



Charles Olson at Goddard College
April 12-14, 1962

Plainfield, Vermont

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What the young know is the price today is huge, and already are clear that institutions are dinosaurs and sanctions are pitiful gasps and procedures all gone dead in their mouths and minds. The task wld seem to be to get the new things sorted and straight for all to have some idea of paths or procedures to follow (other than abandonment and suicide). Guerilla and soft.

-- Charles Olson, Letter to Hank Chapin, April 25th, 1962

Acknowledgements

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A Note on the Text

At Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont, Olson's next stop, he was at his outgoing best for the first few days of a week-long reading/lecture visit, helping a young but receptive student audience through his latest mythohistorical *Maximus* run by airing his views on the poet's role as mythmaker—reformulated, he said, following discussions a few days earlier with Dartmouth French poetry expert Ramon Guthrie. (Guthrie had pointed out to him that the medieval French verb *trobar* meant to *find*, allowing word-root fanatic Olson to link the troubadour poets with Herodotus, Homer, and himself in the tradition of the investigative storyteller, "the man who finds out the words.") But by the end of the week, both the poet himself and his wife [Betty Olson] had been summoned before the college Judiciary Committee, reprimanded for taking part in a wild drinking party on campus, and sternly "told to abide by community laws while there."

—Tom Clark
Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life

Charles Olson's first reading at Goddard College was recorded in the Haybarn Theatre on the evening of April 12th, 1962 while the talk on Melville was recorded in the same location on the afternoon of the 14th. Olson begins by addressing the problem of reading, "it's become a performing art, you feel as though you have an audience, and as if you're supposed to do a concert or something" and concludes, "I don't think I believe in verse in this respect at all." An ironic introduction for a tremendous reading from the third and fifth volume of *The Maximus Poems* with selections from *The Distances*. Goddard is a small, rustic college, popularized for its progressive and experimental practices. In the decade of Olson's visit, the student body was approaching its peak, with just over one-thousand students. According to Don and Susan Wilcox, the reading was arranged by Paul Weiners, a student at the time, who was remembered fondly as a "honky-tonk piano player" who later "became a kind of traveling cabaret act calling himself 'Sweet Pea'."

Textual editing of Olson's words are minimal, yet like any other form of translation, transcription is not transparent. I have refrained from including all "speech whiskers" as Peter Gizzi notes in his Preface to *The House that Jack Built*, by striking some of the stutters, coughs, grunts, etc. that are audible in the recordings, but ultimately proved distracting in the transcription. I have used brackets for two primary purposes throughout these transcriptions. The first is to mark the ambient sounds such as laughter, crying, papers shuffling, breaks in the tape, etc. The general criterion for my inclusion of these assertions has been framed by the question: *do they, or do they not clarify the context of Olson's comments, tone, and interaction with the audience?* When Olson's reading of a poem or essay varies from the published form, I have *not* corrected the variant for consistency with the published form, but made all efforts to allow the speech act to subsist as its own text. Otherwise, all poetic forms and contents are consistent with Olson's works as they appear in *The Collected Poems of Charles Olson & The Maximus Poems*, published by the University of California Press, edited by George F. Butterick, and published in 1997 and 1983, respectively.

Transcriptions of these recordings first appeared in the *Minutes of the Charles Olson Society* #s 2 (June 1993), 3 (October 1993) and 5 (September 1994). Copies of the *Minutes* are still available upon request, by writing to the editor, Ralph Maud at 1104 Maple Street, Vancouver, BC V6J 3R6 Canada. In addition to providing the reader/listener with the unique opportunity to observe the audio and textual recordings of the reading and talk, this transcription provides select bibliographic notes, reproductions of the poems and prose as they were read aloud, numerous corrections to the original transcription, and a more accessible means of distribution.

**Part One: Reading from *Maximus III, Maximus V, & The Distances*
April 12, 1962**

BEGIN TAPE 1

Ms. Glazier: Charles Olson will be giving us a reading from his work tonight, and I'm going to let him introduce himself, because I don't really know much about him.

Charles Olson: Well I'm very glad that I'm going to be here for a few days. Because I'd really rather talk about poetry I'll read somebody else's than myself. Being at some stage of existence which makes that sensible.

Unknown Voice: You don't mind using a tape recorder do you?

CO: Huh?

UV: You don't mind using a tape recorder do you?

CO: No. As a matter of fact I'm going to just watch it, [Laughter from audience] like a fire, let's sit here and watch that tape. [Laughter from Olson] What happens if it just goes on and I don't say anything? See, that's the problem with reading, it gets to be kind of a bore, because it—it's become a performing art, you feel as though you have an audience, and as if you're supposed to do a concert or something, and uh, I don't think I believe in verse in this respect at all. As a matter of fact, I know I don't. [A long pause, followed by the shuffling of papers]

Miss Glazier asked me to introduce myself, which is nuttier than a fruitcake. I suppose I'm here, because my co-agitator Mr. Creeley was here a year ago, and in fact I feel very much at home, because that previous tape, as far as I know was of a reading was—unless you've had someone in between—is Mr. Creeley's tape which ran from this room, was it? Into our kitchen in Gloucester, *directly* almost. I think it was in a matter of hours—it was like hotcakes. Have you had a poet read since?

UV: Not since then, as far as I know.

CO: Then I see it's a trap. If I don't read you'll all be disappointed, and if I do read I'll have to be very careful because it'll have to be the poems that interest me, and I'm not so sure, in recent experience, that they are poems which interest anyone.

UV: You can do whatever you want. [Laughter from audience]

CO: I don't feel I'm free. But then I, like—it's not a captive audience, it's more a captive poet I think. [Laughter from all] I've been working for quite a few years on a poem, which gets called *The Maximus Poems*, and this volume was published last year, which has the first three volumes, and the, the fourth volume was supposed to be published this year, by the same publisher, and yet I'm tempted tonight, if I could feel your, feel your, own experience, a little more, to read you poems first, from the fifth volume.¹ Just because that's more where I am than, where I was.

This, this book dates back about twelve years, I think, as the first poems were written about twelve years ago. And uh, I have no

impression, yea, of how much this book is known—could someone give me some idea of how much you know *The Maximus Poems*? I'm, I'm, I'm really fishing, because if I go to the fifth volume, [Laughter from Olson] instead of the first, because the first is unknown, that makes it awkward for you, I believe.

UV: It's probably little—I think it's probably fairly little known.

CO: Yea, yea, the general proposition is to address yourselves—or I mean this creature Maximus addresses himself to, to a city, which in the instance is, is Gloucester, which, then in turn, happens to be Massachusetts. That is Gloucester, Massachusetts. I'm not at all under the impression that it is necessarily more to Gloucester, Massachusetts, in any more meaningful sense than the creature is, either me, or whom he originally was intended as, which was a, was Maximus of Tyre, a 2nd Century, uh, dialectician. At least on the record, what he wrote, was *Dialethae* which I guess we have in the word “dialectic” meaning intellectual essence, or essays on an intellectual subject, and uh, he mostly wandered around the Mediterranean world from the center, from the, from the old capital of Tyre, talking about one thing—Homer's *Odyssey*. I don't have much more of an impression of him than that. I've tried to read his, *dialethae* and found them not as interesting as I expected. But he represents to me some sort of a figure, that centers, much more than, much more than the 2nd Century A.D. In fact, as far as I feel it like, he's like the neighbor of the world, and uh, in saying that I'm not being poetic or loose, uh. We come from a whole line of life which makes Delphi that center. I guess, I guess I, can say that amongst you and still be heard. And this I think must be the kind of a theory that can at least be disturbed. I, I, I, stress this part of it rather than what, maybe just to make it possible for, you to ignore the fact that most of you don't know, that most of you don't know these poems, so that I might be free to read a few of the fifth volume.

To start us off, because the, what I found that I arrived at in these recent poems is something that, is a transfer for me to that vision of a, of a, of a difference that um, Tyre is, or a proposition that Tyre is, as against, like say, Delphi. And if I can find the beginning of this volume I might just run a few of those poems.

I read in Toronto, just a couple, just a little longer than, two weeks ago, again, two years. And Toronto is one of the greatest places on this continent, or was two years ago. And in reading there at that time, I had read this poem, from this volume. Which, uh, includes a poem, of John Smith. Now John Smith was that man I mean who uh, had to do with Pocahontas, and was, as nobody seems to know, the governor of that Virginia Colony shortly thereafter. And in an explosion of ammunition on the James River, was so badly burned that he had to go back to London, and in fact like it almost burned like half his body. And he went back, and he was cured. And then became the great explorer of the North Atlantic and mapped the Gulf of Maine, Massachusetts Bay, as thoroughly as he had earlier mapped Chesapeake for the Virginia Colony, and became, by appointment, the Admiral of New England, having been the Governor of the Virginia Plantation. And, after one voyage, where he had set out for Wales, in 1614, he never was able to get back to America again, and in fact was refused by the Pilgrims in 1620, as their, as an advisor. In fact he would have liked very much to have come over again, knowing the whole situation as there, well, there earlier, Miles Standish, but there as a more complicated role. And Smith is one of my heroes, and I had read this poem, which is published in Smith's last book, the day of, the year of his death, which was the year of his death, which is 1629 or 30, and it's called, “The Sea Marke”: [Reads from section II of “*Maximus to Gloucester* Letter 15” *Maximus* I.69]²

"Aloofe, aloofe; and come no neare,
the dangers doe appeare;
Which if my ruine had not beene
you had not seene:
I onely lie upon this shelve
to be a marke to all
which on the same might fall,
That none may perish but my selfe.

"If in or outward you be bound,
do not forget to sound;
Neglect of that was cause of this
to steere amisse:
The Seas were calme, the wind was faire,
that made me so secure,
that now I must indure
All weathers, be they foule or faire

"The Winters cold, the Summers heat
alternatively beat
Upon my bruised sides, that rue
because too true
That no releefe can ever come.
But why should I despair
being promised so faire
That there shall be a day of Dome"

CO: And when I read that, which sits in another poem, which I will read you, which sits in another poem of my own, the leading poetess of Canada, questioned me as to whether Smith had written it. Well, I know Ph.D.'s, and my wife and I stayed in San Francisco with the wife of a leading Ph.D. who wrote his thesis on how many Philip—Elizabethan hacks there were who were capable of writing poems like this, and uh—can you hear?

UV: Not quite.

CO: Not quite. I've got a very big voice, I'm just playing mouse at the moment, uh. And we had a lovely long evening, the whole audience was, was involved in *my* argument that Smith is one of the distinguished English poets and that with his prose, and his poetry, one moves from England to America that early. *Now this* poem, that is my own poem, goes on from that moment of quoting that and says: [Reads section III and IV of "*Maximus to Gloucester* Letter 15"; *Maximus* I.70 and I.71]

And for the water-shed, the economics & poetics thereafter?

Three men,
coincide:

you will find Villon
in Fra Diavolo,
Elberthubardsville,
N.Y.

And the prose
is Raymond's, Boston, or
Brer Fox,
Rapallo,
Quattrocento-by-the-Beach, #
429

The American epos, 19-

02 (or when did Barton Barton Barton Barton and Barton?)

To celebrate
how it can be, it is
padded or uncomforted, your lost, you
found, your
sneakers

(o Statue,
o Republic, o
Tell-A-Vision, the best
is soap. The true troubadours
are CBS. Melopoeia

is for Cokes by Cokes out of

Pause

(o Po-ets, you
should getta
job

CO: You don't follow that? Shoot. I told you that tapes going on. So the first poem of the fifth volume of the *Maximus* is this, "A Later Note on Letter # 15" which is: [Reads *Maximus* II.79]

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

& Descartes was the value

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

& that concept of history (not Herodotus's,
which was a verb, to find out for yourself:
'istorin, which makes any one's acts a finding out for him or her
self, in other words restores the traum : that we act somewhere

at least by seizure, that the objective (example Thucidides, or
the latest finest tape-recorder, or any form of record on the spot

– live television or what – is a lie

as against what we know and went on, the dreams—

CO: Excuse me.

the dream : the dream being
self-action with Whitehead's important corollary : that no event

is not penetrated, in intersection or collision with, an eternal
event

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

CO: That I, I, I, I, submit as a poem. That was written January 15th, 1962 which even further confirms it. [Laughter from Olson] The next poem in the series is this: [Reads *Maximus* II:80]

128 a mole
to get at Tyre

CO: "128" is not a—it's like I was talking to Dick Bishop who has been our host overnight, last night he tells me that 750 is an important number in American life. Well, 128 is a route, is a highway from Boston to Gloucester:

128 a mole
to get at Tyre

CO: The third poem in this series, is called, "View, From the Orontes, from where Typhon". Now that is not as obscure as it looks here, but there is that problem when you work for a long time on a poem and you get involved with it and you find yourself just composing it. What I really mean about reading poems is that they can no longer extricate themselves from— from each, of themselves. Somewhere in some poem, some years ago, I had a whole big smash about, stepping right off the Orontes, a big, congested poem. [Olson snaps his fingers twice] I could, read you that passage at least. Oh yes, surely! Oh yes, surely, very interesting, because it has to, it has to—it's a dirty poem, dirty in that sense, it's messing everything up. A bridge over a river, a really huge highway bridge, which really feeds that route 128 successfully onto the island that Gloucester and Cape Ann properly is, and wasn't when John Smith chartered that situation, but was when Champlain did in 1606. The beach had built up and choked the channel of this river, which previously, when the Indians were in Gloucester, had been a very satisfactory connection between Ipswich Bay and Massachusetts Bay, so that the Gulf of Maine and the whole coast was really a unit. It became a great desire of the Massachusetts Bay Colony to open that—get that cork out of there. Now of course, it has been a great desire to put this bridge across it, and this poem, has to do in one passage with this. A fact of the building of this bridge.

Do you know, yourselves, enough of the history of Tyre, to know that the only thing in the world that confronted the universalization that Alexander proposed, which I think is the great compliment to the present, was Tyre? It so succ—It so refused to be knocked down by this Macedonian athlete that it was the sole place in the world which bucked him, and it took, Alexander—and if I were to be corrected, was it three or four years to reduce Tyre? And in order to get at her he built a mole, from the mainland to Tyre, like we did, by the way, to take Mexico City in the Mexican War. Do you remember how Mexico City was a—

UV: What's a mole?

CO: Oh. A mole is an earth bridge, a—simply extending earth out until you have a causeway. We did that to that lovely City of Flowers, floating, floating Mexico City. Remember that wonderful story about how the Americas? How early on, our characteristic intrusion upon on all places, and—[Laughter from the audience] remember that wonderful military fact of the Mexican War, that we did that thing? Or am I confused? Was it Cortés that did it? Was it Cortés who? I think it's Cortés who did it. Was it? I think it was. It was.

UV: I think so.

CO: Yes. Sounds very American right from the start! [Laughter from audience] Well I object to this damn bridge, and I state, state where I am, which is:

in the mud
off Five Pound Island
is the grease-pit
of State Pier

Go 'way and leave
Rose-Troup and myself—

CO: Is an English maiden who wrote a lovely history of the fir—of the founder of, the minister of England who really supported of the United States before she began—

Go 'way and leave
Rose-Troup and myself I smell your breath, sea
And unmellowed River under
the roar of A. Piatt Andrew

CO: Which is the name of the bridge.

hung up there like fission
dropping trucks the face

CO: Samuel Hodgkins who ran the ferry across that same spot.

Samuel Hodgkins didn't show
poling pulling 1 penny
per person 2
for a horse

step off
onto the nation The sea
will rush over The ice
will drag boulders Commerce
was changed the fathometer
was invented here the present is

CO: Excuse me that's heavy.

Commerce
was changed the fathometer
was invented here the present
is worse give nothing now your credence
start all over step off the
Orontes onto land no Typhon
no understanding of a cave
a mystery Cashes?

CO: And so forth. So. So this, some time afterwards: [Reads *Maximus* II.81]

"View" : fr the Orontes
fr where Typhon

the 1st to navigate
those waters
thus to define
the limits
of the land: Helen,
said Herodotus,
was only the last
of the European girls
to be absconded with
by the Asiatics

for which read
Phoenicians,
Semite sailors

Along those extending lines (rhumbs)
there was Manes first (Minos
maybe) there had been
Gades there was Pytheas
out into the Atlantic

far enough up into the North
for the Atlantic to be known

Portuguese
are part Phoenician (?
Canary Islanders
Cro-Magnon

Islands,
to islands,
headlands
and shores

Megalithic
stones

Stations
on shores
And Sable

Then England
an Augustine
land

CO: You dig? You want that again? I don't know. Call me if you'd like any one of these again, I have this problem with scoring, it's more difficult than music. Like, you know, you—one writes music, one doesn't play it. That's that problem with this kind of performing situation. I'm not, I'm not, I'm not, I'm not—I'm Beethoven! [Laughter from audience] Not something—if you'd like this score I'd be happy to read it again, but, this one I think is not a bad score, like they say. "*View, from the Orontes, from where Typhon*"—don't worry I'll be back: [Laughter from audience]

the 1st to navigate
those waters
thus to define
the limits
of the land:

CO: I, I, I—that, that really makes me—you know there's an earlier Maximus way back some time on Columbus, on which this whole business of the fact that Cypress, yea, Cypress. You know Cypress? That island just off this point of land that I'm talking about where the Orontes River comes in, [Cry from the audience] at the northern end of Syria? [Cry from the audience] What is that, a pussy cat? [Laughter from audience]

UV: It's a child.

CO: A child? Uh. Is that the bishop's child? A child? Where is there a child? Is there a child in the audience?
[Laughter from audience] Help! [Laughter from all] Well, anyhow, mind you, it's picture-like, it's a picture. See there's been several pieces of the picture put down before. One is that the islands of Cypress which I hope I can put in your mind quickly like that, is very close to this point where the Orontes River which is the main, was the main, manageable, traffic, trading, outlet of the whole of the Near East to Mediterranean and Atlantic life. And the first step was, and the first stop, and the first step, both weather-wise and sailing-wise was the island of Cypress. Well there was a big business previously about how from Cypress to Columbus, we get here. Now this one is poking around in the same place, and I'm talking about, those who were:

the 1st to navigate
those waters
thus to define
the limits
of the land: Helen,
said Herodotus,
was only the last
of the European girls
to be absconded with
by the Asiatics

for which read
Phoenicians,
Semite sailors

Along those extending lines (rhumbs)
there was Manes first (Minos
maybe) there had been
Gades there was Pytheas
out into the Atlantic

far enough up into the North
for the Atlantic to be known

Portuguese
are part Phoenician (?
Canary Islanders
Cro-Magnon

Islands,
to islands,
headlands
to shores

Megalithic
stones

Stations
on shores
And Sable

Then England
an Augustine
land

UV: [Indecipherable murmur]

CO: Trouble?

UV: No, I just uh—

CO: Yea, come again. I'll be back with this—can't get rid of it, that's all. Don't worry. I can't get rid of it. The fourth in the series now is one of those things you have to do to stay alive, and we happen to live in Gloucester so, and like, it doesn't matter where you live, like the same people occur. This poem is called—no, it's got no name, pardon me: [Reads *Maximus II.82*]

The East Gloucester
Young Ladies
Independent Society
has arisen
from the flames:

Audience: [Laughter]

the Sodality
of the Female Rule
has been
declared:

Audience: [Laughter]

We will Love
with Kisses

Each Other; and Serve Him
as Our Child

CO: [Shuffles papers] This, this has an awful lot of local—this next one, has an awful lot of allusions, and proper names, but I don't think they should trouble you, proper names are all over the place. And uh... and like, if any of you know, like a great poet, like a great poet that should be here at any moment, like, for your sake, Edward Dorn. Do any of you know Dorn's poetry? Well Dorn actually is—was—living in Santa Fe at the time, and Santa Fe, see it doesn't matter, see, it's the same thing as living in Gloucester: [Reads *Maximus* II.83]

patriotism
is the preserved park
of John Black
Magnolia pirate,
and Oliver Viera
his First Mate

Ralph Harland Smith at least
thinks that his intelligence
was given him by nature
or his mother or father for
some use which he at least
has tried
to use it for

Peter Smith
borrows it it is clear from
some one else

Nancy Lower
it is clear
thinks nature
is an ambulance

the wild life
CREW
of the Nancy Gloucester Elspeth Rogers
and the former head of the Harvard Business School
and the Brookline
lawyer
the NANCY GLOUCESTER'S ahoy

boys - at least Mr Brown
of Old Magnolia
made a pass

CO: You see, I don't think you were troubled. Now number six is—has actually got a title. It's, "Book II Chapter 37". And it has nothing whatsoever to do with anything, but, the, you, if you have the power of recognition or the experience of whom I am imitating, you will know:

I. Beginning at the hill of Middle Street the city
which consists most—

CO: Is there somebody speaking? Did I hear voices? [Laughter from audience] Oh, it's that tape talking back at me. I knew it would object! [Laughter from Olson and audience]

I. Beginning at the hill of Middle Street the city
which consists mostly of wharves & houses
reaches down to the sea. It is bounded
on the one side by the River Annisquam,
and on the other by the stream or entrance
to the inner harbor. In the Fort at this entrance

are the images of stone and there is another
place near the river where there is a seated
wooden image of Demeter. The city's own
wooden image of the goddess is on a hill
along the next ridge above Middle Street
between the two towers of a church called
the Lady of Good Voyage. There is also a stone image
of Aphrodite beside the sea. 2. But the
spot where the river comes into the
sea is reserved for the special
Hydra called the Lernean monster,
the particular worship of the city,
though it is proven to be recent
and the particular tablets of Poseidon
written on copper in the shape of a heart
prove to be likewise new.

CO: Anybody recognize *who* that is, beside myself? No?

UV: Is he a Greek?

CO: Yea.

UV: Herodotus?

CO: Uh no, it's Pausanius. It's Pausanius' *Description of Greece* in the 2nd Century A.D. Do you know that poem? It's remarkable, it's very, very, very—to me, like twin to Herodotus. He was a, he was a traveler, again like the boys of—like everybody—see like *On the Road*, you know. For, for, for really, like those first two centuries you know, I mean like wow, talk about being knocked out. [Laughter from audience] Nobody was at home! And in fact they did the thing that like anybody does

who moves, they found very interesting things, [Laughter from Olson] and Pausanius, I think that Pausanius' *Description of Greece* is one of those—is comparable to Herodotus', [Snaps fingers twice] I think for our minds, I think for our interests, yea. [Three strikes against a matchbox] You know everything has gotten very interesting and very complicated and very intellectual, and very satisfying for inquiry. Honestly, expression has lost ground *rapidly*, and a look, see, is really in business. [Blows out a match] I mean this boy is really a cat. Like Plutarch, ya dig? A contemporary, by the way. Plutarch, again, second century. Crazy, crazy, crazy, crazy record. If the Twentieth-Century has one resemblance, it has four, but it has one, one is the second century.

UV: What are the other three?

CO: Beg your pardon?

UV: What are the other three?

CO: Well, let me hold that, we'll come to that. How many days am I going to be here? I got a lecture on Saturday, I got to have *something* on reserve. [Laughter from audience] I got to lecture on Saturday, I mean I got to like, *really* put it out! I mean all I had to do tonight was have a ball! What am I going to do on Saturday night? It's terrible! [Laughter from audience] I didn't feel as though that one made it with you, I—at least I—it seemed too obscure or something. Ah, to hell with it. Naw, it's a postcard, I'll send it to you in the mail! [Laughter from audience] Number seven:

the rocks in Settlement Cove
like dromlechs, menhirs

CO: *men hears?* Whatever that is, *men hears?* menhirs? You know what I mean? Do you know those two words I'm using? No? "Dromlechs, menhirs." [Snaps his fingers three times] Megalithic—ah, mostly around Brittany, and like old Ireland, Scotland, Denmark. Old Waterhedge, ah, no, no. What is it? Stonehenge, but smaller Brittany Stones. The Brittany Stones are smaller than those real, megalithic stones of Stonehenge. Yea, yea, a burial mark, apparently. There were two forms, I love those two words, and even in fact, driving up here tonight, for the whole damn scenery, there's nothing but earth, dromlechs, and menhirs. At least, those words were what I kept thinking of the whole time. These are clichés, I love them, dromlechs, menhirs.

the rocks in Settlement Cove
like dromlechs, menhirs
standing in the low tide
out of the back of the light from Stacy Boulevard on the water
at night

CO: Can you get that picture? I'll try it once more, I think it's there. I think it's there. I'll try it again.

the rocks in Settlement Cove
like dromlechs, menhirs

standing in the low tide
out of the back of the light from Stacy Boulevard on the water
at night

CO: And the next one, dating just a short time ago, November 12th I discovered in 1961, wow.

Peloria the dog's upper lip kept curling
in his sleep as I was drawn to the leftward to
watch his long shark jaw and sick brown color
gums the teeth flashing even as he dreamed.
Maximus is a whelping mother, giving birth
with the crunch of his own pelvis.
He sent flowers on the waves from the mole
of Tyre. He went to Malta. From Malta
to Marseilles. From Marseilles to Iceland.
From Iceland to Promontorium Vinlandiae.
Flowers go out on the sea. On the left
of the Promontorium. On the left of the
Promontorium, Settlement Cove

I am making a mappemunde. It is to include my being.
It is called here, at this point and point of time
Peloria.

CO: The next poem has just recently been—appeared in New York, in—I'm trying to think where it did appear? Oh yes, in LeRoi Jones' *Floating Bear* if you know this remarkable, mimeographed magazine, which is appearing in our time.³ Do you know? Do any of you know this great editor? The greatest editor since Robert Creeley, and Jones has been putting this thing out for a couple of—oh no, maybe it's not been a year, with Diane Di Prima. She does the typing most remarkably. [Coughing in audience] No, I say, say that, very odd, don't think I'm putting her down, wow, I mean, I published the most terrible thing that was ever written last year called, "A Grammar—A Book." And it's *nothing* but parts of speech; and she took my typed copy and put it in mimeograph so there wasn't a—and it's all *tilted*, and *squeezed* and shoved, and the only trouble is that the mimeograph doesn't make sense; actually it's the typewriter that can't make the same effect as a typewriter, but that's not *her* fault, she did it *marvelously*, it was like the greatest publishing I ever had, was like Miss Di Prima. Now this poem, for some reason, I'm really, like everybody thinks is awful square. But then I've had more response from it from those who I, I, I should go on now—to make a pitch, you know. [Laughter from audience] I've ruined it. You never should make a pitch you know. Actually, it's a very quiet idea. The title is "In the Face of a Chinese View of the City." I was talking to the man I wrote this poem about the other day, the city manager, and I said, "I just published a poem about you in New York, and the title is 'In the Face of a Chinese View of the City'." He said, "I don't know anything about Chinese." "Don't worry," and I said, "Remember Confucius?" like. [Laughter from audience] And he said, "Oh yea" he said "Oh yea". Well it just did it, and it suddenly occurred to me that, wow, you know we all go around living with the past as though it had value, and here we are stuck with—what value?

In the Face of a Chinese View of the City

on what grounds shall we criticize the City Manager?
or the D PW ? as easily as we do
the Superintendent of Schools for the texts
he buys? for the snow left on the streets
so a car slews and a boy has a broken
side? for the insufficient time the City Clerk
spends on the earlier records of the City
even if like dog-licenses, and births and marriages,
he is up-to-date on the latest
of the suit-clubs and the bowling alleys? Business is obviously
cant and social life almost entirely
liberal but public office, as forever,
remains distinct — and moral — or
the life of the individual dwindles into
stink — a man in his own kitchen boiling
paregoric is he then and there on an open line to
the vein of the police, and invadable as such, by what
term ? Cant mores praise accomplishment
obvious competence clear management of
\$5,000,000 a year's receipts for ex-
penditures leaves open what judgment
if the color of the lights on the Main
Street turn the lips of women blue
and all the days are cheery too
with the smiles of windows washing cloths?

[Papers shuffle]

The few,

and the masses, as though they constituted
possible public life — while those who lead them
are as cherry-red after golf or shoveling
their sidewalks clean as Santy Clauses hung from silver wires
fat or lean dirty or clean, the differences
of Santy Clauses not by any tally measure for what is what
the single probity public figure better be
what had he better be?

UV: Could you read it again?

CO: Yea, I'll read you a better version, I read the typed copy, I've got the manuscript I see, and there are a few, nice differences, I think. If I can find the second page, wait a minute. [Papers shuffle] What am I doing? I've got most of it in manuscript.

on what grounds shall we criticize the City Manager?
or the D PW ? as easily as we do
the Superintendent of Schools for the texts
he buys? for the snow left on the streets
so a car slews and a boy has a broken
side? for the insufficient time the City Clerk
spends on the earlier records of the City
even if like dog-licenses, and births and marriages,
he is up-to-date on present mechanics of his office

CO: No, that's better here.

he's up to-date-on the suit clubs, on, on the latest of
of the suit-clubs and the bowling alleys? Business is obviously
cant and social life almost entirely

liberal but public office, as forever,
remains distinct — and moral — or
the life of the individual dwindles into
stink — a man in his own kitchen boiling
paregoric is he then and there on an open line to
the vein of the police,

CO: No, that's cramped up, yea that's the way I had it. Excuse me.

Is he, is he, is he then and there on an open line to
the vein of the police, and invadable as such, by what
term ? Cant mores praise accomplishment
obvious competence clear management of
\$5,000,000 a year's receipts for ex-
penditures leaves open what judgment
if the color of the lights on the Main
Street turn the lips of women blue
and all days are cheery too
with the smiles of windows washing clothes?

CO: Like all night it was, the point—you know like that funny—those things we do?

The few.

and the masses, as though they constituted
possible public life — while those who lead them
are as cherry-red

CO: Cherry red or cheery red?

Are as cherry-red after golf or shoveling
their sidewalks clean as Santy Clauses hung from silver wires

fat or lean dirty or clean, the differences
of Santy Clauses not by any tally measure for what is what
the single probity public figure better be
what had he better be?

[Reads *Maximus* II. 90]

while on
Obadiah Bruen's Island, the Algonquins
steeped fly agaric in whortleberry juice,
to drink to see

[Repeats *Maximus* II. 90]

while on
Obadiah Bruen's Island, the Algonquins
steeped fly agaric in whortleberry juice,
to drink to see

[Reads *Maximus* II. 91]

Shag Rock,
bull's eye

& gulls
making such a pother
on the water in the sun
I thought it was Round Rock Shoal
in a south west—easter

[Repeats *Maximus* II. 91]

Shag Rock,
bull's eye

& gulls
making such a pother
on the water in the sun
I thought it was Round Rock Shoal
in a south easter

CO: Thirteen. January 17th 1962

A 'learned man' sd Strabo
the 'English'
of the Mediterranean,
as the Greeks the Germans
the inherited past.

CO: I don't even know what the hell I'm referring to—wait a minute. "A *learned* man said Strabo?" I've lost touch with that one. [Laughter from audience] Huh? It doesn't matter—like learned men we all know about. You know Strabo, again, 2nd Century, the geographer? Who's responsible for our knowing about Pythias at all, the man of the 4th Century B.C., who actually sailed out of Marseilles, and, and, and like, by the very thing which makes Strabo suspicious that he was a liar, Stefansson, who really knows like, god—the present Stefansson, Vilhjalmur—who knows, like, the Arctic, says is the best evidence of the fact that Pythias was really in a certain season off the coast of Iceland in the Fourth Century B.C., like, let's really talk, instead of crap of Irish and Vikings, like, everything was really in existence in powerful ways back before Alexander, yeah? Like, I think—like, there again, I'm pushing, but, like, don't be fooled by the universalization of the present. [Strikes a match] The work, the *real* work of the future has already been done, and the future that is proposed is a lie. I didn't know I was going to get that up! Man, is this Hamlet?

UV: Um-hum.

CO: Oh. I can't figure out what I'm referring to. It's a very complicated intellectual poem, uh [Laughter from audience] like the way you see the whole thing is—

the 'English' of the Mediterranean

And you see, it goes on. Gee, that really looks pretty—pretty obscure, even if [Laughter from audience] see, it's *really* important to me. I can't, I can't really get it, I wish I could, could get it—catch and find out.

A 'learned man' sd Strabo
the 'English'
of the Mediterranean
as the Greeks the Germans
the inherited past.

CO: And so. Can you help me? What am I talking about there? Who is "a 'learned man'?" I can't figure it out. The reference, by the way, the distinction being drawn is between the Phoenicians who are the "'English'" of the Mediterranean against the Greeks who are the "*Germans*," which wow, like you know, like that has never been said, I think, to our knowledge. And I mean—and I even think it's mighty, mighty, mighty, important. I think this one is the same day, yea: [Reads *Maximus* II.93]

Cyprus
the strangled
Aphrodite — Rhodes

Crete
— the Mother Goddess
fr Anatolia
Phrygian Attis

Malta: Fat Lady

Spain

UV: Again?

CO: Oh, sure.

UV: Thank you. Great.

CO: Yea, sure, it's all right:

Cyprus
the strangled
Aphrodite — Rhodes

Crete
— the Mother Goddess
fr Anatolia
Phrygian Attis

Malta: Fat Lady

Spain

CO: Same day: [Reads *Maximus* II.94]

after the storm was over
out from his cave at Mt Casius
came the blue monster

devoured with scale

CO: Excuse me:

covered with scales
and sores about his mouth
flashing not too surely

his tail but with his eyes
showing some glare
rowing out gently

into the stream, to go
for Malta, to pass by
Rhodes and Crete

to arrive at Ireland
anyway to get into the Atlantic
to make up a boil

in northeastern waters
to land in a
grapevine corner

to shake off his cave-life
and open an opening
big enough for himself

CO: That's a story, I, I, I like, think it should be enjoyed.

after the storm was over
out from his cave at Mt Casius
came the blue monster

covered with scales
and sores about his mouth
flashing not too surely

his tail but with his eyes
showing some glare

[Coughing from audience]

showing some glare
rowing out gently

into the stream, to go
for Malta, to pass by
Rhodes and Crete

to arrive at Ireland
anyway to get into the Atlantic
to make up a boil

in northeastern waters
to land in a
grapevine corner

to shake off his cave-life
and open an opening
big enough for himself

[A pause, followed by *Maximus II. 95*]

to travel Typhon
from the old holdings

from taking the Old Man's
sinews out and hiding them under

the bear rug, the Sister
Delphyne

who listens too easily
to music, from Ma

who is always there
and get that building up

at the corner of
Grapevine Road & Hawthorne Lane

with Simp Lyle
for manager

[A pause, followed by *Maximus II.96*]

up the steps, along the porch

turning the corner

of the L,

to go in the door

and face the ladies

sitting in the comfortable

chairs,

and greet Simp

with the morning's mail

[A pause, followed by *Maximus* II.97]

people want delivery

When I used to stop to talk to the Parenti Sisters

or Susumu Hirota, the McLeod sisters

who ran the Harbor View

would call up the post office

and ask what my truck was doing

at the corner of Rocky Neck Avenue

[A whistle followed by a stir in the audience. Olson clears his throat, and reads *Maximus* II.98]

the coast goes from Hurrian Hazzi to Tyre
the wife of god was Athirat of the Sea
borne on a current flowed that strongly
was taken straight through the Mediterranean
north north west to Judas waters
home to the shore

[Silence, followed by *Maximus* II.99]

tesserae

commissure

UV: What is "tesserae"?

CO: Yea. The little pieces that are used in making a mosaic. They are tesserae, the, the—all those little pieces of stone and glass and color.

UV: And the other word?

CO: "Commissure," which means, uh, bound together. But it's ah—

UV: Could you read it again?

CO: Yea:

tesserae

commissure

CO: The "tesserae" is underlined, is a foreign word, and "commissure" —actually they're both in the Webster's book, but I don't know if "tesserae" is. That's really kind of a run, move now, it moves now differently. In fact it kind of breaks a little bit. I, I'll read you the next poem, but the one beyond it I haven't been able to write. It's very bad, you see, and you really get stuck, you really get stuck. Twenty-one: [Reads *Maximus* II.100]

Lane's eye-view of Gloucester
Phoenician eye-view

1833 14 october 443 Vessels at anchor in the harbor besides what Lay at wharfs

CO: And this missing poem, and then this one. That missing poem, by the way, is a, is a story, maybe—I may not be competent to write, but it should be [Snaps fingers once] a story, which, uh, I know a man who wrote. But I'm involved in that problem: *should I crib him or not?* A very great writer, who won the running broad jump at the first modern Olympics in Athens, James Connelly. What I would like to do, which he can do and has done, which is to take a vessel from the eastern end of Georges shoal, the north-eastern end, and run it at night, in a easterner—easterly, through the maze of the shoals of north end of Georges, without wrecking, and getting into clear water on the other side, and making the market in Boston, and it really takes experience I don't have. So I'll have to wait and see what I do with that problem of stealing it from Connelly. It's important to me. I have published some in earlier *Maximus* some such sea stories, one of which I might read after I'm done with this sequence, called "The Rattler" which has been published in another one of those mimeographed magazines, this from the West Coast this time, called *Migrant*. Which, some of you know, by any chance? I did it originally on a tape, that Duncan, and Creeley and I, that Duncan and I, had made for Creeley for his Christmas two years ago, two? Two or three years ago: [Reads *Maximus* II.101]

Older than Byblos
earlier than Palestine
and possessed of an alphabet
before the Greeks

round about the pawl-post
that heavy lines are wound
which hold by the chocks
the windlass when wound

from running back

END TAPE 1 / BEGIN TAPE 2

CO: I've been recently, in these recent poems, plugging, not plugs, I'd likely—to get something, but getting involved in the whole damned Phoenician thing as a force, which seems more interesting to me. And, those two stanzas, there's two stanzas and a running line.

Older than Byblos
earlier than Palestine
and possessed of an alphabet
before the Greeks

round about the pawl-post
the heavy lines are wound
which held by

CO: Excuse me.

which hold by the chocks
the windlass when wound

from running back

CO: You will see that in the fifth poem ahead, which will be the last one that I'll read in this sequence. That language I guess, comes home, comes to bear. I'll have to stand and consult my partner over here—*hello!* Have you ever heard this stuff after? This is what I mean by that "lie," it's awful, it's nothing to do with — This is called, "Chronicles" and I guess it's two.

I

As Zeus sent Hermes
to draw Agenor's cattle
down to the seashore
at Tyre, date

1540 BC, and thereby
caused the pursuit
of him by Agenor's
sons — one to

Carthage, one to the edge
of the Black Sea, one
to found Thebes,
another

to establish the rich
gold mines of Thasos —
meanwhile Zeus
as an immaculate

white bull with one
black stripe down him
has caught Europe
up on to his back,

his softness
fooling her,
she placing flowers
in his mouth,

he sails off
to Crete, near
Idea, and there
also Phoenician

persons are
born, Europe's
sons Minos,
Rhadamanthys,
Sarpedon

2

Taurus,
King of Crete,
caught Tyre
when Agenor

and his sons
were rallying
from a sea-
battle,

and plastered
it — the Evil Night
of Tyre John Malalas
calls it,

when Cretans
took everything
and blasted her
back in to the sea

from which
she came, when
Ousoos the
hunter

was the first man
to carve out
the trunk
of a tree

and go out
on the waters
from the shore

These
are the chronicles
of an imaginary
town

placed as an island
close to the shore

[Reads *Maximus* II.104]

Sanunthion lived
before the Trojan War
a self-conscious historian,
then, existed in,
and as of Phoenicia,
before 1220 BC
(or 1183). The details
of the Parian Chronicle
and such matters as
two Hercules, a
Phoenician Melkart—
Hercules more than
5 generations previous
to the Greek Hercules
(born 1340 BC,
by the Parian Chronicle)
make sense

which loan-words
& other epigraphical
matters now available
enforce: that the Libyans
and the Phoenicians (Agenor
was said to come from Egypt
& to be the son of Poseidon
by Libya – who herself
was the daughter of
the king of Egypt) one
sees a hub-bub
of peoples – Indo –
Europeans,
Libyans (the least known
of all sources of
serious inroads on
Egypt & collaboration

by the Libyans with
the still unknown Raiders
of the Sea) – and Uganda:

is there anything
to the possibility
that some of the non-Euclidian
roughnesses are here
involved – Hittite, or Hurrian
may not be the only evidences,
there may be East African
— and again what about Libyan?
movements to the center
of the 2nd Millennium:
Semite Sailors? They may be
Gondwannan creatures
who swung off,
for market
from the Eastern Edge
(where did the Sumerians
come from, into the Persian
Gulf – sea – peoples
who raided and imposed themselves
on a black-haired previous people
dwelling among reed-houses
on flooded marshes?

[A pause, followed by *Maximus* II.106]

John Watts took
salt – and shal –
lops, from
the Zouche Phoenix
London's supplies
10 Lb Island

UV: Could you repeat that again?

CO: Sure:

John Watts took
salt – and shal –
lops, from
the Zouche Phoenix
London's supplies
10 Lb Island

CO: And now, for the last one, called “The Gulf of Maine” if I can find it. It may take me a minute. Meanwhile, I'll read another poem on that subject, for your, like information, as I read it this afternoon. We had a little accidental stop along the way, at a place called Dartmouth, where on Thursdays, fortunately, they have a very nice thing about the poets. What do they

call it? "Thursday Poets?" or "Poets' Thursday?" Something like that, and I read this poem, and because it isn't — I've forgotten where it goes in the series, but it's another one, so—"Going Right Out of the Century!":

I, John Watts—

CO: Oh, I should say as, like, again we'll have to come back to some information. It seems to me that I've handled this thing before. I've been interested in it for a long time. There was a fellow named Watts who was a factor of, was a factor of this Dorchester Company, who did, did come over on a voyage and found these, and did, did find this stuff stored, on this island which is the middle of Gloucester Harbor, and it had been left there by a ship from London, that is the *Zouche Phoenix*, and the Admiralty Courts fortunately, are filled with this record, and I'm drawing on that. No, not in this one. [Reads *Maximus* II.74]

*Going Right Out of the Century**

I, John Watts via	& did not disturb
Thomas Morton, claimant	scallops thereon lying
to possessing disposal	as well as other
of lands and islands of	fishing gear – sd salt
sd coast including	in tunnes for use in
Gloucester Harbor, did take	drying fish was
salt stored on	all I took, the
10 Lb Island by	provenance of same being
ship Zouche Phoenix, London	sd Morton declared

Oh dear! I seem to have lost the other page, no, no it's not... oh yes, here, here, thank you:

& did not disturb
scallops thereon lying
as well as other
fishing gear – sd salt
in tunnes for use in
drying fish was
all I took, the

provenance of same being
sd Morton declared

in his hand & skipped
I wld suppose which
value received
I herein testify

*[Note: The title of "*Going Right out of the Century*" appears at a 45 degree angle pitched toward the upper right-hand corner of the page. Olson reads the left column, followed by the right, and concludes with the middle section.]

CO: And now with, "THE GULF OF MAINE" if I can find it, we can have a break. [Papers shuffle] I think I scared the baby. [Laughter from all. After a long pause and two deep breaths, Olson begins reading *Maximus II.108*] Al-tham, Altham:

Altham says
they were in a pinnace
off Monhegan
season
1623, having left
Cape Anne

CO: That's a little too pious. Let me:

Altham says
they were in a pinnace
off Monhegan
season
1623, having left
Cape Anne

and trove
mightily
until in
Damariscove Harbor they
split up
in a storm

the sides
of the vessel
with the current running North North East
were ground
in turn
by the same rock wall the vessel

switching about
like a bob and his wife
and Captain Bridge's, in London
reached by mail via
Plymouth's agent

address
High Court Row and St by Chancery Light
could not have imagined
had they known,
that night,
their husbands

were on such a shore
and bandied
as they were: 4 men
alone, of all of them,

dragged themselves up
in the early morn
out of the wash
of that dreadful storm
so many chips among ground timbers

of what was left
of the pinnacle. Such was the coast
when sturdy oak-built 17th-century
little boats out of London and Plymouth
cast their nets, King James said We do approve

of the Pilgrims going
to the sand shore of
Virginiay
if fishing is
the holy calling

they go there
about, dear James for corfish
did they go Madam Altham
Madame Bridge
called on James Shirley

one bright City morning
for pounds and sterling
sturdy pence
in recompense
of their dear husbands

so. The night
was growley
the waves
were high the high built pinnas
tossed the winds down
pressed

the Little James
until she was far spent
& fore went head down
into the sea below the
waves her sticky masts

with thick crows nests
were up above the
waves and broken-stumped
wild balls of fire
played over

where their heads
below the water
filled and shoes
and coats pulled down
the crew

and Captain Bridge
& Mr Altham swam
like underbodies going by
in an outrageous park

or film until
their knees
were smashed
on small rocks
as their poor pinnacle likewise poorly lay

chawn mostly but some parts of her bruised sides
now resting on the sands where we shall
dig them up and set them upright as posts
at just the signal place for tourists
to come by and not give one idea

why such odd culls
stand along a fishing
shore
though not used much at the present time
and mostly well-dressed persons
frequent it

CO: Well, that's a set. That's a set. Can you cut that for a minute while we have a little intermission?

UV: That's a set?

CO: That's a set. Can you cut that for a minute while we have a little intermission?

UV: Can I take your microphone?

**Part Two: Reading from *Maximus III, Maximus V, & The Distances*
April 12, 1962**

[Olson returns to the stage after an intermission, and break in the recording.]

CO: ...I was using very, to them, greatly this Thursday afternoon scene that I went to. It's very nice, it's a—there's one very descent guy, a man named Alexander Lang who, whom all the poets that I know whom have come through would do anything for—which is why I really went there today, despite my delaying my coming here, which is simply because he wrote a letter here, which I haven't seen yet, one request, asking me if, so long as I was going to be here tonight, asking me if, would I come to that thing this afternoon. His ah, his wife was a poet whom I know better than his work, Dilys, Dilys Lang. Previous wife, and he ah, he really is like one of the few men—like there are a few men in this country who you'd touch just to—and if he said come, you'd come, just because he said it. I know I'd say about three, and he's one of them. Man, and there's a great book man, a great bookstore man, Carnie, Gordon Carnie in Cambridge, Mass. whom any of us would go out of our way for. And Lang is just this sort, and he's a very quiet, small thing, he's sort of tucked in there. He's got nothing to do, he's got a post at the Library at Dartmouth, he's not a, he's no big-shot, like, literature or any of that. And there's a very beautiful poet there, who's work I don't know, but he's a lovely man named Guthrie—do any of you know Raymond Guthrie?⁴

UV: Yea.

CO: Huh? Gee, he was a ball, at least personally. Well, Mr. Hamlin asked me if I would explain at little bit of what this, at least, this proposed method, as far as it makes—but then I stumble on this earlier poem on Shag Rock, written on October 18th 1961, called, “Shag Rock”:

the positive
the mythological
the world
the mundus
round
no explanation
all that happens is eternal
no examples
no proving
possible

CO: ...almost fallen...it almost fell out of my hand, didn't it?

the positive
the mythological

CO: And then, in parenthesis:

the world
the mundus
round
no explanation
all that happens is eternal
no examples
no proving
possible

CO: Which sort of—it makes the case, like, if a case can be made. I guess a lot of you are, I heard some, I got some impression, that like, the sort of like the references were like, especially the imperative historical was a little interfering with the, well, there's hardly much I can do about that. I mean, like I said from the beginning, these poems, this work is a—leaves me not very much room to read poems that are like poems, really, either, certainly can be, usually are, and certainly see no reason why they shouldn't continue to be, but I seem to be off on this kick. Or so I can—I mean, there's plenty of them, just like they don't do that I guess more immediate thing that one feels in a poem, I don't know.

I published a book this past year, last—less than a year ago, published by Grove Press, which is all those sorts of poems that are outside *The Maximus Poems*. And like Ms. Glazier asked me, “Do you write poems, like, about those you love or live with, so that a person could know without needing to have the reference, as the experience itself?” So I thought I might read one poem I can think of that might give you that experience with this sort of theme, without departing from the path, that I myself am on—which is called “The Librarian.” I'd like to read that, and a very open historical poem called “The Rattler” that I mentioned, a solid sea story. So you see we could move for a little bit, just for a short while, if you're still interested, a little aside from that apparently what appears to be congested, 2nd Century Phoenician run: [Laughter from audience]

The landscape—

CO: I always have trouble getting this one off.

The landscape (the landscape!) again: Gloucester,
the shore one of me is (duplicates), and from which
(from offshore, I, Maximus) am removed, observe.

In this night I moved on the territory with combinations
(new mixtures) of old and known personages: the leader,
my father, in an old guise, here selling books and manuscripts.

My thought was, as I looked in the window of his shop,
there should be materials here for Maximus, when, then,
I saw he was the young musician has been there (been before me)

before. It turned out it wasn't a shop, it was a loft (wharf-house) in which, as he walked me around, a year ago came back (I had been there before, with my wife and son,

I didn't remember, he presented me insinuations via himself and his girl) both of whom I had known for years. But never in Gloucester. I had moved them in, to my country.

His previous appearance had been in my parents' bedroom where I found him intimate with my former wife: this boy was now the Librarian of Gloucester, Massachusetts!

Black space,
old fish-house.
Motions
of ghosts.
I,
dogging
his steps.
He
(not my father,
by name himself
with his face
twisted
at birth)
possessed of knowledge
pretentious
giving me
what in the instant
I knew better of.

But the somber
place, the flooring
crude like a wharf's
and a barn's
space

I was struck by the fact I was in Gloucester, and that my daughter was there—that I would see her! She was over the Cut. I hadn't even connected her with my being there, that she was

here. That she was there (in the Promised Land-the Cut! But there was this business, of poets, that all my Jews were in the fish-house too, that the Librarian had made a party

I was to read. They were. There were many of them, slumped around. It was not for me. I was outside. It was the Fort. The Fort was in East Gloucester—old Gorton's Wharf, where the Library

was. It was a region of coal houses, bins. In one a gang was beating someone to death, in a corner of the labyrinth of fences. I could see their arms and shoulders whacking

down. But not the victim. I got out of there. But cops
tailed me along the Fort beach toward the Tavern

The places still
half-dark, mud,
coal dust.

There is no light
east
of the Bridge

Only on the headland
toward the harbor
from Cressy's

have I seen it (once
when my daughter ran
out on a spit of sand

isn't even there.) Where
is Bristow? when does I-A
get me home? I am caught

in Gloucester. (What's buried
behind Lufkin's
Diner? Who is

Frank Moore?

CO: Does that seem more a poem? I thought it might. Or, here's a short poem, like a lyric called "Moonset,
Gloucester, December 1, 1957, 1:58 AM.":

Moonset, Gloucester,
December 1, 1957, 1:58 AM

Goodbye red moon
In that color you set
west of the Cut I should imagine
forever Mother

After 47 years this month
a Monday at 9 AM
you set I rise I hope
a free thing as probably
what you more were Not
the suffering one you sold
sowed me on Rise
Mother from off me
God damn you God damn me my
misunderstanding of you

I can die now I just begun to live

UV: Could you read that again?

UV: Yes, please.

UV: Before you do, what's that "cut"?

CO: Cut. It's ah, it's that thing I mentioned earlier. It's that plug in the Annisquam River which builds up and shuts it off, shuts the passage off between the Ipswich Bay and the Massachusetts Bay, and it's called the "Cut" for the necessity to cut it through. It always has to be—ah no, it used to be in the 17th Century. Like I said, it was there when Champlain was there, at the beginning it was open when Smith was there, twenty years later it was closed. It's been a—it's the chief item of whether that's an island or not. Like when, when it's in it's not, and when it's out it is:

Goodbye red moon
In that color you set
west of the Cut I should imagine
forever Mother

After 47 years this month
a Monday at 9 AM
you set I rise I hope
a free thing as probably
what you more were Not
the suffering one you sold
sowed me on Rise
Mother from off me
God damn you God damn me my
misunderstanding of you

I can die now I just begun to live

[A pause, followed by a thunderous and punctuated reading of "The Distances"]

So the distance are Galatea
and one does fall in love and desires
mastery

old Zeus—young Augustus

Love knows no distance, no place
is that far away or heat changes
into signals, and control

old Zeus—young Augustus

Death is a loving matter, then, a horror
we cannot bide, and avoid
by greedy life

we think all living things are precious
—Pygmalions

a German inventor in Key West
who had a Cuban girl, and kept her, after her death
in his bed
after her family retrieved her
he stole the body again from the vault
Torso on torso in either direction,
young Augustus
out via nothing where messages
are

or in, down La Cluny's steps to the old man sitting
a god throned on torsos,

old Zeus

Sons go there hopefully as though there was a secret, the object
to undo distance?
They huddle there, at the bottom
of the shaft, against one young bum
or two loving cheeks,

Augustus?

You can teach the young nothing
all of them go away, Aphrodite
tricks it out,

old Zeus—young Augustus

You have love, and no object
or you have all pressed to your nose
which is too close,

old Zeus hiding in your chin your young
Galatea

the girl who makes you weep, and you keep the corpse live by all
your arts

whose cheek do you stroke when you stroke the stone face
of young Augustus, made for bed in a military camp,
o Caesar?

O love who places all where each is, as they are, for every moment,
yield

to this man
that the impossible distance
be healed,
that young Augustus
and old Zeus
be enclosed

“I wake you,
stone. Love this man.”

[Reads "Cashes"]

Cashes

I tell you it's cruel. There was the Rattler, pitchpoled over Cashe's Shoals at midnight some thirteen years ago in a gale of wind, and came right side up and got into port safe with every man on board

No ship can live on Cashe's in a storm. Sailing either side a quarter of a mile and there is sixty or seventy fathom of room but right on the shoals, which is only a few rod across, the water isn't much over twenty feet deep. Only smaller vessels can go over in calm weather. It's so shallow kelp grows on the top of the water and when there's a blow and the big seas come in, a hundred feet of water chopping down on the bottom, it's a bad place

The Rattler was headed along down the coast from Newfoundland loaded with frozen herring. The night was black and the captain was off his reckoning, leastways the first thing any one knew a big sea lifted the vessel and pitched her forward. She struck her nose on the bottom and just then another big one struck her fair in the stern and lifted the stern clean over the bow. Her masts struck and snapped off. With that, she went over the shoals and floated in deep water on the other side, fair and square on her keel even though both masts were broke off to within fifteen feet of her deck.

The crew of course was down below. They said it was all over before they knew what was up. They didn't sense it at all at first. They said all it was they were sitting there and then they struck the deck then came down again in a heap on the floor. They got up on deck, dazed-like, and there she was, a complete wreck.

The man at the wheel was lashed but he said afterwards when he felt her go over he thought it was all up with him. He held on for dear life and never lost his grip as he went through the water. But it's a terrible strain on a man and he was pretty neigh gone. They took him below and did all they could for him and after they got into port he was laid up for a long time. He did finally come around all right.

It was about the narrowest escape ever heard of for a vessel. They had a fair wind on the lee side of the shoal, the current was in their favor so they worked their way off and finally fell in with a vessel which towed them home.

The facts in the case are as described. The man who owned the vessel was Andrew Leighton of Gloucester, and the captain who sailed her was named Barse.

UV: You read that as a poem. Is it? It reads—you read it like a story?

CO: No. If I did it's only a little accent at the moment. It's really written as a story. You see, the margin gets more—I mean, I'm interested that that piece for example, was published where it was, and I had, that is, a response to that. That's why I mentioned the tape that I put it on. The poem was—the thing was picked off the tape I made, for publication. It's one of those kinds of things, and I'm sure the man who did it is one of the most conservative men we've got on either shore of the Atlantic. His name is Gael Turnbull, if you know him, he is a poet who is a doctor, who did his internship in Canada, and comes from Worcester, England, and has been avoiding my work for years, and embarrassed because he didn't have something he could publish—then you see, but then he's published this. So you see there is a—it has something or other to do with a poem, somehow or other it sure does.

Will Hamlin: In what way?

CO: Don't you think it works by itself, and yet something that has to do with what you had to do with allegory, what had to do with meaning, what had to do with *pun-ch-ing* it out a little, with statement, with pushing something, makes it too— I mean, it's without being captive, that is, being free, it also has a quality of entanglement or connection to. What I'm talking about it as a—it's stupid but, I mean, you're asking me a question, and I'm just talking about it for the first time, this way, sort of thing.

WH: Are you suggesting that in part it can stand as a kind of metaphor for something larger, than it has a quality of a poem and not a story?

CO: No! I'm suggesting that just such a thing as metaphor has broken down and to some extent we're involved in succeeding in picking up things which will not then behave as metaphors again, but what will put us in touch with what metaphor didn't put us in touch with, and never would, because metaphor is caught in a discourse system. If you do, would you know, do you know? Where is that Greek man? Do you know Greek? Metaphor is to my—I ask you to help me—*matapherein* is the verb "to carry over" or "to transfer forth" is the actual word of metaphor, yeah?

UV (Greek Man): Well, I ah...not really...

CO: Metaphor. Is for my—I asked you to help me! *Metapherein* is the verb to carry over, or to "transfer forth" is the actual word for metaphor.

WH: Well, that's a simple meaning.

CO: Yeah! Yeah! I know. And in fact if you take the Greek verb it has a great deal of meaning, I don't really know what, say, the—and here we get into that really crazy question which gets so exciting, at least to some of us today, for whom language is still a part of, of ah, the art of poetry, in fact *is* the art of poetry. Excuse me, I mean like, that's the point—that you can't any longer, any more than you ever could, expect language to behave except current to the sources of its invention.

Now, I—to my mind, to make metaphor mean something, I would have to know what the Greek use of that word was in the—not necessarily to be pedantic, to stay in the original use of it, but in a use that began to get a little over over-determined some time probably, in the 5th Century, or, if it was invented in the 5th, was already beginning to get a little over—over-plastic by the already—well, already in Aristotle's teaching Alexander, like, it was already a kind of hang-up, yeah? And that in just these places that used to be called "image", or like, well, "imagery." It's where, like, poetry today is well, really kind of, really very much, in business, altogether, is ah, how to make what was called an image really an image? And like, how to make what we inherit as a metaphor really *be* a metaphor? But to do it, I think you stumble towards—you get involved with places that are edges of experience rather than something that you know by making anything like an image.

UV: And would you—and would you say that...

CO: Fair? Fair?

WH: Yes. I think when I asked the question about metaphor...

CO: Yea.

WH: ...the sense in which I was...

CO: Yea. Okay.

WH: ...using it is apparently as a larger thing . . .

CO: Yeah, Yeah, I dig, yeah.

WH: . . . and that it was filled with such a story stands as you have shown here. So at least in my mind as poetry, in the fact that it suggests or is analogous in has outlines similar to things which are other than it, and larger than it.

CO: I dig, I dig. Right. Now that—now I suddenly think of a poem, which I think I could read you, which is a very short one, and I think, a pleasure. For example, so and at least let me speak for myself, that this, this Cashes shoal that this thing happens on is one of my places in the poem. I, in some of that stuff I read earlier, I did mention Cashes on that Typhon,

that earlier Typhon poem I left off on Cashes. But let me read you a thing which *Floating Bear* recently published, a short one, just ah, to suggest how I'm reluctant just to let this thing go away from where I think you'll find anything to be, if I can labor it a little more. I think it's very—it has to be resisted to leave it where you find it. Yea, that would be a real thing. There it is, thanks. Just to push that Cashes thing, let me read you this one. "ALL MY LIFE I'VE HEARD ABOUT MANY" is the title:

He went to Spain,
the handsome sailor,
he went to Ireland
and died of a bee:
he's buried, at the hill
of KnockMany

He sailed to Cashes
and wrecked on that ledge,
his ship vaulted
the shoal, he landed
in Gloucester: he built a castle
at Norman's Woe

CO: I lose some of the lilt of that:

He went to Spain
The handsome sailor,

CO: I should do it lighter:

He went to Spain,
the handsome sailor,
he went to Ireland
and died of a bee:
he's buried, at the hill
of KnockMany

He sailed to Cashes
and wrecked on that ledge,
his ship vaulted
the shoal, he landed
in Gloucester: he built a castle
at Norman's Woe

CO: Yea. Steve?

UV (Steve): In that case I see it. In the way that that poem goes—kind of imitates the action that you're talking about.

CO: That's right.

UV: It's kind of a direct experience.

CO: That's right.

UV: But in the one that you read before that, the one about the about the raging ship on the...

CO: Yea. Yea. Yea. Right.

UV: ...I didn't get the same thing.

CO: No. I didn't want you to. And in fact, I'm only suggesting that in answer to Mr. Hamlin—not to him, but in furthering what we're talking about—is that I think that you get inventions—I guess sort of like that—of all sorts of rhythms and faces by letting this thing stay back where you find it, and then in going back there, that kind of a thing, almost like an atavism rather than an image. Very much so, as a matter of fact. I believe completely in magic practice, you know.

WH: Would it be part of "The Rattler" poem for you that it is as it might have been told by...

CO: Oh boy, oh boy.

WH: ...some persons who had heard about it?

CO: As a matter of fact, the point of the writing, if—I think one of the other ways to say it, is the point that the reason why the "Rattler's" had some publishing attention, is due to the fact that I think here, I hit here on one of the real problems which is that that thing doesn't have idiomatic language, yet doesn't give that effect how it well might be reported and with no, uh—one of the boring things about most writing in America is slang, whether it's local or national or—like, in fact, the complement in our cultural speech is a form of slang. That is, that deadness of our cultural, of our universal speech is just so dull, it's like dialectical, dialect, uh? I hate it. I would clean every—I myself would wish that all who spoke and wrote, spoke always from a place that is new at that moment that they do speak and not hang up on any of the places from which they may have acquired their speech, whether it's putative, purposed, or personal. And I like—and I think really that's why I think Turnbull really dug this poem, this thing was—some way or other, I'm getting somewhere a language thing there, which is—well.... Who was sitting there? I just—did she just go? She asked me something and I went back to you, and—oh! There she is. Excuse me, for you had a question which I missed.

UV: You were saying something about the edge of experience, and I was trying to connect that with a geographical . . .

CO: Yea!

UV: . . . point, that you mentioned.

CO: Yea! Absolutely. Well, while you were out, I got to the point where I was saying that I believe even—I read another poem on that, Cashes Shoal, and said that I almost would return to the very place, that somehow or another caused the fermentation. Yea, let's talk wine, that kind of a thing. Each year you grow those damned grapes and make the wine from the same vine, don't you? I mean you really do, so you go back. That's not a bad image. I mean, again, like, let's talk. I mean, again, like, that's what—I mean we had a wonderful conversation this afternoon on—we had a wonderful conversation, and in fact I tried to read a poem of Duncan's from *Trobar*, and I held this thing up, and this guy, "who is the learned man, said Strabo" uh, [Mild laughter] he gets, he, he, he comes on strong because I guess he published a book called *Trobar*, or something, and so [Laughter from audience] immediately, a very lively thing occurred: what does "troba" mean, like?⁵ And we both had no trouble in saying "to find" but then I said, "Isn't the meaning really to find, on a guitar, the tone?" "No!" he says, "as a matter of fact, so and so," Dilys Lang or something it was did a book on the diseases and cures of birds, and uh, was called a "troubadour" for having done it, because it was a "trovar." In other words it means "to find out something" which I really, just knocks me for a loop, because my whole poem is, is well, well, let me read to you, you asked me about the sources of that "Gulf of Maine" poem. Let me read you the, stiffer, stiffer, that opens that last of the three books, number 23, which is just a big pitch. I avoided reading it to you tonight, but I guess I'm stuck again. I always seem to read the damn thing every time I read "The Gulf of Maine." And I would read this again as a question of finding a language in the moment of dealing with the poem that presents itself to write, which is the character of language new to that moment of writing that poem: [Reads *Maximus* l.99]

The facts are:

1st season 1623/4 one ship, the *Fellowship* 35 tons
 with Edward Cribbe as master (compare below see
 below, 3rd season)

left 14 men Cape Ann:

 John Tilly to oversee the fishing,
 Thomas Gardner the "planting" (meaning,
 the establishment, however much a bean row,
 and some Indian corn; much more salt,
 was the business.) The two of them
 "bosses", for a year

But here is the first surprise: all the evidence is, that the Plymouth people, aboard the *Charitie* (carrying Lyford & some cattle, and Winslow with the Plymouth Company's patent to Cape Ann) got in from England before the above Dorchester fisherman made it, and the Pilgrims had their

stage up when these others did arrive, five weeks out of Weymouth.
It was this fishing stage which was fought over the next season,
when the Plymouth men returned to find that Westcountry fisherman
had preempted it; and Miles Standish was sent for, to fight about
it.

What we have here—and literally in my own front yard, as I said to Merk,
asking him what delving, into “fisherman ffield” recent historians . . .
not telling him it was a poem I was interested in, aware I’d scare him
off, *muthologos* has lost such ground since Pindar

The odish man said: “Poesy
steals away men’s judgment
by her *muthoi*” (taking this crack
at Homer’s sweet-versing)

“and a blind heart
is most men’s portions.” Plato

allowed this divisive
thought to stand, agreeing

that *muthos*
is false. *Logos*
isn’t—was facts. Thus
Thucydides

I would be an historian as Herodotus was, looking
for oneself for the evidence of
what is said: Altham says
Winslow
was at Cape Ann in April,
1624

What we have in this field in these scraps among these fisherman,
and the Plymouth men, is more than the fight of one colony with
another, it is the whole engagement against (1) mercantilism

(cf. the Westcountry men and Sir Edward Coke against the Crown, in Commons, these same years—against Gorges); and (2) against nascent capitalism except as it stays the individual adventurer and the worker on share—against all sliding statism, ownership getting in to, the community as, Chambers of Commerce, or theocracy; or City Manager

CO: Well I—my mind flipped. I thought it was in that statement, “I would be an historian as Herodotus was, looking for oneself for the evidence of what is said” but it was in that first poem I read tonight, in which I say “istorin, to look, to look up.” It’s that first paragraph of Herodotus’ *History* which is where the word is used for the first time, I believe the verb, “istorin” from which we draw “history”; and it means “to look, to, to find out for yourself.” In other words, exactly what “trobar” which is the basis on which we are all poets, like, since, since, it’s the Provençal, uh? Is to find out, like this guy did with the diseases and cures of birds. I say that—I should say that too, but my god, we’re talking all over the lot now, I mean, like a fix in the geographical sense, an atavism of that place, but then also that constant alertness that you do find out for yourself every time you find out anything anyhow, for yourselves each time you do, if you do, the next time find out for yourself, because that’s what the next time is. So there’s this, yeah, that kind of a—

WH: Could you just define the word “muthos?”

CO: Myth. It’s the source of our word myth. Miss Harrison says it’s *muth* the “mouth” *muth* mouth, and *logos*, actually, is “words.” But words, it got that dumb meaning, because “muthologos” actually meant “the man who finds out the words.” Herodotus called Homer the *muthologos*—in turn, Herodotus was called the *muthologos*, like a *trobar*, a *trouver*. It comes out crazy today, like today, it comes out crazy to me. The Provençal, and this point of Greek, jeez, it’s too much, I’ve got to get home now. I mean, to put. I mean like today. Like the third is today. It really is today, where we are, I swear. Founding, finding, founding, finding, founding, like that—I got one sentence out of that. Well look, why don’t we, I mean, it got a little not as light as I thought, and I’m going to be—we’re going to be here for a few days, and you’ll have another, and you’ll put up with me again, if you do, on Saturday, so why don’t we call it quits officially or formally now and cut that tape off, see—[Laughter] my friend is getting tired too, and talk further, closer, if you like or we’ll have a drink or something.

END TAPE 2 / BEGIN TAPE 3

Part Three: A Melville Lecture

April 14, 1962

Introduction: O.K. All right, well today, Charles Olson is going to give some kind of a talk or discussion about Melville.

CO: It was... It was curious that I, wrote a thing last week, and he came, and he walked right into the middle of it, so that's why I was laughing. Was the fact that I had again been involved in *him*, and I thought, before I came, that it would be an interesting way to suggest how much he stands—has stood for, stands for. I don't have too much sense of how much of Melville you all know, like Paul Weiners says, "I hadn't realized that *Moby-Dick* had become a school classic, [Laughs] like Lawrence said it was." My father gave it to me, when I was a kid. And that was a lucky way to get it, if you can I guess. And it wasn't in schools, as a matter of fact, it was—I wonder when it came into schools, I didn't know it was a school classic. But then you see, I said to Paul, "Well that's fine, there's a lot of other books." How, just off-hand, how much, do, say any of you, like, say, have *Moby-Dick* or beyond him? Yea. So it's a little difficult to talk about him without knowing, having honestly read him or having a beef about him, like Paul does. Uh.

UV: I read him in high school.

CO: I guess so. Don't you Paul?

Paul Weiners: Sure. Junior high.

CO: Junior high. Yea. I suppose it's become a—it's probably a cut-up edition, a cut-down edition I guess. Like my son has read it, in that wonderful one, that uh—what do you call, what do you call that? Illustrated classics? They're comic strips. Those beauties! They're really the best of all. They really have some meat in 'em, those things. But I—I started this piece, "I Hate the Spirit of Streets": [see "A House Built by Capt. John Somes 1763"]

The spirit anyway of this nation went away at some point of time between 1765 and 1770. And a man born at, about then, therefore a son, rather of those men—son rather of those men who made the Revolution was already, in the first years of the Nineteenth Century, crying us down accurately—James Fennimore Cooper, that early. All of which writing, including the hump-up of the middle of the 19th Century, did insist upon, and Melville had already passed American art out into the geometry, which alone—until time re-reentered, about 1948—was what was making things possible again.

What it was that did break in the moment of time in the Eighteenth Century must have been what Gilles Clays has said, "I'm sure as well as anyone, that when men are still putting down houses to live in, and wish to make food—and *work* to make food," excuse me, "the earth is still lived on." And when that breaks, Captain Somes' house on Lower Middle Street is the possibility of its last moment here, on the new continent—when it broke, all had to be begun again. The critique of Cooper was so complete, all after would simply, going to live it out, until today—or at least until 1949. Any change, any *new* change, had to be toward earth, not—(again Gilles Clay) not across.

CO: And that is provoked by an article by a guy names Gilles Clay, in a lesser sheet than *Destiny*, but a similar sheet, and done very similarly, which came in last week from Pocatello Idaho—um, which is called *A Pamphlet*, and it has no advertising.⁶ But otherwise, is exactly like what Weiner was doing, here. It's done, it's done, because everything that the college does at the University at Idaho, the editors of this magazine find doesn't equal the need. So right now, this issue is to publish three poems of Edward Dorn, whom I mentioned to Ernie yesterday, among the younger poets. And I think you have his last book, *The Newly Fallen*. But suddenly in the back, I was reading the thing, and there's a piece by the former editor of *A Pamphlet*, called "Omnia Mea Mecum Porto" which I'd like to read to you:

Nate sat in his room staring at the same walls that probably his father had stared at all through Europe and he thought perhaps there is a room somewhere in Austria or Hungary just like this one with the faded blue plaster crumbling and peeling and the stained water murals. One generation American who is now leaving the shell that was destroyed long ago before there was electricity and television. —I didn't last long as long as my ancestors remained in Europe but then they were still building buildings for shelter and working for food and what have I to do with a hammer but set off a chain reaction and they still had dreams of fortunes and Junker estates along the Donau and Strauss waltzes captured in Mosel Wine and I can hear them shout build that house plant those crops the Huns have left us long centuries ago and deposited their seeds in our soil and a new generation later one of my ancestors put rosin on his eyes to decrease the epicanthic fold and requested a visa to Oberammergau. And they were still building when Herr Schickelgrüber came marching over vineyards shouting Heute hört uns Deutschland und morgen die ganze Welt and loaded up boxcars of dreamers with Alle Räder müssen rollen—

CO: Excuse my German.

für den Sieg written on the side and deposited their ashes over the pastures of Deutschland and the years following the winecrop was excellent. So my father singing to himself omnia mea mecum porto traveled across ashes with a rifle in his rectum and spent tormenting nights in hotels such as this telling himself that America would be different. And when the boat left Lisbon he lived like a pig in the bottom deck crammed in with eight hundred other visionaries—

CO: Ah, excuse me, *visioners*, yea.

and at eight knots a day across the Atlantic while German planes above were skywriting demn die todten reiten schnell. New York City is a blackout and the war became a reality he found all the ghettos completely filled and someone said foreigners are not allowed but then this is war and you should try Jersey and my father found a job and procured a wife in a cafe next door and then the apartment was filled with a screaming youth who thought his mothers teat was paradise. But the war did not end in 1945 and I was fighting with gravel in my elbows and wiping the blood from my nose and my father said that things will be better with a college education but I found out early that no one really respects education but only for the pragmatic diploma that lets you sell life death hospital car accident baby home crop failure insurance and what can be insured when no one is living and there are no crops and I saw mans exterior crumbling and the psychiatrists treating the interior when there was no interior to treat. There is no home to build father the ground is sterile, the people impotent and I instinctively headed West for I saw no purpose and I kept going as my greatest grandfather did as he chased dreams across the Gobi dessert and what did he find but no purpose and so I kept chasing myself until I reached San Francisco and this room with some understanding of

inseparability with the universe and with no purpose I was liberated and I checked on a boat to the Orient where Tin Sung was waiting for me inside of Buddha's triple body with no ego and where there is an innate trust in good and evil and here is balance and not the land of used car salesman and was flowers over dead people that had always been dead because the Westward migration of man had been too soon based on greed and wealth and exterior pomp and so I am leaving America in the womb of a saline world of Pacific for I am going to be reborn inside the world and I knew that the circle would be completed and the last of mans migration for the next migration would be inside of the world and not across.

CO: Now.

UV: Who wrote that again?

CO: A guy named Gino Clays, who was the previous editor according to this: "Gino Clays is the former editor of *A.P.*" meaning *A Pamphlet*, "back from Europe, blistering Bagdad, and Pont Neuf."

Alright, where I was, that's it. [Strikes a match] My interest, in actually doing that book on Melville, was some years ago now, was— was, was to uh—arrest, arrest the West. In fact, I was so disappointed when everything didn't stop, it knocked me out for five months. I couldn't imagine how the world could have this book and not, uh, (Laughing) catch up. So since then, I've been continuing to write, uh, things on Melville, and in nineteen—all sorts of things have much to do with it. Like in 1951 they were going to have a centennial celebration of *Moby-Dick*, at Williams College. So I wrote, and we published at Black Mountain, a poem called "Letter to Melville, 1951" uh, and that's in that volume *The Distances*, and I was amused to see some reviewer attacking that book in the Hudson Review or something—uh, saying something, "Boy, that Olson has to look around for something for subjects if all he can find to complain about is a meeting with the Melville Society in Williamstown."⁷

UV: Can you read that? Would that be—

CO: I can't find a copy, I must have lost it since I've been here, I uh— Has somebody got my *Distances*? (Papers shuffle) Oh, wait. I think I've—(Papers shuffle) Maybe—ah! Here it is. Oh, here it is. Instead of reading all of that sort of stuff which was at the moment valuable, occasionally, which was the whole attack upon the academics, I myself would rather go to the pot which was what we were writing a poem for, which was just to write a poem about Mr. Melville. Uh, except that it's a little hard— the thing is it's composed so that it's a critique and an essay and a poem in one. Let me just read the little pieces of it before, I want to read you the latest thing, the last thing I've written on Melville. Just so we're closer to the present. And to Gino Clays, I think. So the meaning is, what is the big thing about the dormitories and all that:

Timed in such a way to avoid him, to see
 he gets a lot of lip (who hung in a huge jaw)
 and no service at all (none of this chicken, he
 who is beyond that sort of recall, beyond
 any modern highway (which would have saved him
 from sciatica? well, that

we cannot do for him but we can
we now know so much, we can make clear
how he erred, how, in other ways
— we have made such studies and
we permit ourselves to think—they
allow us to tell each other how wise
he was

He was. Few flying fish
no dolphins and in that glassy sea
two very silly whales throwing
that spout of theirs you might call sibylline
it disappears so fast, why
this year a hundred years ago he
had moved on, was offering
to such as these
a rural bowl of milk, subtitled
the ambiguities

July

above Sigsbee deep,
the *Luccero del Alba*,
500 tons, 200,000 board feet
of mahogany, the Captain
25, part Negro, part American Indian and perhaps
a little of a certain Cereno, by name
Orestes Camargo

Herman Melville

looked up again at the weather, noted
that landlessness And it was no so much truth
as he had thought, even though the ratlines
could still take his weight (185, eyes
blue, hair auburn, a muscular man knowing
that knowledge
is only what makes a ship shape, takes care
of the precision of the crossed sign, the feather
and the anchor, the thing
which is not the head but is
where they cross, the edge
the moving edge of force, the wedding
of sea and sky (or land & sky), the Egyptian
the American backwards

(The stern, at evening,
a place for conversation, to drop paper boats, to ask
why clouds are painters' business, why now he
would not write *Moby-Dick*)

Was writing
Pierre: the world
had moved on, in that hallway, moved
north north east, had moved him

an appendectomy was called for, read
a sea story once, and since
has gone by the pole-star, a scalpel overside
for rudder, has moved on from Calypso, huge
in the dispatch of
the quick-silver god

Yet I wish so very much that neither of you mixed
(as Leyda hasn't) in this middle place, in such salad
as these caters will serve!

For you will have to hear one very bright man speak, so bright
he'll sound so good that every one of you will think
he knows whereof he speaks, he'll say such forward things, he'll tag
the deific principle in nature, the heroic
principle in man, he'll spell
what you who do not have such time to read as he
such definitions so denotatively clear you'll think you'll understand
(discourse is such a lie) that Herman Melville
was no professional, could not accomplish
such mentality and so, as amateur (as this clear neuter will make clear)
was anguished all his life in struggle, not with himself, he'll say,
no, not with when
shall i eat my lunch Elizabeth has set outside the door so quiet
it was not even a mouse, my prose today
is likewise, the cows, what a damned nuisance they also are, why
do I continue to extend my language horizontally when
i damn well know what is
a water-spout

No, he'll skillfully confuse you, he knows such words
as mythic, such adjectives that fall so easily you'll think it's true
Melville was a risky but creative mingling
(how they put words on, that this lad was so
who stowed himself with roaches and a blue-shining corpse at age 16: "Hey!
Jackson!")

the diced bones—now his too, he
who is also of the one society
who likewise lifted altars
too high (a typewriter
in a tree) and spilled himself
into the honey-head, died
the blond ant
so pleasantly

as though he did not want to woo
to chance a Bronx grave, preferred
to choose his own headland

All these that you will sit with—"a mingling," he will drone on,
"of the fortunate and the injurious"

And only you, and Harry (who knows)
Will not be envious, will know
that he knows not one thing

this brightest of these mischievous men
 who does not know that it is not the point
 either of the hook or the plume which lies
 cut on this brave man's grave
 —on all of us—
 but that where they cross is motion,
 where they constantly moving across anew, cut
 this new instant open—as he is who
 is this weekend in his old place
 presume on

I tell you,

he'll look on you all with an eye you have the color of.

He'll not say a word because he need not, he said so many.

CO: Now after, sometime after that, I did two pieces in the *New Republic* on Melville, uh, in which I—in which the title was "The Materials and Weights of Herman Melville." That was a year later. And uh, by the time I was, by the time I was, by this time, like, I was involved in quantity much more more than I had been when I wrote *Ishmael*.⁸ And uh, about three years ago, when the *Chicago Review* was changing into *The Big Table*, and there was the whole shove of Zen Buddhism upon the nation, I uh, was asked to review for the *Review*—the *Chicago Review*, a book, a new book on Melville by another one of those fellows, but which had raised the greatest reach of title which I think has ever been, has ever been tried on Melville. Melville once in, I think it's in *Moby-Dick*, characterized Solomon's wisdom as "the fine-hammered steel of woe" (Laughs). This guy, writing a Ph.D. thesis at the University of Illinois, wrote a book called, *The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville*, which I was asked to review, and just to uh, I'm going to read this and uh, and then we can throw this thing open a little to uh, uh, further talk or questions. And this is the last thing I've done on, that I can think I've done on him, I can think of, except for that reference, in that paragraph this week.

To some that were there yesterday, yesterday afternoon, I had promised to bring these matters up, but as I see, I see that not all of them who there yesterday are here today, but we'll carry it forward as though they were. We were, we were talking yesterday, on this situation, of uh, of uh, of uh, on this situation of language again. And, talking with uh, with uh, Chuck? Was it Chuck? Yea. I asked—I tried—I referred to John Keats and I tried to get somebody to help me quote him, and now I find out that Chuck, I found out later last evening that Chuck could have quoted him, that Chuck could have quoted "The Eve of St. Agnes" easily, but the son-of-a-gun, he never opened his mouth, trap at the moment:

In the year Melville was born, John Keats walking home from the mummers' play at Christmas 1819 and afterwards, excuse me, as... in the year Melville was born, John Keats, walking home from the mummers' play at Christmas 1819, and afterwards, he'd had to listen to Coleridge again, thought to himself all that irritable reaching after fact and reason, it wouldn't—it won't do. I don't believe in it. I do better to stay in the condition of things. No matter what it amounts to, mystery confusion doubt, it has a power, it is what I mean by *Negative Capability*.

Keats, without setting out to, had put across the century the inch of steel to wreck Hegel, if anything could. Within five years, two geometers, Bolyai and Lobatschewsky, weren't any longer satisfied with Euclid's picture of the world, and they each made a new one, independently of each other, and remarkably alike. It took thirty-one years

(Melville's age when he wrote *Moby-Dick*) for the German mathematician Riemann to define the real as men since have exploited it: he distinguished two kinds of manifold, the discrete (which would be the old system, and it includes discourse, language as it had been since Socrates) and, what he took to be more true, the continuous.

Melville, not knowing any of this but in it even more as an American, down to his hips in things, was a first practitioner (Rimbaud was born in the year Riemann made his inaugural lecture, 1854) of the new equation, quantity as intensive.

The idea on which this book is based, this *Fine Hammered Steel of Melville*, naturalism, is useless to cope with Melville, either as a life lived in such a time or as an art, the first art of space to arise from the redefinition of the real, and in that respect free, for the first time since Homer, of the rigidities of the discrete. Naturalism was already outmoded by the events above, whether one takes it as an 18th or 19th century idea. Mr. Stern, that's the writer of the book, alas, takes it every way, including the unhappy thought that Melville can be put at the head of a literary use which includes Twain, Dreiser, Hemingway, and Faulkner!

It is the error on matter sitting in naturalism which gives it its appeal, that by it one can avoid the real, which is what is left out, at what cost all over the place Mr. Stern is only one of the fools of. He writes, in summary of what he takes it Melville did prove, quote:

that the naturalistic perception in the years of the modern could and must take from woe not only materialism but also the humanism and the deep morality of social idealism, which are the true beginnings of wisdom.

CO: I'd like to repeat that. This is Stern's—this is the heart of this whole naturalist concept. I'm using that word "naturalism" as it's classically used, and I hope that some of you are acquainted with it. I think it's not, actually, as a tag word used today, but much is going on today I think is simply, further, naturalism. And it's not Nature, like, it's not the other use, not for Thoreau, certainly. "He writes, in summary of what he takes Melville did prove." Now this is his, now this is his suggestion that this is what Melville did it all for:

that the naturalistic perception in the years of the modern could and must take from woe not only materialism but also the humanism and the deep morality of social idealism, which are the true beginnings of wisdom.

The true beginnings of nothing but the Supermarket—the exact death quantity does offer, if it is numbers, and extension, and the appetite of matter, especially in human beings.

The change of the 19th Century—the change the 19th Century did bring about is being squandered by the 20th, in ignorance and abuse of its truth. Melville was a part of the change, and I can do nothing, in the face of this book but try to show how, how in terms of that change. He put it altogether accurately himself, in a single sentence of a letter to Hawthorne, written when he was writing *Moby-Dick* (1851) quote: "By visible truth we mean the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things. By visible truth we mean the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things."

All things did come in again, in the 19th century. An idea shook loose, and energy and motion became as important a structure of things as that they are plural, and, by matter, mass. It was even shown that in the infinitely small the older concepts of space ceased, ceased to be valid at all. Quantity—the measurable and numerable—was suddenly as shafted in, to any thing, as it was also, as had been obvious, the striking character of the external world, that all things do extend out. Nothing was now inert fact, all things were there for feeling, to promote it, and be felt; and man, in the midst of it, knowing well how he was folded in, as well as how suddenly and strikingly he could extend himself, spring or, without even moving, go, to far, the farthest—he was suddenly possessed or repossessed of a character of being, a thing among things, which I shall call his physicality. It made a re-entry of or to the universe. Reality was without interruption, and we are still in the business of finding out how all action, and thought, have to be refounded.

Taking it in towards writing, the discrete, for example, wasn't any longer a good enough base for discourse: classification was exposed as mere taxonomy; and logic (and the sentence as poised on it, a completed thought, instead of what it had become, an exchange of force) was as loose and inaccurate a system as the body and soul had been, divided from each other and rattling, sticks in a stiff box.

Something like this are the terms of the real and of action Melville was an early inheritor of, and he is either held this way or he is missed entirely. With one thing more: the measurement question.

CO: That's where I miss Chuck here, I remember he said a poem can't be measured, yesterday:

With one thing more: the measurement question. What did happen to measure when the rigidities dissolved? When Newton's Scholium turned out to be the fulling-mill Melville sensed it was, via Bacon, whom he called that watch-maker brain?

CO: This is one of the great passages in *Pierre*. This is Melville's attack upon Bacon, that is, Francis Bacon. I don't—if any of you—I guess none of you have ever read *Pierre* in this room, have you? This is a novel, that you, that if you pretend at all, to be, to be, to be like eh, at grips with writing and your society, I swear that you just couldn't—it's unbelievable this book! It's a broken—it's a broken book with a life in Vermont and New York City. It was written by, written by Melville right after, right after *Moby-Dick* and just absolutely busted by having done *Moby-Dick* and carrying five children, like four children, and keeping a farm down here just below us in the Berkshires and trying to make it, and not, and then really broken after a year a half writing *Moby-Dick* he rose—rolled right on into this book and really rolled off his rocker as far as anybody knows because Doctor Oliver Wendell Holmes was called one night and the family finally got wise and got together and sent him off to Europe, but by this time he'd written four more books, so it was obviously a lot later than *Pierre*, so he'd suffered much for several years, and then had this damned thing that I mentioned that poem after having falling off the farm wagon, when it turned on a rut and he was, what they used to call sciatica, he'd busted, hit one of his vertebrae, so he really was never much good—I mean he was plenty good—from that year he lived seventy more years, for he lived to be seventy of more, or seventy-two, and I uh mean, he lived and worked for twenty-years in a customs house in New York thereafter, but uh, this *Pierre*, is really, uh—I couldn't possibly suggest a book that will both take away the curse of *Moby-Dick* in the sense of how that's been over-circulated, [Strikes a match] but, but if only those who care, really then if they stumble into *Pierre*, they're done for and *The Confidence Man*, which he wrote before he went on that trip too. So I, so that, so, so he—what I'm suggesting is that Melville's critique of Bacon applies directly to Newton's Scholium:

What is measure when the universe flips and no part is discrete from another part except by the flow of creation itself, in and out, intensive where it seemed before qualitative, and the extensive exactly the widest, which we also have the powers to include? The rhythm suddenly which had so long been the captive of meter, excuse me. Rhythm, suddenly, which had been so long the captive of meter, no matter how good (Shakespeare, say, in our own tongue, or Chaucer), was a pumping of the real so constant art had to invent measure anew.

Watching Melville in a lifetime trying to make prose do what his body and his soul—as a heap? Excuse me. Watching Melville in a lifetime trying to make prose do what his body as a heap, and his soul and his mind on top of them a tangle (this is also a way of putting a man's physicality), trying to get a measure of language to move himself into a book and over to another man's experience, is a study makes more sense now, in the midst of the 20th century art, painting and music as well as narrative and verse, than it could have, previously. It wasn't image, it wasn't anything he lacked. Possibly, it was only any reason he might be confident he was right, taking it all so differently as he did, from those around him, at least those known to him. Or say it as my friend Landreau does, who swings, with

The Confidence-Man: "Melville seems entitled to 'disillusion itself,' and given his personal bitter life, possibly because of that vision, in the scene, society, he had to live it in."

Who still knows what's called for, from physicality, how far it does cover and reveal? No one has yet tried to say how Melville does manage to give the flukes of the whale immediacy as such. It is easier to isolate his skill over technology than to investigate the topological both in his soul and in his writing, but it is my experience that only some such sense of form as the topological includes, able to discriminate and get in between the vague types of form morphology offers and the *ideal* structures of geometry proper, explains Melville's unique ability to reveal the very large (such a thing as his whale, or himself on whiteness, or Ahab's monomania) by the small.

The new world of atomism offered a metrical means as well as a topos different from the discrete. Congruence, which there, in mathematicians' hands, lifted everything forward after Lobatschewsky (via Cayley especially, another contemporary of Melville, and Felix Kline) makes much sense, as no other meter does, to account for Melville's prose. Congruence was spatial intuition to Kant, and if I am right that Melville did possess its powers, he had them by his birth, from his time of the world, locally America. As it developed in his century, congruence, which had been the measure of the space a solid fills in two of its positions, became a point-by-point mapping power of such flexibility that anything which stays the same, no matter where it goes and into whatever varying conditions (it can suffer deformation), it can be followed, and, if it is art, led, including, what is so import to prose, such physical quantities as velocity, force and field strength.

Melville's prose does things which its rhetoric would seem to contradict. He manages almost anytime he wants to, for example, to endow a more general space than other writers, than anyone except Homer I find. The delivery of Tashtego from the whale's head, say. The point is also the overall "space" of *Moby-Dick*. That space, and those of which it is made up, have the properties of projective space (otherwise they should all come out more familiar, and round, because they would stay Euclidian), and I conclude that Melville could not have achieved what amounts to elliptical and hyperbolic spaces (he makes things stand out at once transparent and homogenous) if it were not using transformations which we have not understood and which only congruence makes possible. (The lack of it, in his verse, as negativism in his life, such as Keats knew, is one of the ways of putting how far Melville didn't go.)

His ideas also. In spite of the vocabulary of his time, much more is to be read out of him, I suspect, than any of us have allowed. In the rest of the letter to Hawthorne from which I have quoted, he goes on to discuss the effects of the absolute of present things on self and being and God and his insistence there, to get God in the street, looks to me like the first rate breakthrough of man's thought which was called for at 1851: the necessary secularization of His part in the world of things. (It doesn't diminish it, that is was probably the only time in a lifetime in which Melville did manage to throw off the Semitic notion of transcendence.)

Or take him just where so much academicism has wasted its time on classic American literature, and Mr. Stern does again: the place of allegory and symbol in Melville and his contemporaries. As the Master said to me in the dream, of rhythm is image/of image is knowing/of know there is/ a construct. It is rather quantum physics than relativity which will supply a proper evidence here, as against naturalism, of what Melville was grabbing on to when he declared it was *visible* truth he was after. For example, that life, that light is not only a wave, but a corpuscle. Or that the electron is not only a corpuscle, but a wave. Melville couldn't abuse object as symbol does by depreciating it in favor of subject. Or let image lose its relational force by transferring its occurrence as allegory does. He was already aware of the complementarity of each of two pairs of how we know and present the real—image and object, and action & subject—both of which have paid off so decisively since. At this end I am thinking of such recent American painting as Pollock's and Kline's, and some recent American narrative and verse; and at his end, his whale itself for example, what an unfolding thing it is as it sits there written 100 years off, implicit intrinsic and incident to itself.

Melville was not tempted, as Whitman was, and Emerson and Thoreau differently, to inflate the physical: take the model for the house, the house for the model, death is the open road, the soul or body is a boat, and so forth. Melville equally couldn't spiritualize it, as Hawthorne tried, using such sets as the mirror image, M. de Miroir, etc., and Melville himself in *The Bell Tower*, but not in *The Encantadas*, or *Bartleby*, and how explain the way the remark "The negro" does hold off and free in *Benito Cereno*? Melville couldn't have known it to say it this way, but he was essentially incapable of either allegory or symbol for the best of congruent reason: mirror and model are each figures in Euclidian space, and they are *not* congruent. They require a discontinuous jump.

Finally, to take the possibilities here suggested, at their fullest—the actual character and structure of the real itself. I pick up on calm, or passivity, Melville's words, and about which he knew not—excuse me, ha! About which he knew *something*, having served as a boatsteerer himself, on at least his third voyage on a whaler in the Pacific. He says somewhere a harpoon can only be thrown accurately from such repose as he also likened the White Whale to, as it finally approached, a mighty mildness of reposed in swiftness is his phrase. Likewise, in handling Ahab's monomania, he sets up a different sort of a possible man, one of a company which he calls the hustings of the Divine Inert.

I am able to stress the several aspects of Melville's thought on this because, note, in each case the feeling or necessity of the inert, or passivity as a position of rest, is joined to the most instant and powerful actions Melville can invent: the whale itself's swiftness, Ahab's inordinate will, and the harpooner's ability to strike to kill from calm only. *The inertial structure of the world is a real thing which not only exerts effects upon matter but in turn suffers such effects.*

I don't know a more relevant single fact to the experience of *Moby-Dick* and its writer than this. Unless it is the prior and lesser but more characteristic Riemannian observation, that the metrical structure of the world is so intimately connected to the inertial structure that the metrical field (art is measure) will of necessity become flexible (what we are finding out these days in painting writing and music) the moment the inertial field itself is flexible.

Which it is, Einstein established, by the phenomena of gravitation, and the dependence of the field of inertia on matter. I take care to be inclusive, to enforce the point made at the start, that matter offers perils wider than man if he doesn't do what still today seems the hardest things for him to do, outside of some art and science: to believe that things, and present ones, are the absolute conditions; but that they are so because the structures of the real are flexible, quanta do dissolve into vibrations, all does flow, and yet is there, to be made permanent, if the means are equal.

CO: Well, I'm sure that's much too written for the page I suspect, to be read out loud, and especially for—really, it's not like I'm trying to be a philosopher. If you haven't read Mr. Melville I *think* that the thing is very relevant to Melville. I, I myself find it more interesting than *Ishmael* simply because it's—in the book I wrote—simply because it's, it feels to me, it's, it's more in on how he was a poet and a uh, and uh, and a writer. Because he was also a poet I think it's one of the uh, other crazy things that's happened in recent years that uh, not only has *Pierre* and *The Confidence Man* risen in, in, in value, but uh, there's been a number of poets who've found Melville's poetry interesting to them. I'm not one of them, but uh, I respect some men who have found that verse important to them. They all, those verses come late in his life, uh, he wrote a whole book of poems on the Civil War called *Battle-Pieces* which includes, say, half a dozen, that are among the poems that these men I speak of value, and uh, and then uh, in his, when he uh, when he got this job in the customs house he occupied himself for some years with a two-volume novel in verse which he called *Clarel, or A Pilgrimage to the Holy Land* which almost nobody reads, like even these people I speak of. I thought Grove Press, uh, I, I, I thought, I thought I succeeded in getting Grove Press to publish that as a paperback, which was about as wild as—I mean that was getting a publisher to risk his money. I was hoping it would work. I was asked to do an introduction to it but I decided the best thing to do was to get them to, to get it out—but I haven't seen it, I guess they really fouled me out. They didn't do it. That's a, that's a crazy book—a two-volume novel in verse, dig that! And it's written in tetrameters which would, which contradicts, well I mean one doesn't contradict, but it shows you how difficult it was for him to get at problems of verse, uh, uh, for himself. And then, in the last year of his life he did publish two volumes which I think are beauties. One is called *Timoleon*, a little, a little paper book smaller than, smaller than that, and much thinner, I mean so about, about so big. And *John Marr—Timoleon* and *John Marr*, two volumes of late poems, [Strikes a match] among which is a very great poem called, "After the Pleasure Party" which I wish I had my hands on at the moment I'd read it, but I, I don't see any Melville lying around here. Ha! I suggest, I suggest you—that's a wild, that's a wild one. Now there's what—now that's what I really pick up on, I think that poem is one of the greatest, ever. It's written to a woman, who, who, in Italy, whom he obviously

met at a dinner party. And he gets her called Urania in the poem, which again sounds like him to make her a goddess of astronomy. I guess, isn't it? Yes. Sure. And uh, it opens with these beautiful lines on, "Amour Threatening" and in the middle of the poem he breaks out with a passage, [Snaps finger once] uh, "shy the fractions through life's gate" [Snaps fingers again] I can't get any of it now. [Whispers] "shy the fractions through life's gate..." I can't at the moment. In terms of, in terms of what I'm talking about here both, both the statement, both in the statement, and in, and in image, and in feeling, and in, and in dropping into the mass-matter-ish-ness of the, of the, of the, spirit of life—where if John were here right now, I'd say the *warheit* lieth. The poem is all, everything going into the whole, the whole, and in a little thing, just about five or six lines—just a knock-out. I, I always know those lines, I don't know why I can't quote them I, I live with them for—the only line I get is "Shied the fractions through life's gate." Okay.

Well that's enough I think for me to shoot off about. I'd like very much to hear—to deal with any questions you might have, or do anything else. I could read you a story, which isn't very long, I think. The opening, the opening of the *Ishmael*, which is the closest I ever got to being successful in the movies. In fact, this book had a great history because it brought me to Hollywood, where I sat around, waiting for, waiting for uh, Mr. Warner to return from the Cote d'Azur, and then, interrupted by his desire to see the World Series. [Laughter]

Meanwhile, I had little money, and uh, but here was my golden chance, because I was going to be asked to advise on John Huston's *Moby-Dick*, because of this book, which was about as silly as a—then, because you see there are some people who might think *Ishmael* might have something to do with *existenz*, at least Mr. Huston is interested, was interested, was interested in *existenz* as you know his movies, like the *Treasures of Sierra Madre*, which you will see tomorrow night. But curiously enough, the real success I had was with a much more interesting director, who read this story and said, "I'll make it into a movie if you'll write it as a movie." And if you want to hear it, it's one of the desperate stories. I think it's possible to *hear*, but it's a sea narrative, that's always kind of palatable. Uh, the director was Jean Renior, and as a Frenchman it was clear that he didn't understand. [Chuckles] Would that be a good way to—unless, uh—how would that sit with you all?

UV: That's good.

CO: And we can cut-out or do otherwise if you like? I don't know the time I'm running. Does anyone know what time it is?

UV: Four o'clock.

CO: It's four? Oh. I think this takes about [Taps the podium] fifteen minutes I should think. It's seven pages of—I open the book with this and it's called "First Fact as Prologue."

Herman Melville was born in New York August 1, 1819, and on the 12th of that month the *Essex*, a well-found whaler of 238 tons, sailed from Nantucket with George Pollard, Jr. as captain, Owen Chase and Matthew Joy mates, 6 of her complement of 20 men Negroes, bound for the Pacific Ocean, victualled and provided for two years and a half.

A year and three months later, on November 20, 1820, just south of the equator in longitude 119 West, this ship, on a calm day, with the sun at ease, was struck head on twice by a bull whale, a spermaceti about 85 feet long, and with her bows stove in, filled and sank.

Her twenty men set out in three open whaleboats for the coast of South America 2000 miles away. They had bread (200 lb. a boat), water (65 gallons), and some Galapagoes turtles. Although they were at the time at no great distance from Tahiti, they were ignorant of the temper of the natives and feared cannibalism.

Their first extreme suffering commenced a week later when they made the mistake of eating, in order to make their supply last, some bread which had got soaked by the sea's wash. To alleviate the thirst which followed, they killed a turtle for its blood. The sight revolted the stomachs of the men.

In the first weeks of December their lips began to crack and swell, and a glutinous saliva collected in the mouth, intolerable to the taste.

Their bodies commenced to waste away, and possessed so little strength they had to assist each other in performing some of the body's weakest functions. Barnacles collected on the boat's bottoms, and they tore them off for food. A few flying fish struck their sails, fell into the boats, and were swallowed raw.

After a month of the open sea they were gladdened by the sight of a small island which they took to be Ducie but was Elizabeth Isle. Currents and storm had taken them one thousand miles off their course.

They found water on the island after a futile search for it from rocks which they picked at, where moisture was, with their hatchets. It was discovered in a small spring in the sand at the extreme verge of ebb tide. They could gather it only at low water. The rest of the time the sea flowed over the spring to the depth of six feet.

Twenty men could not survive on the island and, to give themselves the chance to reach the mainland before the supplies they had from the ship should be gone, seventeen of them put back to sea December 27th.

The three who stayed, Thomas Chapple of Plymouth, England, and William Wright and Seth, Seth Weeks of Barnstable, Mass., Massachusetts, took shelter in caves among the rocks. In one they found eight human skeletons, side by side as though they had lain down and died together.

The only food the three had was a sort of blackbird which they caught when at roost in trees and whose blood they sucked. With the meat of the bird, and a few eggs, they chewed a plant tasting like peppergrass which they found in the crevices of the rocks. They survived.

The three boats, with the seventeen men divided among them, moved under the sun across ocean together until the 12th of January, when, during the night, the one under the command of Owen Chase, First Mate, became separated from the other two.

Already one of the seventeen had died, Matthew Joy, Second Mate. He had been buried January 10th. When Charles Shorter, Negro, out of the same boat as Joy, died on January 23rd, his body was shared among the men of that boat and the Captain's, and eaten. Two days more and Lawson Thomas, Negro, died and was eaten. Again two days and Isaac Shepherd, Negro, died and was eaten. The bodies were roasted to dryness by means of fires kindled on the ballast sand at the bottom of the boats.

Two years—two days, excuse me. Two days later, the 29th, during the night, the boat which had been Matthew Joy's got separated from the Captain's and was never heard of again. When she disappeared three men still lived, William Bond, Negro, Obed Hendricks, and Joseph West.

In the Captain's boat now alone on the sea, four men kept on. The fifth, Samuel Reed, Negro, had been eaten for strength at his death the day before. Within three days these four men, calculating the miles they had to go, decided to draw two lots, one to choose who should die that the others might live, and one to choose who should kill 'em. The youngest, Owen Coffin, serving on his first voyage as a cabin boy to learn his family's trade, lost. It became the duty of Charles Ramsdale, also of Nantucket, to shoot him. He did, and he, the Captain and Brazilla Ray, Nantucket, ate him.

That was February 1, 1821. On February 11th, Ray died of himself, and was eaten. On February 23rd, the Captain and Ramsdale were picked up by the Nantucket whaleship *Dauphin*, Captain Zimri Coffin.

The men in the third boat, under the command of Owen Chase, the first mate, held out the longest. They had become separated from the other two boats before hunger and thirst had driven any of the *Essex's* men to extremity. Owen Chase's crew had buried their first death, Richard Peterson, Negro, on January 20th.

It was not until February 8th, when Isaac Cole died in convulsions, that Owen Chase was forced, some two weeks later than in the other boats, to propose to his two men, Benjamin Lawrence and Thomas Nickerson, that they should eat of their own flesh. It happened to them this once, in this way: they separated the limbs from the body, and cut all the flesh from the bones, after which they opened the body, took out the heart, closed the body again, sewed it up as well as they could, and committed it to the sea.

They drank of the heart and ate it. They ate a few pieces of the flesh and hung the rest, cut in thin strips, to dry in the sun. They made a fire, as the Captain had, and roasted some to serve them the next day.

The next morning they found that the flesh in the sun had spoiled, had turned green. They made another fire to cook it to prevent its being wholly lost. For five days they lived on it, not using of their remnant of bread.

They recruited their strength on the flesh, eating it in small pieces with salt water. By the 14th they were able to make a few attempts at guiding the boat with an oar.

On the 15th the flesh was all consumed and they had left the last of their bread, two sea biscuits. Their limbs had swelled during the last two days and now began to pain them excessively. They judged they still had 300 miles to go.

On the 17th the settling of a cloud led Chase to think that land was near. Notwithstanding, the next morning, Nickerson, 17 years of age, after having bailed the boat, lay down, drew a piece of canvas up over him, and said that he then wished to die immediately. On the 19th, at 7 in the morning, Lawrence saw a sail at seven miles, and the three of them were taken up by the brig *Indian* of London, Captain William Crozier.

It is not known what happened in later years to the three men who survived the island. But the four Nantucket men who, with the Captain, survived the sea, all became captains themselves. They died old, Nickerson at 77, Ramsdale, who was 19 on the *Essex*, at 75, Chase who was 24, at 73, Lawrence who was 30, at 80, and Pollard, the captain, who had been 31 at the time, lived until 1870, age 81.

END TAPE 3 / BEGIN TAPE 4

The Captain, on his return to Nantucket, took charge of the ship *Two Brothers*, another whaler, and five months from home struck a reef to the westward of the Sandwich Islands. The ship was a total loss, and Pollard never went to sea again. At the time of the second wreck he said: "Now I am utterly ruined. No owner will ever trust me with a whaler again, for all will say I am an unlucky man." He ended his life as the night watch of Nantucket town, protecting the houses and people in the dark.

Owen Chase was always fortunate. In 1832 the *Charles Carrol* was built for him on Brant Point, Nantucket, and he filled her twice, each time with 2600 barrels of sperm oil. In his last years he took to hiding food in the attic of his house.

CO: Now, we just made it. [Break in the tape] In 1921, when Raymond Weaver wrote the first biography of Melville, he went to her for materials, and one night they went up in the attic and opened that cake box for the first time, and there was the manuscript of *Billy Budd*. It was never published until, it was never known to exist until—I've looked at that manuscript, but I've never made the studies that a man named Freeman in particular and Jay Leyda have made of it, and Freeman published a book on—which you can buy now, I've just bought it myself in paper, the paperback edition of *Billy Budd* is the, is Freeman's edition. Originally published by Harvard Press, its a very interesting study, I think, I've reviewed that, by the way, in a piece of prose that's going to be published in this book for ah, for the *Western Review*. And I argue a big case there, the title of the piece is called, "Hawthorne, Homosexuality, and Hebraism"—uh, no the title is that, the title is "David Young, David Old" but the, but the—really! The pitch is, the pitch is Hawthorne, Hebraism, that's homosexuality and Hebraism. Because *Billy Budd* is a novel of a pretty boy, who is loved by a Master of Arms aboard a ship, who, who is, and, whose love, who loves, and the love is scorned by Billy, and, and the Master of Arms accuses Billy of being the ringleader of a mutiny aboard a ship, and Billy, who's a completely unflawed apple of cheek and everything else, of virtue, I mean like, like virtue. But he has one impediment, his speech, and as a result, his muscles act faster than his mind. So he clouts Claggert, and kills him, so then the

captain is stuck with the problem of trying this thing, not only as possibly the mutiny, but actually as the problem of a murder aboard the vessel, so he hangs Billy from a yardarm. It's a parable, an allegory, and everything else. And I myself think that Freeman's argument that it was originally a short story, and that as a short story it was much—it was very powerful, that uh, Melville decided to try to make it a short novel, which he did, and the manuscript is the second thing, a short novel.

UV: It's not *Redburn*, is it?

CO: *Redburn* is before *Moby-Dick*. It's a beautiful—you know that book? It's a knockout.

UV: In relation to *Billy*...

CO: Yea. I think, uh, not any, anything of meaning at all, really. Again by that fact of that whole Hawthorne thing, again that whole homosexuality thing and that whole Hebraic thing is all, is all on the later story. And *Redburn* is marvelous simply as the story of an American boy of his period who goes to sea, and is, and is therefore shoved right down into the, into the *filth* of life. And it's actually, and it's actually, it's called, it's called, the subtitle of that book is called *Redburn*, which is the name of the boy, or, "The Story of a Gentlemen." It's a funny subtitle, because the whole story is the bitterness of Melville's having, from his own point of view, fallen into his father's failure in business in Albany, from a social class, that he was born into—to ah, to ah, to becoming simply a normal, simply a—like in this damn society, I mean, mind you, the democracy is an old thing, like. I think it's a marvelous book—like from that poem again, it's like "Hey! Jackson!" is a smash out of that. Jackson is the Claggert of *Redburn*. There are those kinds of fictional relationships between the two books.

UV: Charles? Do you know, is it Maxwell Anderson, the one who did the play of *Billy Budd*?

CO: No. No. It's two young men, Louis Coxe and uh—whose now at Bowdoin, and uh, and uh, the guy who's now at the head of the theatre at Harvard, Robert Chaplin. They wrote the play of *Billy Budd*.

UV: Well, uh, what do you think of that?

CO: I, I never saw it. No. No. No. Never read it either. No, no, don't know a thing about it.

UV: Well, uh, *Billy Budd* I know has been interpreted by some people as being Melville's ah, Melville's ah, Melville's peace with the world...

CO: Yea. Yea.

UV: Well that just seems kind of ridiculous, I was just wondering, if you do see this as being a good bit of the older Melville, it just seems contradictory of the older Melville.

CO: Well, well, when I said in the piece, that the uh, that the uh, only once did he manage to skip out of that uh, prison of the Semitic notion of Transcendence—believe you me, that uh, Melville's problem with God, was a, was a, was a somewhat, the old-fashioned Puritan concept of God—but then Melville is a big psyche, and the Old Man, up there, was his own old man like, and that kind of stuff, and he was, he was wrapped up. And Billy, the interesting thing about Billy is the Captain De Vere, who again if John was here, listen to that for "truth". Captain Truth of the vessel, and Pa, and God, and Truth, were all the authority, and do you know—by the way, if you ever want to get Melville right where, where he's younger, and less organized in a sense, as he is in *Billy*—Billy is the only organized sort of a managed formalized, a formal literary achievement in a sense. Yea, yup—otherwise, his forms are open forms, but um, uh, "The Lightning-Rod Man" a short story by Melville, is about a guy who sells lightning-rods all up and down the Berkshires and the Vermont area. You ought to read that, because actually, it's clearly Zeus. [Laughter]

Uh, uh, and the story is just the most wonderful manipulation of allegory again, because um, of course, because the guy is no more than a guy going around from farm to farm, up and down these valleys, selling lightning-rods to, to farmhouse wives when their husbands are in the fields. And gee, it's too much, that story. Another one by the way of his, is "I and My Chimney" which has to do with his house in Pittsfield, which had this chimney. It has to be the biggest chimney in New England, I think still is that one down there. I've been down in the basement of that house, and the basis of the, the base, it's a pyramid, and the base, the base of that pyramid is almost as wide as the cellar. It starts with a base that you've never seen! And it goes, it goes up on an angle through the house. And he writes this, well, a very beautiful scholar on Melville writes books, he's named Sealts, from Yale, has written the most interesting, almost equal to Lawrence's great passage on "The Cassock", the chapter called, "The Cassock" from *Moby-Dick*, which is one of the greatest pieces of scholarship that uh—in fact Lawrence is one of the greatest Melville scholars for having written that chapter alone. Nobody, in fact nobody caught on to Melville, what Melville did except, Lawrence in the chapter called, "The Cassock". It's a marvelous essay by Lawrence. But again, Sealts on "The Chimney" is just too much again on this subject of Captain De Vere and the Papa, Papa, Father, and God thing. He was Justice! You know justice? You know, like the problem of justice in the world upon? Like that's, like that's De Vere's problem, like, he loves Billy. Billy's his son in the novel. Billy's perfect, and he's just the captain of a vessel. He's got responsibilities, yea. So he hangs Billy! And boy! It's a man hanging his own child! There's no question about it! And Melville gets himself a big rise in being hung, you can feel that! The ending of that thing, which is pure Crucifixion, by the way, stolen right out of it—just, I mean he's spread-eagle on a—isn't he? He's hung that way isn't he? He's spread-eagled on that thing. At least. At least he's just hung from a yardarm, isn't he? But...

UV: Yea. But the sun comes out!

CO: Yea! But the sun comes out! Yea! Yea! Exactly! It's a resurrection! Sure. Big moment, boy!

UV: He never quit.

CO: Huh?

UV: Melville never quit! Even as an old man!

CO: Oh no. Oh no. Oh no. Uh-uh. No, no, no.

UV: A little off the subject, but did you see the movie that they made...

CO: Oh, sure. Yea, sure.

UV: ...with Gregory Peck?

CO: Oh sure, oh sure...

UV: How do you like the way they handled it? Do you have any reactions?

CO: No, uh, naturalism.

UV: It wasn't too close to the book?

CO: Beg your pardon?

UV: It wasn't too close to the book?

CO: Oh no. Oh no. No, no. Yea. Yea, yea, yea. But then if you know Huston's movies like the, the one I'm always thinking of is the, rather than "The Treasures of Sierra Madre", or the movie of *Moby-Dick*, is the uh, one with Kathryn Hepburn and Bogart on that uh, on that—

UV: "The African Queen"!

CO: "The African Queen"! Yea! Or the one he made—"Beat the Devil" I think it is.

UV: Oh Yea!

CO: Yea! He's a pretty, a pretty poor novelist. He really should have been a writer, he was a writer you know, and if he'd only half meet the problem, the problem where he can't get away from trying, I mean wishing he could write novels, instead of making movies, would I think whole, always the literary is sub-present, even if he's a marvelous movie maker, that dishes the film. Or you feel that statement thing coming in from existentialism. He really is, he's really just a guy who admires

Camus and Sartre, in that vision of life. [Cough] And hardly, it seems to me, has got a god-damn thing to do with Herman Melville, to say the least.

UV: Do you think of anyone else in American literature who's anywhere's like Melville...

CO: No.

UV: ...and I wonder if Crane wasn't sort of influenced by him very much?

CO: Yea. Sure

UV: They sort of coincide in the same direction.

CO: Yea. Sure. Absolutely...yup. Crane of course had the misfortune, in a sense, to be living at a time when naturalism was at its height. In fact, he's one of the great naturalists that we have, but then the "Blue Hotel"...

UV: Yea!

CO: ...is something that that would make your skin stand up.

UV: There's a passage in the "Blue Hotel" that seems exactly parallel to a passage in *Billy Budd*.

CO: [Strikes a match] Um-hum.

UV: Ah, it's a beautiful connection, it's ah, it's ah...

CO: Just think how few years there are between the writing of these two stories, do you realize that? Well, yea? Oh well. Let's see, no, it's about ten to fifteen years, but it's a relatively small amount of time. Yea. It's very close. I've always, or due to Duncan, I've always—since I've heard Duncan make the most beautiful piece on Gertrude Stein I've ever heard.⁹ Do you realize that Melville was alive until 1892, and writing—1891 I think, and writing right up until the last minute? And the manuscript, one of the manuscripts, being *Billy Budd*. Miss Stein's *Three Lives* is 1903. I mean, I think it's hard for us to realize that the nineteenth century is woven into our lives, because we feel Ms. Stein or Steven Crane as being, belonging, somewhat to us, and Melville sounds to us, like everybody, as being one of those, "Oh dear!" and even Henry James is closer than Melville.

UV: Science sort of mixes us up a little.

CO: Well, well, yup, yup, well—that's the great date! Well, well, I, I, could mention *Private Lives*—I'd rather mention, *Three Lives*, ha, ha! I'd rather mention Planck's, Planck's theory is 1901 or 1902, isn't it? Maybe even, maybe even

1897? I stress this really because, because really I don't think we're disconnected at all. In those little years, those little years don't break it off! If you, if you hit the Melville line—if you feel the Melville line—like for example, as against Whitman, like. For example, me—I think he's a beautiful poet and all that, but boy, I mean though, that sounds like light experience. Like, I honestly, Whitman's just as alive. It's like only in that, like only in the things that I've been talking about, that Melville seems to me more, that Melville feels to me more relevant.

UV: Do you see any relationship between Conrad and Melville?

CO: Almost none, except the fact that they were both superb seamen, once. Obviously. I mean they went to work on the sea, didn't they? Oh no! Absolutely none whatsoever! Beth and I were up in Maine last, the summer before last I guess. And I stayed with an old friend of mine who is a lobster, whose son is a lobsterman. In the house that we had for a few days, there was a copy of the *Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, which I had never read, so I'm really quite fresh on Conrad, I could talk forever. And it's painting! It's got nothing to do with literary art! It's just, it's just *incredibly* good painting, it's like uh, better than oil sea painting! Yea. Storms and...

UV: Have you read *Heart of Darkness*?

CO: Yea, sure.

UV: I don't know. I've always had this feeling, that uh, that uh, that that's the kind of thing about Conrad, you said it's great painting, but yet I feel it's more than that. And uh, in this, I kind of think that there's a relationship.

CO: Well I, you know, every man's his—every man eats you know. Like now, now that you say it that way, like, I'm thinking of a man who read in Gloucester the other night, he's been a friend of ours for years and he's a statistical analyst for Gorton Pew Fisheries, and they had—well I thought Duncan was going to be in, and well I set up a reading for Duncan and he never showed up and I never heard from him, so I was going to go in and read for him, and, and Creeley, and the other people in town thought it'd be better if they asked three writers to read three other writers, and they did, and this guy read this thing called, "Prologos". It's the chapter—opening chapter to his novel, and this man believes in Conrad. I mean he has that feeling for Conrad, and I suspect Conrad is really his master. And this piece of the novel I'm really going to try to get published, it's so, it's so crazy good, it's like, it's like what does, you know, what does it make? Who's your man if he's your man? That's the lot! If you, if you, well isn't it? If he's your man, that's cool. These values are really, you know like that literary history and literary criticism are rye, and I don't think it relates. For me, Conrad is like not at all as interesting. For me, psychologically I think he's, he's a bore of character, physically, I think he's got the sea in the painting world, uh, you know, these things. And, like, Mr. Melville turneth me on, that's all.

UV: I think Mr. Melville turns me on.

CO: Huh?

UV: Mr. Melville turns us all on too!

CO: Sure! Har, har!

UV: You mentioned that the homosexuality in *Billy Budd*...

CO: Yea.

UV: Not a physical contact, just but a, feeling of love toward, toward one's own sex. Does this permeate Melville's works? Because I seem to recall several references of this nature in *Moby-Dick*.

CO: Oh, tremendous! And if you know *Clarel*, the novel, it's uh—or the poem on the death of Hawthorne, the poem called "Monody":

To have known him, to have loved him
After loneliness long;
And then to be estranged in life,
Ease me, a little ease, my song!

CO: And the second stanza is, because Hawthorne would, died up here at Crawford March, and is buried there, and he's buried in the snow, and the vine image, [Snaps fingers] is ah, "the vine that hid the shyest cloistral grape." The imagery, the imagery of vine and grape, in Melville, the leading character of *Clarel*, outside of Clarel, the story-teller, the hero, the story-teller, is Vine. Melville, Melville is a man of such archetypalism, by the way, that his uh, his again, that is, his again—if we only had the... Why didn't a person like Chuck not come today? He's dopey! He probably spent a whole afternoon on these problems so we can pick it up again! Huh? Let me come—I'm just answering you.

UV: Oh.

CO: Is that the, is that the proper nouns, like Vine, and the image, "shyest cloistral grape" are where Melville's, uh, where the scenes in his psyche that had to do with homosexuality are all—they flow towards, they flow, they flow, like in his lifetime and friendship, was towards Hawthorne, they flow right on the same vein out toward David and Jonathan, which is the biggest imagery he's got as of the relationship of man. He cries out in the middle of *Billy Budd*, *I can't use David as my hero because you've all lost touch with the Old Testament, so I gotta' use Lord Nelson as my image of the authority that De Vere has to use*. You know, you know that marvelous passage right smack out! It's still in novel! It's such an angry passage about how completely crippling the condition of man is, now he's lost touch with the Old Testament, which had all that imagery, and all that swell, that swell and sweltering, of the possibilities of life in a human being.

UV: Was this caused primarily because of his sailing?

CO: Well I'm sure he got a good, he must have had his uh—he must have had his uh—[Laughter from the Audience] No! No! No, I'm not quite sure. Oh boy, oh boy, no, no, no, there's no evidence whatsoever that *Hoyman* [Herman] was a homosexual, in the active sense.

UV: No, I meant that he was involved...

CO: Well! He was, uh, I'm sure like, like Billy, he was, that he was, a very attra—well, I describe him in that poem, don't think Herman wasn't a little beauty. And you don't think a few seamen on board those vessels all those years weren't interested in said fact.

UV: In the opening scene, where he goes to bed with Quib—

CO: Yea, I, I, I, think that that's always abused in, in—

UV: D.H. Lawrence pointed it out, he sees the beauty of the thing.

CO: Yea. Yea. He certainly does, absolutely—

UV: Melville's...

CO: Yea, and I think that one is—but that's often abused, that passage, in this homosexual thing. All this other place that I'm working at the moment to answer Paul is really where it's really true, where it's much more meaningful. And where, and where, and where Melville is engaged his whole lifetime, crucially. Believe you me, that friendship with Hawthorne is so beautiful, simply because once in his life—you know, by the way, *Billy Budd* is, is, um, is, inscribed to Captain John Chase of the maintop of the U.S. vessel the *United States*, who was Melville's maintop captain when Melville was a sailor coming back a year and a half after from Honolulu to Boston, and John Chase, ah, well ah, John Chase is so obviously the figure of a man who he really loved. But, whatever one, furtherance that love had, one doesn't know, but clearly there was another man, beside Hawthorne and his wife for whom the whole thing was going, and that was Chase. Whom, and he was an older man than he, whom by, I think by about ten years, at the time they were aboard that vessel.

UV: Do you think that if society had then condoned homosexuality, this would change both his writing and his...

CO: Not at all. Not at all. No.

UV: ...personality?

CO: No. Not at all. Absolutely. I don't believe that social change has anything but superficial effects upon these matters. I think these matters are locked in nature, and reality, and in life. And I don't even care for a human race that would be removed from them by becoming a new species, personally.

UV: Do you want to take a break and have some coffee?

CO: [Strikes a match] Um, that would be delicious.

END TAPE 4

End Notes

Whenever possible, these bibliographic entries are consistent with the edition in Olson's library as they appear in *Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives* edited by George F. Butterick and published by the Special Collections Department of UCONN at Storrs.

¹ Olson, Charles. *The Maximus Poems Jargon/Corinth* (New York) 1960.

² Smith, John. *Travels and Works of Captain John Smith* edited by Edward Arber. 2 vols. John Grant (Edinburgh) 1910.

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⁵ Duncan, Robert *TROBAR* 3. Orion Press (Brooklyn, N.Y.) 1961.

⁶ *A Pamphlet* Vol. 3 No. 7 Idaho State College June 12, 1962.

⁷ Olson, Charles *Letter for Melville 1951: Written to be read AWAY FROM the Melville Society's "One Hundredth Birthday Party" for Moby-Dick at Williams College, Labor Day Weekend, Sept. 2-4, 1951* Printed at Black Mountain College, Black Mountain, N.C. Copyright 1951 Charles Olson. This poem later appeared in *The Distances* Grove Press (New York) 1960.

⁸ Olson, Charles *Call Me Ishmael: A Study of Melville* City Lights Books (San Francisco, CA.) 1947.

⁹ Duncan, Robert *Writing Writing a Composition Book Stein Imitations*. Sumbooks (Albuquerque, N.M.) 1964.