CLAYTON ESHLEMAN/NOTES ON CHARLES OLSON AND THE ARCHAIC[1]

for Ralph Maud

1] On May 20, 1949, Francis Boldereff sent S.N. Kramer's article, "The Epic of Gilgameš and It Sumerian Sources" to her recently-discovered poet-hero and correspondent, Charles Olson. At two points in the article, Kramer presents scholarly verse translation of two sections concerning Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Underworld. In the first section, Gilgamesh's *pukku* ("drum") and *mikkû* ('drumstick") have fallen into the Underworld. Unable to reach them from this world, he sits at the gate of the Underworld and laments:

O my *pukku,* O my *mikkû,*
My *pukku* whose lustiness was irresistible,
My *mikkû* whose pulsations could not be drowned out,
In those days when verily my *pukku* was with me in the house of the carpenter,
(When) verily the wife of the carpenter was with me like the mother who gave birth to me,
(When) verily the daughter of the carpenter was with me like my younger sister,
My *pukku,* who will bring it up from the nether world,
My *mikkû,* who will bring it up from the 'face' of the nether world?

A week later, Olson sent his adaptation of these lines to Boldereff:

LA CHUTE

O my drum, hollowed out thru the thin slit,
carved from the cedar wood, the base I took
when the tree was felled
o my lute

[1] This lecture, commissioned by Robert Creeley, was given in the Special Collections Library at the SUNY-Buffalo, on October 22/23, 2004. It was published in *Minutes of the Charles Olson Society #52*

wrought from the tree’s crown

my drum whose lustiness
was not to be resisted

my lute from whose pulsations
not one could turn away
they
are where the dead are
my drum
fell where the dead are, who
will bring it up, my lute
who will bring it up
where it fell in the face of them
where they are, where my lute and drum

have fallen?

Olson has added information from Kramer’s explanation of prior material in the poem. And without explaining why, he has also converted “drumstick” to “lute.” It should be noted that the lustiness of the drum and the pulsations form the lute refer, on one level, to King Gilgamesh’s tyrannical behavior with the citizens of Erech, including his abusive sexual cravings. The cedar wood out of which the instruments have been carved is from a magical tree nurtured by the goddess Inanna, which has become invested with snakes, Lilith, and birds. As a chivalrous favor to the goddess, Gilgamesh felled the tree.

In a subsequent passage of the epic, Gilgamesh’s servant and friend, Enkidu, volunteers to descend to the Underworld and retrieve the fallen drum and lute. In Kramer’s version, Gilgamesh warns his companion of the various Underworld taboos that he must respect:

Gilgameš says to Enkidu:
‘If now thou wilt descend to the nether world,

A word I speak to thee, take my word,
Instruction I offer thee, take my instruction.
Do not put on clean clothes,
lest like an enemy they will mark thee;
Do not anoint thyself with the good oil of the buru-vessel,
Lest at its smell they will crowd about thee.
Do not throw the throw-stick in the nether world,
Lest they who were struck by the throw-stick will surround thee;
Do not carry a staff in thy hand,
Lest the shades will flutter all about thee.
Do not put sandals on thy feet,
In the nether world make no cry;
Kiss not thy beloved wife,
Strike not thy hated wife,
Kiss not thy beloved son,
Strike not thy hated son,
Lest the outcry of Kur will seize thee;
(The outcry) to her who is lying, to her who is lying,
To the mother of Ninazu who is lying,
Whose holy body no garment covers,
Whose holy breast no cloth wraps.'

Kur here is another word for the Underworld.

Two weeks after composing "La Chute," Olson, skipping the first lines and leaving out the names of the characters, reworked the rest of the passage into "La Chute II":

If you would go down to the dead
to retrieve my drum and lute
a word for you, take my word,
I offer you directions

do not wear a clean garment
they below will dirty you
they will mark you
as if you were a stranger

nor rub yourself with oil
the finest oil from the cruse
the smell of it will provoke them
they will walk round and round
alongside you

carry no stick, at least
do not raise it
or the shades of men will tremble,
hover before you

Pick up nothing to throw, no matter the urging.
They against whom you hurl it
will crowd you, will fly thick on you.

Go barefoot, make no sound,
and when you meet the wife you loved
do not kiss her or strike the wife you hated.
Likewise your sons. Give the beloved one no kiss,
do not spit on his brother.

Behave, lest the outcry shall seize you
seize you for what you have done
for her who, there lies naked, the mother
whose body in that place is not covered
whose breasts lie open to you and the judges

in that place
where my drum and lute are

Both of Olson's adaptations make for engaging, mysterious poems. These two poems (along with a third, "La Chute III, which is not an adaptation[2]), propose a contemporary entry into the archaic, as well as protocol to be followed in such a descent. They are the first signals in Olson's body of work that the archaic *is* the post-modern, and that stripped of its historic context its content is potentially our own.

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2] Near the end of Olson's life, the drum fashioned from Inanna's cedar (now identified as "The Tree of the World") appears in two poems ("for my friend" and "The Drum World"). This drum has become in these later poems the drumming of Jack Clarke's fingers on a table (perhaps a seminar table at the head of which Olson was holding forth in the spring of 1965). Such drumming evokes for Olson a 9th century Norwegian ship burial containing the body of a queen as well as the entombment of Djosser, a Third Dynasty Egyptian pharaoh, in a pyramid he has designed. The evocation here is that of Clarke, as shaman apprentice, sending the aging Olson off into symbolic realms.

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[2] The S.N. Kramer article is to be found in *Journal of the American Oriental Society #64* (1944), pp. 7-23.
"La Chute III" links incest, descent, and second birth, and appears to be Olson's own poem, not an adaptation. For more on descent and second birth, see my *Juniper Fuse: Upper Paleolithic Imagination & the Construction of the Underworld* (Wesleyan University Press, 2003), p. xxi.
It is appropriate here to note that there is a fascinating relationship between "La Chute II" and "A Newly Discovered 'Homeric' Hymn." Both poems concern the registration of a protocol to be followed when dealing with the dead, the first Sumerian, and the second out of Homer. While the first is a slightly revised translation, the second is, as far as I can tell, Olson's own, and a fine poem in its own right.
While, outside of *Olson #10*, there is little marterial in Olson's work on Ice Age imagination, the presence of the historic archaic is constantly there. To engage it fully would require a book length study. Certain poems set in the present, such as "The Lordly and Isolate Satyrs," are made more substantial by deft archaic referencing. Olson's seeing Hell's Angels on the beach as resonant with "The Great Stones" of Easter Island builds an archaic shadow into the motorcycle gang that makes their strangeness unearthly.

3] The “La Chute” series, along with “Bigmans,” “Bigmans II,” and “The She-Bear” series make up Olson’s first archaic focus in poetry. Writing to Robert Creeley in August 1950, he remarks:

> The whole & continuing struggle to remain civilized is documented reign in & out: I imagine you know the subtle tale of how Gilgamesh was sent Enkidu to correct him because he had become a burden to his city’s people. As I read it, it is an incredible myth of what happens to the best of men when they lose touch with the primordial & phallic energy from which man, said these younger people, takes up nature’s force.

Written a few days after Olson had worked out much of “I, Maximus” in a letter to Boldereff, unlike Gloucester-centered Maximus, “Bigmans” and “Bigmans II” are based on Gilgamesh material. The first poem begs Bigmans to leave the house of an unnamed goddess (as one might have urged Odysseus to leave Circe’s ingle) and to “wake” unnamed “cities.” “Bigmans II,” addressing the “land,” proposed that Bigmans has already seen everything, cut down “the dirty tree,” and started to “unravel what no man can complete.” A long passage then describes Bigmans as the master builder of a well. An even longer passage, set in the voice of the people, complains about Bigmans’ tyrannical wildness and begs “whatever force presides” to create an equal to distract and test him. Gilgamesh-wise, this rival would be Enkidu.

The Bigmans poems end as if they are the opening evocations of a much longer work. Both they and the “La Chute” series are shadowed by Olson’s own size and ambitions, throwing up an archaic background to substantiate his recently discovered desire to do an end-run around post-Bronze Age history and invest his poetry with a primordial core.

Olson wrote to Boldereff that “The She-Bear” is “based on the images you invoked in me,” and that “You are / that girl, SHE- / BEAR!” Boldereff thus joins Olson as a shadowy presence through these early archaic engagements. Of the three versions of “The She-Bear,” the first strikes me as the most original and intelligent. It grounds a renewed goddess image in a chant-like assessment of patriarchal damage to woman’s

body and spirit, basing its "praise for woman" on some up-to-date feminist-positive anthropological data. Like "La chute III," it belongs more to Olson than to archaic texts.

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4] Boldereff's passion to engage Olson sexually and psychically, to absolutely back him as *the* poet of their age, and to feed him materials he quickly came to see were timeless to the human condition, had a rippling centrifugal effect on his entire life in 1949 and 1950 (possibly, because she could not support him, he refused to leave his first wife, Constance, for her). One potent indication of this Olson/Boldereff mesh is the flexibility in their gender relationship as it dances about in their letters. She is his daughter, sister, sib, his angel, mentor, and miracle, and he (symbolically) impregnates her. He is her daddy, her son. This god-like confusion or iridescence (in which, mythologically, a serpent can be consort, deity, and offspring of the Great Goddess) harks back to undifferentiated prehistoric archetypes without discrete and complimentary structures.[3] Such flexibility in personal address and identification accounts, in part, for a poem like "The She-Bear." Given the departmentally differentiated world of 1950s America, Boldereff's multiple presentation of herself to Olson (along with his immediate reciprocity, at least as far as correspondence goes) appears to have been the prime in the poet's carving a man out of himself, filling his own space, and making traceries sufficient to others' needs.[4]

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5] One crucial aspect of Olson's shaping a poetic personality involved locating and rejecting positions inimical to his ongoing post-modernist project. The correspondence with Boldereff and Creeley (and Cid Corman to a lesser extent) is peppered with blocks to be destroyed on the road to the archaic:

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[3] For more on undifferentiated archetypes, see *Juniper Fuse*, pp. 46-47.

[4] The latter part of this sentence draws on Olson's words in a letter written to Vincent Ferrini, in 1952, to be found in Charles Olson, *Selected Letters*, ed. Ralph Maud, University of California Press, 2000, p. 18.

"original sin"

"existence of a previous golden age" (Boldereff); "we've been dragooned into a notion that whatever came before was better"

"lyrical interference (the poet interposing himself between what he is and other creatures of nature… and objects)"

"inherited form;" "a poet stays in the open and goes by breath, not by inherited forms"

"the lazyness of specialization"

"the archaic mushed into Xty, in order to give it a ride on a new back, when itself … could walk… BY HERSELF"

"lust and shame—words invented by Hebraic man" (Boldereff)

"stopping anywhere this side of ICE"

"PATRIARCHY;" "a vision is the absolute dynamiting of the patriarchy"

"UBANITY i.e., gentilnesse, grace, recognition of others, connection to realism, tendence toward the suave"

"symbol, magic, aesthetic art, superstition or religion"

"opposites"

"Humanism" (versus "man as object in field of force"); [Humanism in Olson's sense of it includes] "a single patriarchal god; a concept of Ideal or World Forms (Socrates-Plato); Future, that thing Christ most did havoc with, Redemption"

"the descriptive and the analytical"

"logic and classification"

"the microscope and the telescope."

Facing such a list, one might inquire: what is its primary purpose? Beyond building access to the archaic/post-modern, there is this (from a letter to Creeley, August, 1951):

> my assumption is that any POST-MODERN is born with the ancient confidence that, he *does* belong.
>
> So, there is nothing to be *found.* There is only (as Schoenberg had it, his Harmony, search) tho, I should wish to

> kill that word too—there is only examination. And I hew to ED's proposition, one perception instantly, another—as, the INSTANT is, that fast, *another* : why, too, I take it, the *flaws*, when they exist, are COMPOSITIONAL

To belong would be to end the estrangement that Heraclitus perceived as dividing man from that with which he was most familiar. Olson was intuitively convinced that the loss Heraclitus addressed at 500 B.C. had, at the beginning of the 20th century, ceased to obtain, and that this profound shift had released man from a mind focused on the absolute and the ideal, in place of which the comparative and the archaic offered man the possibility of becoming a creative rival to nature.[5]

The "peril in stopping anywhere this side of ICE" presents Olson with a problem that he never solved. ICE here can only mean the last Ice Age, the Upper Paleolithic period (roughly 35,000 to 9,000 B.P., meaning "before the present," the present being 1950, the time at which radio carbon dating techniques were established). The archaic is a vague term and can refer to the art of ancient Greece as well as to images in Lascaux. Olson's primary archaic materials for his poetry are predominately Bronze Age and classical Greek. As we shall see, he made some perceptive (as well as erroneous) notes on Upper Paleolithic culture in 1953, but these notes led nowhere, and were never developed in his poetry, essays, or interviews to any substantial extent.

In the Introduction to my book, *Juniper Fuse,* I wrote:

> To follow poetry back to Cro-Magnon metaphors not only hits real bedrock—a genuine back wall—but gains a connection to the continuum during which imagination first flourished. My growing awareness of the caves led to the recognition that as an artist, I belong to a pretradition that includes the earliest nights and days of soul-making.

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[5] Robert Duncan's essay, "The Rites of Participation" (from the still unpublished "H.D. Book"), with its opening statement about "all things coming into their comparisons" is pertinent here. The some 400 pages of "The H.D. Book already published in magazines can be accessed via: http://www.cca.ca/history/ozz/english/books/hd_book/HD_Book_by_Robert Duncan.pdf

6] In contrast to positions rejected, Olson was simultaneously proposing stances and perspectives to be adopted. He announced to Boldereff that innocence was "the real home of creative being" (unaware, I suspect, that William Blake had astutely qualified such a belief by declaring that after "innocence" and "experience" there was only "organized innocence," thus making a distinction between the mature poet and the child).

Olson associated the archaic (which he also called the chthonic and the primordial) with "the poet's ability to hear through himself" and access "secrets objects share." Such language evokes shamanism. While the word crops up from time to time in Olson's correspondence, he does not appear to have brought a detailed shamanic plan into his sense of the mythic. In 1965 he bought Mircea Eliade's *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstacy* and annotated the Foreword.

While stressing "self-containment," the "staying within one's nature," in the same spirit that the poem must "stay within itself," he also insisted that the poet must "stay in the open" (which he associated with "going by breath and not inherited form"). The goal of such inside/outside positioning was that of "accomplishing coverage of the whole field of knowledge."

Again and again, assimilation of whatever the archaic includes is presented as the key. Dreams produce the presence of archaic figures, he told Boldereff, and such presence is "of absolute importance to a rebirth of conduct and structure and force: simply because it was from these areas that, originally and now, men discovered ambiguity of experience which told energies they wot not of."

One might ask: why is "ambiguity of experience" presented as a positive? I think Olson would refer the question to the Keats quotation which, along with the Heraclitus adage on estrangement, is used as the epigraph to *The Special View of History:*

> Brown and Dilke walked with me & back from the Christmas pantomime. I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects: several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of

> being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason—Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated veri-similitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge.

To acknowledge ambiguity is also to recognize ambivalence, and the poetic obligation to allow contradictions to coexist as part of the fullest showing possible.

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7] For Olson, to eliminate history (or that portion of it he associated with the "WILL TO DISPERSE") is also to eliminate time, as if it were a container, or Pandora Box, replete with Greek classification and logic, Christianity, opposites, inherited form etc. The goal, in this sense, is spacial existence which turns out to be, or turns on, perpendicularity and the instant e.g., "time, as axis, is only this now, every new instant."

This perpendicularity is directed downward, toward an "under" that is increasingly probed in *The Maximus Poems IV, V, VI* (I will henceforth refer to this middle volume as *II*, to keep it in line with *I* and *III*), where it is especially targeted in the fourth of the "Maximus, from Dogtown" pieces. Olson's anxious repetition of "under" there suggests a desire to once and for all break through the bottom of Tartaros to some absolute lower level or base. Perpendicular descent immediately calls to mind the horizontal strata of middens, so Olson's pounding at the vertical as the percussion of the instant is more of an emphasis than an elimination of the horizontal. For he writes to Boldereff: "We are a perpendicular axis of planes which are constantly being intersected by horizontal planes of experience coming up from the past (coming up from the ground)… and going out to the future… it is at the innumerable points of intersection that images and events spring up."

There are of course many instances of one of Olson's "Projective Verse" commands—"ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION…"—which I understand as an attempt to keep poetic movement in an appositional swiftness and away from description and narrative tied to

memory. There is a terrific example of the fruits of such a practice in a late Maximus poem, “As of Parsonses or Fishermans Field or Cressys Beach or Washington, the Capital, of my Front Yard?” I have in mind the following sequence:

Gassire’s
fate to
I FA—to
s-i-n-g the
root of
the Well of the
Liquid of the
Eagle’s mouth:
teonanacatl is also
God’s body…

Gassire is the hero of a folktale from Niger who is told that his lute will only sound when it absorbs his pain, blood, breath and the life blood of his son. In Dahomey, a man seeking to see into the future visits a sorcerer who “draws the FA”—fruit stones are thrown like our dice and the way they fall enables the sorcerer to make a prediction. The Well of Mimir is located beneath the Nordic World Tree, Yggdrasill. Odin, turned into an Eagle, let fall from his mouth drops of magic mead and in this way humankind received the gift of poetry. *“teonanacatl”* is the Nahuatl sacred mushroom and means “God’s flesh.” So here we have a kind of metonymic syncretism utilizing four mythic systems, a brief rhapsody of “stitched song.” The risk here is Poundian: if the nodes do not light up, the dramatic presence will be weak, and the reader’s only thoughtful response will be to turn to the reference texts.

After reading the Olson *Selected Letters* in 2002, I wrote to the editor, Ralph Maud: “One of the things that struck me, with some of the intellectual letters, is the way Olson’s mind acts when it gets excited. It reminds me of watching a stone be skipped across a pond—hit hit hit and pong! The associations come in so fast that each is touched upon, struck, followed by a ricochet, and so on. This is one version of ‘one perception must

lead directly to the next,' but in a version that often seems to me to work against *thinking.* In contrast, some of the best poems seem slower than the above procedure, with quick decisive moments, but with enough of the image or material offered for the reader to grasp before being taken forward. 'The Librarian,' for example, or 'In Cold Hell…" I am wondering what if anything accounts for such speed. Is this vertical thought (as he once proposed)? An attempt to discharge a constellational moment so that all nodes are present at once?"

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8] In his essay "The Gate and the Center," Olson makes a challenging and audacious proposal: that something he calls "THE FIRST WILL" is, as of 1950, "back in business." While he does not define "first will," implications are that it relates to "the will to cohere," and that it manifests itself in "a life turning on THE SINGLE CENTER." By "center," historically Olson means Sumer, 4th millennium B.C., which he takes to be the site of the first city which "nourished, increased, advanced… all peoples around it," and provided "a coherence for the first time since the ice." One reason I think that Olson chooses Sumer for his first "center" is that the Sumerians are credited with inventing the cuneiform system of writing near the end of the 4th millennium. Since Olson also proposes that the 'WILL TO COHERE" begins to fail around 2500 B.C., when important Sumerian cities such as Kish, Erech, and Ur were supposedly at their height, the question arises as to how the poet would explain the "WILL TO DISPERSE" as setting in at this time. What we need here from Olson is an extended, in depth, essay on Sumerian civilization, contrasting it with other early settlements such as Jericho (8000 B.C.) and Catal Huyuk (6500 B.C.). And of course we do not have that.

Olson offers examples of the Amerindian Omaha puberty quests as proof that 'THE FIRST WILL" had reasserted itself. What such quests have to do with post-industrial, capitalist America in the 1950s misses me. Indeed, Olson joins his comrade Hart Crane in having a visionary program undercut by grinding pessimistic feelings about the America of their respective eras. And the Omahas themselves, no matter how we regard their puberty quest, were, to borrow Olsonian terms, moreorless put out of business in the mid-

19th century when they ceded all of their lands west of the Mississippi River to the United States. Granted that the puberty quest is probably of Ice Age antiquity, it would seem to be a miraculous and attenuated survival rather than a new direction determining power.

Elsewhere (same period) Olson writes to Creeley: "I am led on to imagine that the turn of the flow of man's energy (I take it the turn came c. 1917, or thereabouts) is only the SECOND TIME it has ever happened—and thus all our measures had better be tossed overboard, if we are to participate & to project." Why 1917? Could Olson have the Russian Revolution in mind?

A clear distinction between "cohere" and "disperse" also seems questionable. As a writer who owes his own existence to migration, one would think that he would see beyond a "will" as central to dispersal throughout history. Near the end of *The Maximus Poems,* Olson writes:

> Migration in fact (which is probably
> as constant in history as any *one* thing: migration
>
> is the pursuit by animals, plants & men of a suitable
> and gods as well--& preferable
>
> environment; and leads always to a new center…

While writing these notes, I came across an article by Paul Krugman in the August 8, 2003, New York Times, called "Salt of the Earth." Krugman writes:

> When archeologists excavated the cities of ancient Mesopotamia, they were amazed not just by what they found but by where they found it: in the middle of an unpopulated desert. In "Ur of the Chaldees," Leonard Woolley asked: "Why, if Ur was an empire's capital, if Sumer was once a vast granary, has the population dwindled to nothing, the very soil lost its virtue?"
>
> The answer—the reason "the very soil lost its virtue"—is that heavy

> irrigation in a hot, dry climate leads to a gradual accumulation of salt in the soil. Rising salinity first forced the Sumerians to switch from wheat to barley, which can tolerate more salt; by about 1800 B.C. even barley could no longer be grown in southern Iraq, and Sumerian civilization collapsed. Later, "salinity crises" took place further north. In the 19th century, when Europeans began to visit Iraq, it probably had a population less than a tenth the size of the one in the age of Gilgamesh.

As often, in human history and prehistory, climate is the "unmoved mover."

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9] Given Olson's base of historical information for most of the first Maximus volume, and a significant portion of the second and third ones, it is intriguing to note the stress he places on figurative language. "Image is the most volatile thing in creation," he writes to Creeley, and: "This leads me to think what's involved here is, actually, METEMPSYCHOSIS—and the restoration of METAPHOR as the human 'science' proper to human affairs & actions."

> When [psyche and metapsyche] are in such identity vectors come into existence that an individual is a force astronomically different than the personal alone, the resonances then resulting from the beat and sound of those two "boards" and strings being comparable only to the finest speech to the best poem
>
> Image… is the only thing I am after, in any search, act, or learning

The implication here, as I read these proposals, is that when psyche and metapsyche (or consciousness and the subconscious) connect, the product is metaphor, or image.

That Olson also equates metaphor with "the act of art" suggests that he is using the word in a more inclusive sense than a Surrealist might.[6] In the poem, "Maximus of Gloucester," one reads: "the only interesting thing / is if one can be / an image / of man, 'The nobleness, and the areté.'" The complexity of this matter is sounded in the poem "rages / strains," concerning the Cretan war god Enyalios (called by Olson "Enyalion"). In the poem, Enyalion becomes what the depth psychologists call a "combined object," made up of himself, Tyr, Mars, and Hephaestus, "who goes to war with a picture." The implication is that going to war with a picture, or image, ennobles Enyalion, illuminating him as an image of man.

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10] Olson also asserts that "No prime has an opposite… it exists not by reaction from but by virtue of its own nature." It can be demonstrated that the Cro-Magnon move from no image of the world to *an* image established the rudiments of the wilderness/cultural divide, and was a primordial act that established the first opposition. An enduring and catastrophic "separation continuum" was set in motion, it could be said, by initial image-making.[7] If one agrees, then it would seem to follow that there is no cultural prime without an opposite.

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[6] Olson's extended use of "image" is sounded in an exchange with Robert Kelly in 1960. When I asked Kelly about this, he responded:

> this was before I actually met the man, and while I was still living in Brooklyn. I had sent him the first purple hectographed versions of my Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image, and in his reply, speaking I think to the points I was making about the rhythm of the imags constituting (what we would call now) the deep structure of the poem he (and I remember it scrawled on a post card) said:
>
> "not imageS but image"
>
> in so many words. Left me to chew on the difference he was after. My guess is/was that he was already after the Angel, the Sufi transsensory (hence beyond images but not beyond being an image of use to the mind) that so preoccupied him through the third volume of Maximus and marked his sensational (and not much noticed by Olsonians) departure from the Aristotelian into the realms of what would presently be talked about as soul, angel, Amoghasiddhi.

[7] This idea of a "separation continuum"is argued throughout *Juniper Fuse*, and presented in the Introduction to the book, pp. xvi-xvii. Also see footnote #14 , p. 245.

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11] Olson and mythology. He quotes Bronislaw Malinowski's definition of myth (from Jung and Kerenyi's "Prolegomena" to *Essays on a Science of Mythology*) to Creeley, lauding it as the "best thing a man has sd, so far as I know em, on this subject." Here is the Malinowski:

> The myth in a primitive society i.e., in its original living form, is not a mere tale told but a reality lived. It is not in the nature of an invention such as we read in our novels today, but living reality, believed to have occurred in primordial times and to be influencing ever afterwards the world and destinies of men… These stories are not kept alive by vain curiosity, neither as tales that have been invented nor again as tales that are true. For the native on the contrary they are the assertion of an original, greater, and more important reality through which the present life, fate, and work of mankind are governed, and the knowledge of which provides men on the one hand with motives for ritual and moral acts, on the other with directions for their performance.

Olson appears to like this definition because it denies the symbolic and the etiological (that myth explains something). The problem here, as far as Olson's attempt to establish himself in a prime for his own times, to find a perpendicular stance geared to the instant, is the part of the definition that states that mythic stories "are an assertion of an original, greater, and more important reality through which the present life, fate and work of mankind are governed." If we look at the Gilgamesh material from this point of view, I guess we could agree that Olson's recasting of the first two "La Chutes" communicates that the content is still an "influence" in Olson's own time. However, one must also note that to make a poem of his own, Olson had to decontextualize the work, eliminating the Sumerian figures. Thus the "governing" aspect of Malinowski's definition becomes nebulous indeed.

One might also question the matter of a descent into an underworld which both workings indicate. We have no underworld today in the Sumerian and Greek sense. This

is the old problem of taking the reality of archaic myth for granted: can one really worship Zeus if one does not sacrifice bulls to him? This dilemma pertains to Malinowski's last sentence concerning knowledge of rituals and directions for their performance.

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12] Convinced that "the struggle for language today is THE PRIMARY," that "it is the Poet… who is the one finally responsible agent of culture," Olson also proclaims "that it was language—words, goddamn it, WORDS—which freed man from his hands and any extension of same." His source for this claim is C.F.C. Hawkes' "Prologue" to *The Prehistoric Foundations of Europe,* in particular the passage where Hawkes stresses that "The faculty of even the simplest speech could substitute precept for mere example in the training of the singly born children whose slow-passing infancy kept them so long in need of it." In the same letter to Creeley quoted above, Olson also argues that the invention of speech replaced tools.

Clearly, Olson is feeding his own speech furnace here, finding prehistoric evidence to bolster his argument for the importance of the poet in his own time. But speech did not free early man from tools—speech enabled him to contextualize the use of tools, develop more complex ones, and find new uses for hands and tools. The invention of long-distance weapons was crucial in increasing his power over animals and creating via image-making the culture/wilderness divide.

Olson must be thinking of only extremely basic tools, such as fashioned by Neanderthal. Without long-distance weapons on one hand, and flints, burins, pads, hand lamps, scaffolding, fiber rope, and mineral-based paints on the other, the Cro-Magnon moves into image-making and culture would not have taken place.

One of the questions motivating these Notes is why Olson did not move Ice Age research materials into *The Maximus Poems*—or into non-Maximus poems and essays. I will have more to say about this when I look at the material in *Olson #10.* Here I want to point out that what appears to be an over-emphasis on speech, and a failure to make the connection between tools and image-making may account in part for the failure of the

wide visual Upper Paleolithic range to make its way into his poetry and essays, where archaic materials are dominated by a referential mythology.

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13] Occasionally, I come across ideas in Olson's writing that when juxtaposed with Upper Paleolithic images offer some insight into them. Take his comment that "man is but one object in field of force declaring self as force," which he opposes to a "'humanism,' [in which] man, out of all proportion of, relations, thus, so mis-centered, becomes, dependent on, only, a whole series of 'human' references which, so made, make only anthropomorphism, and thus, make mush of, any reality, conspicuously, his own, not to speak of, how all other forces (ticks, water-lilies, or snails) become only descriptive objects…"

The figure of the human is relatively rare in ice Age image-making, and when present is often one tiny human force in a huge field of animal forces (as in the engravings in Les Trois Frères' "Sanctuary"). While there are more women figurations than men, there are only around 140 "Venus" statuettes, in contrast to the thousands of horses, bison, and other animals painted and engraved on cave walls or on portable objects.

The non-narrative way in which most of these animals are presented is evoked by another Olson proposition. One nearly always finds them depicted in profile, often motionless, with no landscape or background indications. While there are realistic details (particular pelt marks, feline whiskers, anal flaps on mammoths etc), to our eyes the animals seem generic. They do not appear to be part of a human society. D.H. Lawrence made a comment in his essay, "Him with His Tail in his Mouth," that seems relevant here:

> The pictures in the cave represent moments of purity which are the quick of civilization. The pure relation between the cave-man and the deer: fifty per cent man, and fifty per cent bison, or mammoth, or deer. it is not ninety-nine per cent man, and one per cent horse: as in a Raphael horse. Or hundred per cent fool, as when F.G. Watts sculpts a bronze horse and calls it Physical

Energy.

And here is Olson (from the "Human Universe" essays):

> All that comparison ever does is set up a series of *reference* points: to compare is to take one thing and try to understand it by marking its similarities to or differences from another thing. Right here is the trouble, that each thing is not so much like or different from another thing (these likenesses and differences are apparent) but that such an analysis only accomplishes a *description,* does not come to grips with what really matters: that a thing, any thing, impinges on us by a more important fact, its self-existence, without reference to any other thing, in short, the very character of it which calls our attention to it, which wants us to know more about it, its particularity.

Such comments suggest an affinity with Ice Age sensibility. Had Olson visited some of the caves in the spirit that he looked at Mayan glyphs in Yucatan,[8] I think that their contextual visuality might have impressed him more than it did on the basis of looking at small black and white book photos and drawings. He might have found that some of his ideas were grounded in Cro-Magnon imagination.

*

14] At the 1963 Vancouver conference, Olson identified himself as Bronze Age man. From Pauline Wah's notes (in *Olson # 4*):

> Olson a bronze-age man
> O. & metal—identification, not metaphoric
> "I Maximus, a metal hot from boiling water"
> belief is substituted for metaphor

[8] It should be added here that at the time Olson went to Yucatan, in 1951, no one knew how to read Mayan glyphs, including Olson.

Keats: man’s life is a life of allegory

From Daphne Marlatt’s notes (same day, August 7):

> Olson is now Bronze Age man, goes back that far (metal)—
> “special character,” “good conductors of electricity (kinetics
> of the thing) & heat (writing action)”—Olson thinks of himself
> as a metal, specifically antimony (anti-money, also that which
> strengthens lead, produces luster but not rainbows)—his poems
> then: Bronze Age poems, poems of the clarity of the metallic
> age
> — “towards the Absolute”—Cro-Magnon man

His Bronze Age civilizations and figures include:

> Sumer/Babylonian: Gilgamesh, Tiamat
> Egypt: Ptah, Geb, Nut, Isis, sneferu
> Phoenicia: Byblos, Ousoos
> Canaan: Athirat, Ras Shamra Tables
> Crete: Enyalios

Most of his other archaic materials are Greek. The list is considerable and indicates more of a focus than the Bronze Age group: Hesiod, Herodotus, Thucidides, Hermes, Hercules, Athena, Typhon, Zeus, Andromeda, Moira, Phryne, Okeanos, Tartaros, Eumolpus, Styx, Iris, Hera, Kouretes, Hydra, Tethys, Kore.

Among these, Tartaros and Typhon are given particular attention, for one reason, I think, because both press against what we might call the Greek back wall. They gesture toward the never-arrived-at “ICE.”

*

15] Tartaros (the word is apparently Cretan, thus very old, signifying, according to Robert Graves, “far west”) is the deepest of the Greek infernal regions. According to Hesiod, its unmovable threshold is made of bronze, “having unending roots and it is grown of itself” (facts that would appeal to Olson), Tartaros is the eternal stronghold of the Titans, imprisoned there by Zeus, along with Typhon (“stupefying smoke, hot wind, or hurricane”), the largest monster ever born, and the child of Earth and Tartaros. The struggle between Zeus and Typhon is described by Graves as follows:

> Wounded and shouting, Typhon fled to Mount Casius, which looms over Syria from the north, and there the two grappled. Typhon twined his myriad coils about Zeus, disarmed him of his sickle and, after severing the sinews of his hands and feet with it, dragged him into the Corycian Cave. Zeus is immortal but now he could not move a finger, and Typhon had hidden the sinews in a bear-skin, over which Delphyne, a serpent-headed, sister-monster, stood guard.

The cave, bear-skin, and serpent-tailed sister-monster imagery evoke a background of considerable antiquity.

Olson’s fullest treatment of Tartaros, in “Maximus, from Dogtown—IV,” argues the libidinous depth-charge of this region and implies that it is placed between Hades and primordial realms. According to Charles Stein in his Olson/Jung study, *The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum:*

> Olson believes, apparently, that the story of the conquest of the Titans by the Olympians and the destruction by Zeus of the monster, Typhon, prefigure, in mythological terms, the conquest of the chthonic, appetite-centered cosmology of the old Mediterranean world by the rational and ultimately “statistical” cosmology of the subsequent European West.

By emphasizing certain aspects of Typhon (out of Hesiod), Olson also connects the monster to shamanism. As the soul of Tartaros, Typhon is said to have “’voices’ / inside

all his dreadful heads / uttering every kind of sound (imaginable?... sounds / such as solely the gods / caught on to." Typhon is also Protean: at one time, he was a bull, at another the sound of a lion's heart, at another he made sounds like whelps, and at another time "he would hiss / so the sky would burn." Elsewhere, Olson depicts Typhon as sea serpent which migrates to North America as a kind of "shadow" (in the Jungian sense) of Olson/Maximus. In one poem, "the blue monster" who departs for America from "his cave at Mt Casius" becomes Olson himself, in his blue postman's uniform, making his Gloucester rounds, delivering psychic "news."

Olson also tells us that "Heaven as sky is made of stone," while "Earth [is] made of grout." The image struck here is one of Earth as a mortar connecting a stone Heaven to a Bronze Age underworld. To think of Heaven as stone, for me, evokes the earliest paradise, the ur-underworld of the Upper Paleolithic caves. This view is reinforced by a passage in "Maximus, from Dogtown—IV":

Tartaros
was once 'ahead' of
Heaven was prior
(in coming into being) this 'child'
of Earth: Tartaros
was next after Earth (as Earth
was next after hunger
itself—Typhon
was her child, by Tartaros…

This is pretty much standard Greek mythic information. However, in Olson's shaman-shadowed context, such words suggest that Tartaros was a kind of "heaven," or paradise, before Heaven, the first alternative world after Earth herself, allowing the possibility that the proto-shamanism might have been the "off-spring" of the interpenetration of stone and humankind.

*

16] There are a half-dozen occasions when Upper Paleolithic materials make brief appearances in *The Maximus Poems.*

In "Maximus further on (December 28th 1959)," at the beginning of the second volume, we find the following compacted lines:

afternoon Manatee of my mind? Rock picture
of a beast? Lausel (sic) woman, holding out a ladle? Actually
sluggish treadle up which nature
climbed Wet white body dried Old picture Andromeda
awash Norn nurse waitress

According to Butterick, Olson saw the photo of one of the three Laussel Venuses in Erich Neumann's *The Great Mother.* The one reproduced there is not the more well-known one holding up the notched bison horn, but the one called "the Venus of Berlin." What Olson calls a ladle is proposed by archeologists to be either an object comparable to a jai alai basket, or a water-skin made out of a ruminant's stomach.[9]

*

17] In *Juniper Fuse*, in the poem "At the Hinge of Creation," one stanza reads:

Olson, out of Fowler, writes:
"licked man (as such) out of the ice,
the cow" Authumla
comes into being to provide food for Ymir,
"a rich, hornless cow"
the streams of milk from her udders nourish

[9] The "sluggish treadle" occurs in an earlier Maximus Poem, p. 127, in the first volume, there clearly referring to a machine in a ship's hold. Here the image seems more evolutionary than mechanical. It is unclear in this poem who the pregnant woman is (Gen Douglas? her sister? Andromeda?); whoever she is, Olson tells us, at the poem's end, "Perseus [is] the husband not me."

Yggddrasil

The entire Olson poem referred to here reads”

Licked man (as such) out of the ice,
the cow----------did who
herself came into being
so that Ymir would have some source
of food (her milk one supposes

Odin was born of either this man directly
or one generation further on, Odin’s mother
was the giant----------.

Olson may have put the blanks in to suggest unverifiable or missing sources. He may also not have remembered the name of the cow (Authumla, or Audumia), or Odin’s mother (Bestla, a giant’s daughter, one of Ymir’s descendants). The licking of Odin and his brothers out of the ice could also suggest birthing on Authumla’s part. Since Odin is depicted as a warrior-shaman, it would not be unusual for him to be the offspring of giants and animals.

While the mythology here is Norse, and not prehistoric, as a creation myth it strongly evokes the Ice Age. The next poem in *The Maximus Poems* repeats some of the information in this poem and adds a little material on the birth of Burr (also licked out of the ice), the father of Odin. As before with Gilgamesh, Olson’s contribution has been to reframe fragmentary information into his own context.

*

18] We now leave *Maximus II* and enter *III.* Near the beginning, one finds the following short poem:

I believe in God
as fully physical
thus the Outer Prědmost
of the World on which we ‘hang’
as though it were wood and our own bodies are
hanging on it

Olson is probably, with the word “Prědmost”, referring to a schematic and somewhat geometrical figure of a woman engraved on a piece of mammoth tusk (six inches long), from a camp site of mammoth hunters upon the Moravian plain, around 24,000 B.P. Her head is an upside-down triangle, possibly horned, with a tectiform sign near the top. She has mussel-shaped breasts, and one atrophied arm on the right (the left side of the engraving is badly damaged), no hand. Her navel is emphasized by chevrons to the left and to the right. Her vulva is a horizontal oval larger than her head with interior chevrons. She has no feet. The entire figure can also be read as a face mask.

Olson’s addition of “Outer” to “Prědmost” would seem to indicate a place or region, not a goddess. If the engraved figure is being referred to, why “God” and not “Goddess?” Since the figure is identified as being of ivory (in Neumann, Olson’s probable source), what is wood doing in the poem? Might the “Outer Prědmost” be a cross?

*

19] Another short poem from *Maximus III:*

Sweet Salmon
from the coldest clearest
waters. Cut the finest
on the bone.
Rose
directly from the stream straight into my greedy
throat. And breast. A home

for life. Wise goddess

of the straightest
sapling

Saturday March 20th
1965

Butterick provides a 1959 note by Olson implying that this salmon refers to a "bone carving art mobilier / France, Perigord / perhaps / Aurignacian / anyway." A more exacting placement of the salmon occurs in two lines of a poem from the same period, "OCEAN, and we shall fail…" (rejected from *The Maximus Poems* and published in *Olson #9*):

Ocean is stags cut on a reindeer horn
with salmon entangled under their feet

If the three salmon references pertain to the same engraving, then Olson is wrong about the provenance of the object in the note, as the salmon on the reindeer horn is from Lorthet, a site in the Pyrenées, depicted in Henry Fairfield Osborn's *Men of the Old Stone Age*, figure #208, a book Olson acquired in 1952. The object is a broken reindeer antler, with superb engravings of two reindeer apparently crossing a stream, with four salmon leaping up between their legs. Two of the salmon leap toward the genital area of one of the reindeer.

A variation on this poem occurs on p. 187 of *Maximus III.* In both pieces, Olson's attention is directed less to the deep past than to the salmon leaping from the stream into the speaker's throat (troped as the speaker leaping into the "Beloved's love" in this poem). The meaning of the leap might be what Gary Snyder has, à la Dōgen, called nature affirming *us*, versus the Romantic notion of man affirming nature. Such affirmation is equated by Dōgen with enlightenment.

Note that in the first salmon poem the vertical leap becomes the "straightest sapling," bolstering Olson's belief in the perpendicularity and the "immensity," or wisdom, of dwelling only in the present.

*

20] In "'View': fr the Orontes" in *Maximus II,* Olson juxtaposes "Canary Islanders" with "Cro-Magnon." In "To my Portuguese…" (*Maximus III),* he writes: "You know, Gloucester itself comes from the / Canaries / probably…" and, later in the same poem, "Gloucester still moves / *away* from the Canaries—". In "The chain of memory is resurrection…" (in *The Collected Poems*), we find: "Cro-Magnon man and… his descendants are Guanches / right now in the Canary Islands…"[10] Here we clearly need some background information.

Butterick writes: "The Canary Islands make up an archipelago in the Atlantic about sixty miles west of the North African coast. They were taken by Spain in the early fifteenth century. See Note V, 'The Cro-Magnons of the Canary islands,' in Osborne's appendix to his *Men of the Old Stone Age,* p. 506, for evidence of Cro-Magnon stock among the inhabitants of the islands at the time of their conquest."

The aboriginal inhabitants of the Canary islands, called Guanches, were, according to Osborne, "a composite people made up of at least three stocks: a Cro-magnon type, a Hamitic or Berber type, and a branchycephalic. These natives were in a Neolithic stage of civilization." Butterick again: "In later published Maximus poems, which incorporate the theory of continental drift and the wider migrations of man and his symbols westward, the Guanches are again seen as ancestors of the settlers of Gloucester, esp. its Portuguese settlers form the Azores and Canaries, just as Gloucester itself is seen as having once been joined, geologically, to the Canaries."

Olson's proposals here are two-fold: 1) that Cro-Magnon descendants are alive in the Gloucester of his own days, and 2) that millions of years ago what was to be the eastern

[10] There are also other Upper Paleolithic references in "The chain of memory is resurrection…" on pp. 375 and 376, such as "the animal / fat lamp" and "The Venus of Willendorf." "the gate of horn" is also the title of Gertrude Rachel Levy's book on the deep past which Olson had read.

coast of America was attached to Gondwana, the southern landmass of the huge continent known as Pangaea ("All Earth").

According to the map of Gondwana on the cover of the second *Maximus* volume, while mostly to the south of the northern landmass known as Laurasia, Gondwana did touch Laursia at points of the future North American eastern coast. However, this was 200 million years ago, and by 125 million, Laurasia was completely split off from Gondwana. Since Africa-to-be was in Gondwana, and North America-to-be was in Laurasia, there was no geological contact between the landmasses from this time onwards.

Thus the possible geological contact is so ancient that Olson's point about Gloucester still moving away from the Canaries is without much resonance. As for his statement, in *Olson #10,* that "Cro-Magnon man… still lives, in the Pyrenées, and the Guanches, of the Canary Islands:" the Spanish exterminated most of the Guanches in the beginning of the 16th century. Of course it is possible that some interbred with their conquerors and made up part of the stock of immigrants to North America.

Thus Olson's attempt to bring incredible time depth to bear on his claim that European North Americans are the last of a "first people" is more visionary than factual. The liens that can be drawn between the dots, as one might anthropomorphize star assemblies, are faint indeed.[11]

*

21] The last appearance the Upper Paleolithic makes in *The Maximus Poems* is in the piece about the Beothuk "boat" on page 189. In 1967, the poet was given an article by someone identified only as "Gardner" which mentioned an earlier article by E.F. Greenman entitled "The Upper Paleolithic and the New World," which, according to Butterick

> argues that the sea-faring canoe of the Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland 'may be of Upper Paleolithic origin, and that its prototypes'—which could have easily

[11] See *Olson #6,* pp. 69-71 for further commentary by Butterick on the Gloucester/Canary Island "connection." manuel Brito, in *Un Topos Atlántico para El Mitólogo* (Zasterle Press, 1989) has collected and translated all of the Olson material relevant to the Canary Islands, with an informative introduction.

> made Atlantic crossings—'were quite possibly in sue in the Bay of Biscay by Late Stone Age people as early as 15,000 B.C., or even earlier.' Gardner also reports that Greenman had identified 'an hitherto unexplained Upper Paleolithic painting in the Cave of Castillo in Northern Spain, not far from the Bay of Biscay, as a representation of a craft that could well be the direct prototype of the Beothuk canoe'… while pointing out that the Beothuks, who became extinct in the early nineteenth century, 'were much addicted to the use of red ochre, whence they got the name of Red Indians."

Butterick''s note continues and I recommend it to anyone seeking more information about this matter.

Before looking at the signs Greenman identified as "boats," I must note that his argument for the presence of Upper Paleolithic artifacts and traits in the New World (from Magdalenian northern Spain) is based on a late Upper Paleolithic diffusion between the Biscayan area and Newfoundland. This would mean that small boats like kayaks and canoes were able to make the North Atlantic crossing (at that time "choked with floating ice," according to Greenman). To what extent this was possible, I do not know. For many decades, the Bering Strait landmass at 13,000 B.P. has been proposed as the only credible corridor of access to the New World. However, Greenman's artifactual evidence makes a strong case for some North Atlantic contact.

In the northern Spanish caves of Altamira, El Castillo, and La Pasiega, there are signs that can be read as naviform (boat-shaped). El Castillo in particular has at least a dozen signs, mostly in red ochre, and scattered throughout the cave, that could be read as small, stubby, barge-shaped boats. André Leroi-Gourhan calls these signs in La Pasiega, "brace-shaped," and those in El Castillo "female quadrangular signs." The Abbé Breuil calls the El Castillo ones "tectiforms" (roof-shaped).

As with the pieces linking the Guanches and the Canary Islands, this poem is another attempt to argue unbroken diffusion between The New World and the ancient Old World.

Perhaps it should be noted that the boats described in the poem are hut-like, with a covering frame extending beyond the sides. If the Spanish signs *are* boats, they appear to have no upper structure or covering.

*

22] Outside of *The Maximus Poems*, there is even less referencing of Ice Age culture in Olson's poetry. There is, of course, the well-known juxtaposition of "Buchenwald" with "new Altamira cave" in the 1946 "La Préface" (which I comment on in my Introduction to *Juniper Fuse*). Olson's juxtaposition is, to my knowledge, the first acknowledgement that the rediscovery of Altamira and the existence of the Nazi death camps (there could hardly be two greater opposites) occurred in the same time frame. Beyond that, in a later line of the poem—"He talked, via stones a stick sea rock a hand of earth"—there is an implied perception that the archaic is the post-modern, for not only has Altamira displayed itself as a visionary element in the modernist panorama, but the image of a stripped human being scratching with a stick in the dirt backgrounded by a concentration camp wall powerfully evokes, in a positive way, a Cro-Magnon in cavern dark drawing a flint line in stone. It is not only that the beginning of imaginative play has jutted into our era, but that our dwelling place has been scaled back to a sinister caricature of its original.

In other poems, there are a few mentions of Upper Paleolithic animals—the mastodon, the woolly rhinoceros, the giant deer (probably the Irish elk, or megaloceros), and a slight but memorable piece called "On All Sides:"

the cave/wall the cave lion's
SHOULDERS
are rubbing off

*

23] "Maximus, from Dogtown—IV" is the far point of any saturated push into Gloucester's antecedence. After it, there is an abrupt swing back to historical Gloucester, with the relatively weak "Fort Point" section concluding the second *Maximus* volume. Olson, at the end of "Maximus, from Dogtown—IV" reminds me of Rimbaud two-thirds of the way through the voyage of the drunken boat—a maximal point has been reached.

In Rimbaud's case, the poet is thus simultaneously confronted by destroying himself at sea and becoming a caricature of his visionary self in the memory of himself as a child playing with a paper boat on a puddle.

In Olson's situation, this is when he needs "ICE" and he doesn't have it. Rather than making contact with the Canary Islands, say, and envisioning Cro-Magnon settlements there, or engaging the Bay of Biscay and making metaphorical contact with the nearby painted/engraved Cro-Magnon caves, he stays in Gloucester "to write a Republic / in gloom on Watch-House Point." Whereas he had written to Creeley in late 1950 that "RELIGION [was] one of the two monsters" and "on a par with SUPERSTITION," he now writes (several months after the accidental death of his wife, Betty, from which he would never really recover):

> I believe in religion not magic or science I believe in society
> as religious both man and society as religious

Thus moving through *Maximus III*, and seriously effecting its presence, is a grim "return of the repressed" Catholicity in conjunction with despair and the conviction that Gloucester is no more than another tacky part of 1960s America. The Christian prayer on page 561, for this reader, is the nadir of *The Maximus Poems.*

Olson is certainly entitled to his feelings, but as far as the poem goes the repeated declarations of abject self-pity and the appeals to God represent an abandoning of the Maximus/Olson presence, foregrounding instead the intrusive voice of pathetic Charles on his knees before God. I shudder to think what the Olson of the Boldereff and Creeley correspondences would have said reading this material. Loss here seems so total as to have ripped the fabric of a work that was initially mounted off one of the most demanding and charged apprenticeships in modern letters.

*

24] The Olson writings that make up *Olson #10*, subtitled "The Chiasma, or Lectures in the New Sciences of Man," from 1953, are probably only in part the actual notes that

were the basis for the lectures. Butterick refers to this material as a "selection," and says that he has "been guided by copies of the lectures among Edward Dorn's papers… and by notes made available to him by Mervin Lane." This may or may not account for the fact that Olson's "Outline" for the Lectures, on pages 8 and 9, is only in part followed by the ensuing notes. Under these circumstances, it is hardly fair to evaluate this material *as* Olson's Lectures.

Much of Olson's reading and thinking here is a logical outcome of his engagement with the archaic especially in his correspondence with Boldereff—these writing start to engage the "ICE" or "Absolute" that was sighted via Bronze Age and Greek myth, and while the Upper Paleolithic observations are often mixed in with Greek, Neolithic, and 19th century Australian aborigine mythology, these notes act like a springboard for a leap and descent that never took place.

Earlier I mentioned that one possible explanation for Olson's failure to include material from the deep past in the unfolding of his long poem was that his obsession with speech versus tools always drew him to oral sources e.g., he could relate to the Sumerians via the Gilgamesh epic (and I should note here that there is very little material on Cro-Magnon painting and engraving in the Chiasma material). Another explanation might involve a compulsion to return the poem to a daily sense of Gloucester (in 1963, at the beginning of *Maximus III*) after hammering away at Tartaros. Olson had never earlier allowed himself what we might call confessional largesse. There is very little personal/private life material in the early and middle period poetry—certainly some dreams, but nothing directly about Constance or Betty, or daily life at Black Mountain College. The part of Olson's life involving dependence upon women and the subsequent "goddess" idealization is not addressed. In the *Guide,* Butterick mentions "a long, confused, personal poem (involving the poet's mother and deceased wife" from 1969 and then quotes a few lines from it. When published one day it may open up some of this sealed and congested psychic terrain.

*

25] In the Chiasma material, Olson has a tendency to propose presentations that he does not follow up on. Here one must keep in mind that some inconsistencies may occur because we do not have the Lectures as outlined.

He proposes to quote Jung's "shortest characterization of the anima," then two pages later, he mentions a paper Jung has sent to him which he will use to "launch [his] own attack on this question of present power & a useable force of myth to each of us now." There is no follow up to either of these matters. Later, he proposes to give his "reasons in just a moment, as of the intent of Paleolithic man," and to offer "abundant evidence of signs of the winding path not only in Paleolithic but right thru Mesolithic and Neolithic… down to, say, the labyrinth of Crete at least." Paleolithic man's "intent" would represent a central declaration. Nothing more is said about it. Ditto for signs of the winding path, possibly because there is no evidence for such in the Upper Paleolithic (the term comes from Australian aborigine myths of origin). He also proposes to discuss "a man stalking a bison, and covered with the skin of the bison as he does it," and to examine Cro-Magnon dance. Again these fascinating matters are left up in the air.

Olson's free-wheeling and often exciting blast of ideas in the late 40s/early 50s seems to have set up an anti-methodical way of working that became problematic when examples were need to concretize proposals.

*

26] I am impressed with the rapidity with which Olson was able to read and assimilate materials about which he must have known virtually nothing until he looked into the books on the archaic that Boldereff brought up, along with what appears to be a half-dozen more. According to Butterick's notes at the end of *Olson #10,* the books involved were the Frobenius/Fox *Prehistoric Rock Pictures,* the earlier-cited Osborne *Men of the Old Stone Age,* C.F.C. Hawkes' *Prehistoric Foundations of Europe,* Gertrude Levy's *The Gate of Horn,* Max Raphael's *Prehistoric Cave Paintings.* Neither the Hawkes nor the Frobenius/Fox books would have been much help with the European Ice Age: after a brief introduction, the former moves to the Mesolithic and works forward from there; the latter is mainly about Africa and its historic rock paintings. Olson apparently did not

know about the publication of the Abbé Breuil's *Four Hundred Centuries of Cave Art* (in English translation, spring 1952). The book would have been a cornucopia, and have alerted him to, among many other painted/engraved caves, the revelation of Lascaux, discovered in 1940.

At times in these Lectures, Olson made perceptive observations and sightings. Probably via Levy, he recognized that cup-shapes (cupules), gouged out of rock slabs at La Ferrassie were "the first instance of engraving & shaping moving from utility to celebration: he [Mousterian man] starts with PERFECT CIRCLE then spiral, or, labyrinth." He is one of the first to notice that that there may be regional differences in aesthetic development in Cro-Magnon image-making, and associates the geometrically-painted stones from the Azilian period Mas d'Azil site with Australian *churingas,* noting that "these churingas are believed to hold in union divinity-animal-man, including the recent dead as well as those awaiting incarnation, and were shown to every initiate at the moment of his passage from boyhood to membership of the clan." While there is no evidence that the Mas d'Azil stones pertained to puberty rites, Olson's link is imaginative and resonant.

He intuited that the maze (and, by implication, the maze-like cave) was involved with the concept of a second birth:

> But the birth-death thing has another side to it—and actionable side of considerable moment now. It is the actual fact of SECOND BIRTH—that the maze of life does not stay maze—that one gets through. And thus all of these acts of expression we have been following is of a different import than merely that generalized thing—how does Eliot have it, that chief contemporary generalizer? birth, copulation, death
>
> for men have never, it appears, when they have known the intensities of the passage, rather than just the cave—that darkness—or the outside—that activity—been unaware that this is the thing, that *this is yourself,* that the passage can be forced to yield light, or something beside the noise of itself

He also offers a fantasia on the cave's evolution to tomb, temple, house, and church, up to the present: "and now, in the refusal of any of us any longer even to admire the SKYSCRAPER, we have that pseudo-cave, the WOMB, in place of that recognition which I have suggested will force itself more and more on men, that they, now, are literally CAVE—that the phrase that we are forced back on ourselves, has just such meaning."

Finally, he made the fascinating proposal that the *Odyssey* was not "an epic at all, was, in fact, a drama—was written as such—and that it reflects at its late date the masked dance of the caves."[12]

*

27] When my wife Caryl and I moved to the French Dordogne in the spring of 1974 for several months, Olson was not much on my mind. After visiting some of the painted caves, including Lascaux, I became aware that all the direct research done on them had been carried out by archeologists and that the field was wide-open for a poet to undertake his own investigation. After returning to Los Angeles late that summer, I reread Olson's advice to Ed Dorn that by taking on a man or a subject and doing what Olson called "a saturation job" on him or it, he would learn more about such than any other man and, in some mysterious way, "be in, forever."

I had actually done my first "saturation job" from 1962 to 1978 in translating and co-translating all of the European poetry of César Vallejo. I made that decision in Kyoto in 1962, thinking of my project not as a "saturation job," but as my apprenticeship to the art

[12] Olson also makes quite a few errors, mostly of a factual nature, in the Lectures. Some of these undoubtedly come from material he was reading that is now considered out of date. Some examples: Olson wrote that no objects were found in caves. Thousands of objects have in fact been found, including engraved bones and stones, hand lamps, paint tubes, flints for etching, charcoal, crayons, and ornaments. Olson also confused time periods, implying that Australian aboriginal ceremonies took place in the Upper Paleolithic. He was also confused as to where decorations are in the caves, thinking that paintings only occur in the depths and that all signs and Venus statuettes are at the entrances. This is not so. He suggests that the bull-roarer was the first musical instrument. While it is possible that one incised reindeer antler from La Roche de Birol is a bull-roarer, this piece is Magdalenian (18,000 to 12,000 B.P.) and much younger than Aurignacian or Gravettian flutes or Solutrean ochre-marked mammoth bones thought to have been musical instruments.

of poetry. The stone lithographer Will Petersen had visited one day and told me that he had just come from a *bonsai* gardener who had recently started to do some very original work. How old is he, I asked Will. In his late 60s, was the reply. When I expressed my amazement that it would take someone that long to come into his own, Petersen explained that in traditional Japan, artists and artisans often had long apprenticeships and sometimes only did their own work at the end of their lives. As a young American fixated on doing something original in my late 20s, this news threw me for a loop and got me thinking about what might really be involved in practicing an art over the long haul. I began to realize that I had learned very little about poetry as it might relate to myself while I was a student. Vallejo struck me as a different kind of poet than I had read before, and I intuited that if I really worked through his *Poemas humanos* I would learn something about poetry and about myself that I couldn't get anywhere else.

Thus the sixteen years spent translating and retranslating Vallejo somewhat prepared me for my even longer investigation of the origin of image-making. Other than the Lectures in *Olson #10* (which Butterick kindly xeroxed for me in 1977, a year before they were published), Olson's writings did not figure much into my work, and the Lectures themselves, while fascinating, did not bear directly on my project. However, I had two significant dreams concerning Olson, one at the beginning of the investigation, in 1976, and another at its end in 2000. They represent a kind of psychic contribution, a comradely display on the part of a man I never met.

Here is the first dream:

POEM COPIED FROM TEXT WRITTEN IN DREAM

I, Charles Olson,
left

Oprecht
walking my bicycle

a trace of chat

on the catless road

seemed to bridge
two far points
moon nodes

[at this point I as presented with a drawing of what looked like two cat ears intersecting a curved line—I drew it into the poem as I remembered it from the dream]

where I'd gotten air
the boy said be sure to see
the north ear
the marsh there nothing intersecting earth
more beautiful

I cast
& netted
Babson Whitehead
Jung & Neumann
stocked
my inner lake
until I need no longer
want what other men call
food, the outside,
was sufficient on
my innerness
an image of man
& collaged their
words into the fabric
--were they keloid
over an unhealable wound?

A faceless woman
chained to
the Venus of Willendorf
--was the lacuna in
the areté this crouched facelessone
the bridge across

atlementheneira

"Dictated" would be a better word than "Written," as I woke up with the entire Dictation" in mind. After the list of scholars' names Olson has drawn upon, fragments of a couple of his poems make their way in. The stocked inner lake probably picks up on "Wholly absorbed / into my own conduits to / an inner nature or subterranean lake," and "an imge of man" must allude to the "Maximus of Gloucester" poem from 1965 with the line, "The only interesting thing / is if one can be / an image / of man…"

The most interesting word in the dictation is the last one, "atlementheneira," a neologism. I took it as the sounding of the unknown depth possibly to be encountered in an investigation of the deep past. At the beginning of the poem "Visions of the Fathers of Lascaux," I seized on the word as the name of one of the "Fathers." I also heard ghosts of other words inside of it, like "atl atl" (the Nahuatl word for spear-thrower), "men," "then," and "era." Something like "atl atl era of men then."

*

28] During the night of February 16, 2000, when *Juniper Fuse* seemed to be finished, Olson appeared in another dream:

> Near a beach I discovered mole hills between kennels or chicken coops. A farmer said he'd turned his dogs on them. I watched furious fighting inside a shed, lots of pups being spit out. Worried that Caryl would not know where to find me, I started walking a path to suddenly find myself in a crowd where

I heard that Charles Olson, now out on the road with a small child, wandering and giving lectures for food, for some 80 days, was to arrive. I was shown photos of Robert Kelly with a young black woman and other strangers. Then I was in a house with people who had studied Olson, including an attractive Irish woman who had a small *tansu* set into the floor. She said it contained Olson texts and could not be opened until he arrived. The excitement was mounting—Olson enthusiasts seemed to be everywhere. I was now in a spacious cave and heard the approach of what I took to be Olson and his retinue—there he was, 7 feet tall, shaggy white hair, thin neck, block-like skeletal head, hunched over, climbing through the air. I went up to him, took his huge hand. He looked at me curiously, then boomed: "How are your caves coming along?" I started to describe the completion of *Juniper Fuse* but he interrupted: "The music, how about the music?" Before I could respond, he was past me. I was surrounded by hip-looking men in sunglasses whom I figured were Olson aviators. It was a joyful occasion—then it hit me: How could he be here? He died in 1970! Larry Goodell then piped up: "That's the majesty of it!" I was now caught up in another crowd, being shown a map of the Pech Merle cave with certain areas marked that I understood Olson had explored. "Olson is coming!" I heard. "What?" I said, "I just saw him." "No, he's coming now," voices clamored, and a strange creature rounded a cave bend, a leg-like head with one huge eye, stick-like body, insect legs. There was intense conversation about what was referred to as a "restoration." New people appeared, shouting that Olson was on his way! An even stranger apparition appeared, more insectile, arachnoid, long extending legs front and back, its head—a compact lavender mass—under its body. I worked my way under as the creature ambled along, yelling: "What happened to you?" I got my hands around the jewel-like head and wrenched it free, at which moment an agonized voice cried: *"I couldn't get the whole Theolonius!"* What was left disappeared among the mass of people thronging the cave.

Olson appeared, in this dream, to be devolving, or passing from personal consciousness into his collective, the realm of creature souls. His response to my question—"What happened to you?"—possibly banked off his earlier music remark, brings Theolonius Monk to mind, but even more a pun on "the whole Olson," perhaps also sounding the name of the Roman poet, Ausonius, whose poetry Olson read in translation in the late 1940s.

Shortly after this dream, I wrote "Cemeteries of Paradise," and added it to the manuscript. While writing the poem, the final line from "The Kingfishers" came to mind: "I hung among stones." Olson had set up this line with the couplet right before it:

> I pose you your question:
> shall you uncover honey / where maggots are?

In his study of this poem, *What Does Not Change,* Ralph Maud writes: "Olson is drawing here on a proverbial expression in the Bible (Judg. 14: 5-9), where Samson kills a lion and, coming back later, sees 'a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey.' In other words, bees can make use of the rotting carcass of a lion; can you make use of the apparently dead past, Western civilization?" In a way parallel to the bees, Olson implies that he will figure out a way to move into the future by attending to the archaic past, the past that one might examine in a field or ruins. Thus recovery of work done in the sun becomes the task of an "archeologist of morning."

In my poem, I wrote: "Unlike Olson / I do not 'hunt among stones.' / I hunt inside stone." In other words, I have gone back to the ice, as it were, before there was a city, to the dark of caverns, as an "archeologist" of the wee hours, right before dawn, and before any heaven. Olson's Lectures and fragmentary referencing of the Upper Paleolithic in his poetry slashed a path into that abyss of forms, confirming that a poet had business there. It was up to me to find my own direction toward the source of form that ultimately turned out, in *Juniper Fuse,* to be the hole that grew into a pole (or, bending, became the Uroboros and Okeanos). Or to ring one more change off my Gloucester, in the spirit that "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT," one could say:

pole is never more than an extension of hole.[13]

[13] For a contextualization of the hole/pole matter, see *Juniper Fuse*, pp. 232-236.