely a “hair’s” difference. Psyche is some sort of battle ground, and logos and anima are warring lovers:

it is the cause, yes, and the movements contain, the nightmare  
 is  
 the day’s ambiguous responses, her  
 harassments, his  
 flying off, (*Archaeologist*)

Olson skillfully creates an accurate account of Desdemona similar to her behaviour in the play, and along with that he portrays a vivid disagreement between the logos and anima – “he smothered her”. Such an outcome is indispensable in a tragedy, but the nature of tragedy is different when viewed psychically. Othello found it hard to free his “half-self” from her “likeness’ and thus he

... carried (jealous)  
 buried, you can say, and no more mirroring her - no, not at  
 all, in fact  
 a she, initiate with himself alone, another creature concealed  
 in him -  
 a female male to him his confession - made male by one

point short majority (*Archaeologist*)

The logos in Othello is quite confused by the “female-male” in him, and wants to be released from the “buried half” otherwise called “the creature concealed in him” or the anima. The tragedy does not lie in the “smothering” of the anima, but in Othello’s coming to the “queer juncture” so that, he encounters his “double”. Tragedy is the breaking up of integrity that is the root cause of creating the sensation of a “double-self” that initiates the estrangement of anima by logos. “for half love of another / Eve”, Olson’s Othello smothers his “animal half”. This is not the termination of the story; there is another half to it:

..., the tragedy

repeats itself in inverse, increasing inverse (transvest) plane:

on this even more rotted stage,

the rage -

no longer only male (the half’s gone over!) repeats, repeats!

(*Archaeologist*)

The woman too is “joined & sundered” and she “returned to the mono beast”. She too conceals a brother and is witness to “another murder”. The feminine anima could be liberated from the masculine “half self” and the “brutal destruction of psychic integrity” will remain the same (Merrill 154).

The poet explains 'the Cause' in the last part of the poem. He says, "difference only / is the cause". The inability to continue with a difference leads to the murder of psychic integrity. Opposition is an essential component of the normal stage, and it should never be treated as an abnormal state of affairs. Irrespective of being outside "kosmos" or inside "psyche", reality ought to be appreciated as such. Otherwise, the place of man and woman, that is their psychic Eden, will be "dirtied".

"Place; & Names" is Olson's reply to the question, "What is 'history'?" It is an obscure poem and Allen Ginsberg's reaction to Olson's reading of the poem was "I don't understand what you're saying" ("On History" 42). The poem is Olson's hunt for a description of the word "place" devoid of any sort of historical and geographical interpretations. This word addresses what Olson calls the "Isness of Cosmos", a coinage that can be compared with "suchness" in "Taoism" that means something that "exists throughout itself". "Isness of cosmos" is a substitute to a cosmos which is the construction of intellectual reflection, an essence of "Human Universe" itself. A creative artist experiences and then names a "place" and such a name retains a commonality to all men. By "not falling for realism, or the false particularism of the autobiographical", the force of the common can be retained. Commonality cannot be achieved through actual events or specific place names and it is not a thing of accurate data, true description or exact registration. "You know a 'place' because you are

there; it is that with which you are most familiar; it is a precinct of the human universe” (Merrill 155). These places or names should be considered “as parts of the body, common, & capable / therefore of having cells which can decant / total experience” (“Place; & Names”) Olson applies Duncan’s law to justify the linkage of “cell” to “story”. In his letter to Olson, Duncan used the word *histology* to elaborate on “cell” and “story” expressive of something unique. In Herodotus’s version of *’istorian*, history is immediately and comprehensively known to everyone as “cells” of their body.

“The Americans” can be read as a sequel to “Place; & Names”. It is a satire on an America that “stinks” and Olson points out the reason behind this degeneration. For a cosmologist, a society is “an assemblage of atoms”. Because “each American stinks”, the whole “social stinks”, and in order to “constitute an organism it is an inadequate / number of cells they are / sitting in a room”. It is noteworthy that “they aren’t cooked / and ruled by information”.

“A Discrete Gloss” opens with a list of discrete items such as “the tide, the number 9 and creation” or “whatever sits outside you”. The poem is an epitome for the notion that virtually evolves as a massive opposition to “discourse”. This sort of experience compels the poet to surmise: “what happens before the eye / so very different from / what actually goes within.” (“A Discrete Gloss”). This ideal of Olson depends on his

distinction between “inner” and “outer” things that he has discussed in “Trinacrio”. “What happens before the eye” and “what happens within” are complementary epistemological events. These lines can be read as a continuation to what Olson wrote in “The Human Universe”: “I am not able to satisfy myself that these so-called inner things [“dreams ... thoughts ... desires, sins, hopes, fears, faiths, loves”] are so separable from the objects, persons, events which are the content of them” (*Human Universe* 10). Olson is indebted to Whitehead’s notion in his explanation of this phenomenon. In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead says: “When we register in consciousness our visual perception of a grey stone, something more than bare sight is meant. ... the mere sight is confined to the illustration of the geometrical perspective relatedness, of a certain contemporary spatial region, to the perception” (184-85). The poem insists that “Your eye, the wanderer, sees more”. It could witness “what happens somewhere else”. Visual sensations are shaped and enriched by the experiences from within. As Whitehead feels, a stone is enhanced by our unconscious awareness that it could serve as a missile or a chair.

The Maya culture is very particular in maintaining nature’s force and despite the affliction of discourse everywhere, it still, “can seize / as the sun seizes ... acts as swiftly as a plant turns light to green ... can take some human thigh bare ... with a stone tool, carve such likeness on it ... makes gorging nature at her blackest root / a silly starrer too”. This culture



indicates the nature of a man of new age. Such a man is of little significance in this world, for: “what is the world / that he can separate himself so simply from it”. Mayan hieroglyphs are inseparable from nature’s force and they assert that “Man is no creature of his own discourse” and he is always in harmony with Nature’s force. Thus, “it says here / in the face of everything it says / this, is the more exact”.

Some more poems constitute the collection, *Archaeologist of Morning*, which also adds to Olson’s quest to vitalize a “human universe”. A casual reader may find the volume an amalgam of numerous distinct eccentricities with their exotic subjects and arresting forms. Olson’s power originates from the integrity of the selections it makes from the mystifying chaos of his voracious reading and equally unquenchable experiences. His ideal of a “human universe” derives its raw materials that fulfill his aims like a magnet and they form materials of the poems, which are organically united to the “wholeness of a corpus” – the *Archaeologist of Morning*.