



Gloucester from Good Harbor Beach

Birds, Landscape, Place, Cosmicity · Sherman Paul

I WANT TO TALK about several related things: birds, landscape, place, cosmicity.

Birds. To live in Gloucester, at the harbor as Olson did at Fort Square, is to be aware, always, of gulls. They animate the air, and contribute to the motion of that “perfect bowl/of land and sea.” They are immemorial presences, as Olson, looking out of the six tenement windows of his eerie, tells us in the *Maximus* poem of his first winter’s occupancy, when he realized the newness experienced by the fishermen of the Dorchester Company—

and the snow flew
where gulls now paper
the skies

where the fishing continues
and my heart lies

Gulls figure in one of Olson’s earliest poems—in the river landscape, which, with the harbor, is of greatest psychic significance to him. They figure as tutelary birds: doves of ascent, teaching us that flight is attained only by love. Or, as we have it in the first *Maximus* poem, teaching us that to take possession of place by planting the mast, the vertical of the self, we must do the work enjoined by the declaration “Love is form.” Olson’s gulls are notable, among other things, because they are never depicted as scavengers. They do not seem to be kin to the gulls of *Paterson IV* but to those of *The Bridge*: they release the creative spirit—the flight of imagination—to the end, in Olson’s case, not of transcending but of inhabiting space. The flight of the gull, with the love it summons, gives one a privileged landscape, the total or circumambient landscape—and the correlative psychic wholeness—that Olson sought in his lifetime’s devotion to place.

I begin with birds because Olson’s deepest imagination of being involves them. Let me cite two instances whose intensity makes them indelible. The first is the account of the chii-mi at the beginning of the *Mayan Letters*.

Birds, lad: my god what birds. Last evening a thing like our hawk. And that woman of mine (again) most alert to their nature. It happened this way. I was down the beach bargaining to buy a piece of their best fish here, what sounds like madrigal, only it comes out smedreegal. I had my back turned no more than three minutes, when, turning, to come back to the house (Con was on the terraza out over the sea, surrounded by a dozen of these gabbling kids), below her, on the water line, I noticed these huge wings fluttering wrong. My guess was, one of the kids, all of whom carry sling-shots, had brought down a zopalote (our vulture, "brother v," as Con named them). But when I came near, I noticed, just as Con cried down, that it was no vulture but another bird which is quite beautiful here, in Maya a chii-mi (chee-me): flies in flock over the waterline, soaring like hawks, high, and is marked by a long splittail ((by god, i was right : just checked dictionary and is, as I thought, our frigate bird))

there it was, poor chii-mi, stoned by one of these little bastards, and the others, throwing more stones at it, and a couple, kicking it. And it working those three foot wings, hard, but not wild: very sure of itself, tho downed. By the time I came up, it had managed to get itself over, and was already out into the water, to get away from the kids. But each wave was wetting it down, and the misery was, that it drown.

My assumption was, the stone had broken its wing. But Con had seen it happen, and seems to have known it was only its head that had been struck (it was out cold, she told me later, for a minute or so, and then, on its back, had disgorged its last fish). Anyhow, she had the brains to send down one of the older boys to bring it out of the water, and up on the terraza. And when I came up, there it was, quiet, looking hard at everyone, with its gular pouch swollen like my Aunt Vandla's goiter, and its eye, not at all as a bird's is, when it is scared, or as, so quickly, they weaken, and that film drops over the eye. Not at all: this chii-mi was more like an animal, in its strength. Yet I still thought it was done for, something in the wings gone.

Just about then it started to work its way forward, pulling its wings in to its body, and making it look so much more like, say, a duck. What it had in mind, was to try to lift itself the two feet up to the wall that goes round the terraza. But it could not. It had worked itself into the inner angle of a corner. So I reached down and raised the right wing up to the top of the wall. Then it left. And, itself, it pulled its body up, perched for an instant, and swung off, off and up, into the sky, god help us, up and out over the sea, higher and higher, and, not like the others but working its wings in shorter, quicker strokes, it pulled off and off, out over the shrimp ship moored out in the deeper water, inside the bar, from which it swung inland again, and, as I watched it a good five minutes, kept turning more and more to the west, into the sun, until that peculiar movement of the wings began to give way to the more usual flight of a chii-mi. And I figure, as it disappeared, it was all right, all right.

God, it was wonderful, black, wonderful long feathers, and the wing spread, overall, what, five to six feet. Never got such a sense of a bird's strength, inside strength, as this one gave, like I say, more animal, seemingly, and sure, none of that small beating heart. That's why its victory, over these mean little pricks, was so fine.

Here victory is enhanced by victimization, by Olson's sensitivity to exigencies of resistance. The triumph of beautiful being over death is moral: of indomitable heart, spirit, will. In depicting the chii-mi with "maximal attention," Olson makes its spirit his own; his projective act gives him "secrets objects share."

In "A Round & A Canon," he speaks of "a lovely bird of a wild human motion," assimilating the bird to the movement of a child swinging—and, more important, to his own precarious equipoise.

A bird
knows too much, or it strikes me he knows enough
to awake to a day to sing a day down

And when he falls—o

all saints & recitals, consider
what a very high heart, what a high heart

such nerves
I cannot keep him alive, holding
him in my hand, winged or pawed, he fell
from his own world, his own careful context, those
balances

Even a spoon
of the finest honey, or a splint, or,
tried down his throat like his father,
the finest worm

Won't do. He dies, his eyes
close upward, the film first, the milky way
of his dying
(as the Two who shyly rule
off the north in the night settle, distractedly,
in the sea

He ceases to fly or to sing. And no reference
to the twisting of the neck of
the spitting black goose

he dies
as the instant dies, as I die
for an instant listening
to the slightest
error

I underscore *his own world, his own careful context, those/ balances*. For the bird is an exemplary inhabitant of space. Its dynamic will maintains a dynamic state; it is always at home in a forever-changing world, the careful context, the cosmos of its fluid circumscriptions.

The bird is remarkable for both its resistance and its stance. It lives in the fields of air as Olson wished to live in the fields of life and poetry. (We may speak of *air* in the Bachelardian way, as one of Olson's characterizing elements. The free-soaring bird, of course, contributes to

its valorization. But there is also the air we breathe, the inspiriting element of life and poetry. For Olson field composition involves breath because space is air and we are lungs: “space . . . the air that it is and the lungs we are to live in it as our element.” Although the meditation on metacenter in “Tyrian Businesses” provides an aqueous example of “those/balances,” Olson is not, I think, primarily a poet of water. It is too much the element of smother—an interesting association with mother and with the choking of the flesh—a fearful, denying, death-dealing element. Air, then, and for the great reason Bachelard gives: “anguish is factitious: we are made to breathe easy.”)

But what of stance? Olson saw the chii-mi in Yucatan, where he was also overwhelmed by the Mayan glyphs. These were built around “ONE central HUMAN figure,” and in them, as he said, the human figure is part of the universe of things, individuated only by acts of attention, by its “own special selection from the phenomenal field.” Like the bird, the human figure is within its world. It is not estranged from the familiar world; it inhabits this “human universe.” What Olson saw in the Mayan glyphs he also recognized in the Hopi and Whiteheadian cosmologies: a space-time centered on the individual, bending around him, creating an intimate space of here/now peopled by particular things that, impinging on him, solicit his attention. *Familiar. Intimate.* It must be emphasized that Olson wished to bring us out of hostile or indifferent into intimate space. He did not wish to conquer space but to live in place, and he valued cosmologies that “reset man in his field”—cosmologies that gave him a veritable cosmos with its virtue of cosmicity, of well-being.

Olson’s achievement is of the highest order because, in his concern with cosmology and psychology (his studies in myth join both), he trans-values our primary conceptions of nature and self and gives us a new ontological possibility. Resetting man in his field is the cosmological work; restoring his dynamic is the psychological work. And the bird in its own careful context—perhaps we should note here a relevant Creeley title: *Contexts of Poetry*—the bird tells us that care, as requisite as attention, is a condition of being and of being in the field, of having such a cosmos. Olson’s field is not for spectators but vigilant participants. Creeley provides a corollary when he says that poets are only poets when they are writing poems. And Paul Goodman, commenting on the sadness

of writing about rather than doing something, adds another: "Poetry is not sad, it is an action."

Olson notes in *The Special View of History* that these lectures on "actual willful man" most fully develop the dynamic view first presented in the essay "Projective Verse." One of the most remarkable things in this essay is the use Olson makes of the following passage from Fenollosa:

There is in reality no such verb as a pure copula, no such original conception: our very word *exist* means 'to stand forth,' to show oneself by a definite act. 'Is' comes from the Aryan root *as*, to breathe. 'Be' is from *bhu*, to grow.

A summary declaration of *The Special View* puts this succinctly: "Man is, He acts." Olson's poetics of breath, accordingly, is a poetics of self-action. All act springs from the breath; to breathe is to act, to stand forth, to grow. Every thing—and we are things among things—every thing in Olson's universe manifests energy, is efficacious. And so he speaks to us of a morality of motion and challenges us to move, to put ourselves in motion. What is the will to change without the power to move oneself?

The bird, always in motion, moves itself, and this is why Olson dedicated "A Round & A Canon" to a dancer. In dance, the kinetic art closest to Olson's physiological conception of poetry, one moves oneself, and gloriously in defiance of gravity. His meditation on the relation of *M* to *G*, metacenter to gravity, Maximus to Gloucester, addresses this. But the supreme imagination of this relationship is in the dance scenario Olson composed depicting episodes of Nijinsky's life and patently fabling his own deepest desire. I cite the second indelible instance of imagination of being, this one the concluding instructions of "The Born Dancer." Olson describes the occasion: Having fled the insane asylum, Nijinsky wanders in the forest where he meets the soldiers who recognize him and plague him to dance. Then he says,

So he does it. He starts, and, from pain, it comes, all the way, until, you shall dance beyond what Act II is, you shall dance as Shiva might, say. Until, at the end, how I don't know, it is as though he shot straight *up* into the air.

Nijinsky's leap is vertical flight, an image of mobility akin to the most mobile of powers, that of imagination; and it is a more felicitous image of vital imperatives than the diorite stone. In the context of a troubled sexual and personal life—again Olson stresses victimization—this wonderful leap enacts the ultimate tropic liberation of self and fulfillment of being. Clearly the leap is transcendent, an apotheosis. But it is also a figure of the wholeness whose attainment includes the other stations of the vertical of the self: hell and earth (Diaghilev and Romola). Duncan says that “Maximus call'd us to dance the Man.” Maximus does, and fortunately in a way more commensurate with our powers than Nijinsky's. He calls us to walk in the world, or, in the lovely admission of the last volume of *The Maximus Poems*, to find our satisfaction in the laborious and limited—yes, earthbound—flight of the cormorant.

In calling us to dance the Man, Maximus also calls us to the dance of imagination and the creation of form. *Love is form*. What form? Considering the exemplary bird, could it be anything but a nest? “O Gloucester-man/weave”; “The nest, I say, to you, I Maximus, say”—these imperatives initiate the work, which has for its goal the initiation of another kind of nation. Love is form because cosmos is the work of Eros. (A distinguishing feature of Olson's studies in mythology, as in Duncan's too, is the primacy accorded Eros.) We are, Olson says, *amovores*; and the forms we love are born and torn from ourselves in our necessary engagement with the environment. Love is not easy because our environments revulse us; they are strewn with the “rubbish of creation,” the detritus of civilization. Yet, as Olson demonstrates, we must make our forms—our nests—from the available pickings.

The bird is exemplary because it makes a shelter of such inhospitable materials—because it does what all of us would literally like to do, make our own houses. Isn't a nest, as Bachelard reminds us, isn't this place of primitive warmth, a bird's *house*? And doesn't it stir in us the deepest reverberations? When Kerouac (about whom I have been reading in Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's chicken essay) remembers the kitchen of his childhood he recovers a “feeling of indescribable peace” in the “warm home time.” In their literal activity, poets, of course, make houses. (Creeley's “The House” is an apt example.) *The Maximus Poems* is a house to be remembered along with Capt. Levett's and Roger Conant's, in my mind, at least, situated in Olson's essential unspoiled landscape, the pristine America—

by fish flakes and stages
on rocks near water with trees
against sea . . .

We might linger to enjoy the reverie *nest* awakens, but let me simply touch on some of the relevant associations Bachelard develops in *The Poetics of Space*. Nests, he says, call up our childhood wonder (and the wonder of childhood). They are associated with the ideas of return and lost intimacy, with the desire for cosmicity. To have a house for the self, and one so conformable and comfortable! “To make a world”—the imperative need of childhood, according to Edith Cobb—“to make a world in which to find a place to discover a self”! The nest, in the first *Maximus* poem, is the center of the cosmos; at the end of *The Maximus Poems* the cosmos itself is a nest. Gloucester, the perfect bowl of land and sea, is a place where Olson, at last, is physically at home.

The nest is the model of poem, polis, and cosmos. Olson’s great poem is a polis—the polis of Gloucester exists only in the poem—and this polis, this Gloucester, is finally, because of his labors, a cosmos-polis, a true cosmopolis. And to live there, in the place of that poem, is to know again what moved the bird and the poet to make nests. “Would a bird build its nest,” Bachelard asks, “if it did not have its instinct for confidence in the world?”

A reading of “Apollonius of Tyana” confirms the equation of nesting place and natal place, and reminds us that both involve return—the “human returning,” according to Bachelard, that “takes place in the great rhythm of human life.” Worcester, not Gloucester, was Olson’s natal place, but Gloucester was a childhood place cherished, as we know from “The Twist,” where places often count most, in dreams. I cannot think of that poem, nor of *The Maximus Poems*, without recalling Thoreau. He too made a nest beside the water. And he sufficiently accounts for the labor of inhabiting Walden when he says that he well remembered, when only four years old, being “brought from Boston to this my native town, through these very woods and this field, to the pond.” The sentence moves inward, centering in what he says is one of his oldest—earliest, deepest—memories, evoking for him “that fabulous landscape of my infant dreams.” It may well be a landscape dreamed then, but it is clearly a landscape dreamed now again, advising us to remember in

reading *Walden* and *The Maximus Poems* that “childhood”—how well Bachelard says it!—“is at the origin of the greatest landscapes.”

How is it then that Olson, one of our greatest poets of landscape (because he gives us the greatest landscape)—how is it that such a close student of the landscapes of Fitz Hugh Lane is silent about Thoreau, Lane’s contemporary? One reason—I will offer another later on—is Olson’s repudiation of the Romantic-Transcendentalist legacy. Everything in his thought refuses the dualism of subject/object, consciousness/nature, and its resolution on the side of the Ego in the aggrandizement of the symbol-making imagination. Matters of this kind, as we now say, were Thoreau’s constant *problematic*, but they were not Olson’s, once he had overcome them.

This can be seen in terms of Olson’s transformation of the conventional view of landscape. I take the briefest formula for this from the title of John Barrell’s brilliant book on John Clare: *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place*. The idea of landscape is the correlative of the Cartesian way of seeing and, with the old discourse, contributes to our estrangement from the familiar world. In *Proprioception*, where Olson sets forth the fundamentals of a new discourse, he defines landscape by citing the entry in the dictionary: “a portion of land which the eye/can comprehend in a single view. . . .” This is the familiar spectatorial, pictorial definition. Landscape is *scene*. In the nineteenth century, that great age of landscape, it is always *scenery*: one not only took the waters but took in the views, and for similar tonic reasons. The definition tells us that to see is only to *comprehend*, to grasp the meaning mentally, to understand. Romantic landscape is predicated on a geometry of inside/outside and on an epistemology of subject/object. The land becomes a “landscape,” a picture, because we are predisposed and disposed to see it that way. We come to it with an “idea” in mind; we look for “views.”

Now for Olson in search of intimate being (he will endorse the notion of contact, of the skin as sensitive interface), such landscape required that he open the field, enter “outside” space, become active within it and so inhabit it. The emendation in *Proprioception* suggests this:

to bring the land into the eye’s view

This evokes for me the act of discovery Olson associated with *periplus*,

with the fresh experience of sailors at sea and the wonderfilled moment when the eye, straining to grasp the unseen, finds the land emerging in its sight. The occasion is such—is so Whiteheadian—that I hear *prehend* instead of *comprehend*. And *view* becomes *viewing*, an activity that gathers the land into and about oneself, as a further notation suggests:

Cosmos
creation
a verb

Cosmos is creation resulting from activity: we attack chaos by work. But “*a verb*,” charged inevitably by Olson’s reading of Fenollosa, also tells us that the cosmos itself is a verb: the universe is a process. We live in the world of fishermen and gulls, not a world of fixities (subjects and objects) but of energies (verbs). “*The verb*,” Fenollosa says, “must be the primary fact of nature, since motion and change are all that we can recognise in her.” So we see again the intellectual magnitude of the task of making space place and appreciate the justice of Ed Dorn’s comment on *The Maximus Poems*: “You don’t have a place just because you barge in on it as a literal physical reality, or want it to prosper because you live there. . . . Place, you have to have a man bring it to you.” A man, I might add, doing what Dorn depicts Olson doing in “From Gloucester Out.”

Olson gives us Gloucester because he learned how to stand in the landscape. The problem, he knew, was one of “landscape,” and in “Lower Field—Enniscorthy,” an early poem originally called “Field notes,” we see him trying to solve it.

The sheep like soldiers
black leggings black face
lie boulders
in the pines’ shade
at the field’s sharp edge:
ambush and bivouac

A convocation of crows overhead
mucks
in their own mud and squawk

makes of the sky
a sty

A bee is deceived
takes the rot of a stump
for honeycomb

Two black snakes cross
in a flat spiral
the undisciplined path

Report: over all
the sun.

The fundamental difficulty presented in this poem involves the “stance toward reality” that Olson said in “Projective Verse” “brings such verse into being. . . .” This is a matter not only of acts of attention (as with Lawrence and Williams) which Olson is obviously practicing; it is a matter of composing things in a way that avoids the conventions and expectations of landscape poetry and painting. “Field notes” is an accurate title. This poem is not a “landscape” even though a place is named and an observer assumed, and it begins with a distant view taking in the field. The arrangement of verses does not compose a landscape, though, interestingly, the movement of the eye is not unlike that in a poem by Thomson or a painting by Claude. But Olson, who avoids syntax in the juxtaposition of verses, cannot organize it as Thomson did his Claudian views. He cannot organize it at all, unless we consider it collage, a composition, in this instance, following only the serial order of the poet’s random acts of attention, desperately closed by a terminal period and the hopefully conclusive enclosing awareness of the “over all” sun.

Olson sees things, not landscape, because he has relinquished the “idea of landscape,” the *a priori* conception of how to compose one, the desire to manipulate the world. This is notable. The sheep he sees might have evoked a familiar romantic landscape but now call up a legacy to be refused. The simile of “sheep like soldiers” and the impression of “ambush and bivouac” are owing to his recollection of the “dark sheep in the drill field” in the first *Pisan Canto*. Pound, much in his mind at this time, mediates his seeing. And with the simile, such things as the

supposition that the bee is “deceived” and the path “undisciplined” call attention to Olson’s act of seeing and not, as the suppression of the “I” throughout the poem intends, to the primacy of things seen. Olson is troubled because in putting aside the idea of landscape he has not yet put aside the “I.” He remains as much outside the field as a romantic painter and is perhaps more aware of estrangement because he refuses to employ the romantic resources of consciousness to overcome it.

His problem is not to compose but enter the field, to do this by merging the “I” in the “eye,” where the eye, as Creeley says of Zukofsky, is “a locus of experience, not a presupposition of expected value.” His problem is not to dominate nature but to participate in it, to become, as Francis Ponge says so well, “not just the site where ideas and feelings are produced, but also the crossroads where they divide and mingle. . . .” Perhaps the closing verse (“Report: over all/the sun”) accomplishes this. With sudden release the attention leaps from sheep, crows, bee, snakes to totality, as if Olson recognized that these things are all *in* a field. The sudden “Report” destroys the several perspectives of the previous acts of attention. The sun, over all, establishes the poet at the center of a hemisphere, in a field, arched by the sky.

Even so, “landscape” has not yielded to place. The field at Enniscorthy is too empty. It lacks the fullness of place. It is space. Olson has not inhabited it. He gives us very little sense of what it is like to be there. He has yet to introduce us, in John Clare’s words for a place lived in, to “a landscape heard and felt and seen.”

Olson continues to use the word *landscape* because, as he goes on, he associates it less with the tradition of landscape painting and more with the areal tradition of chorography and geography. One of his early teachers was Carl Sauer, the eminent geographer—in “The Area, and the Discipline of, Totality,” a valuable unpublished essay on his essential themes, he speaks of Sauer as his master. It is true that Olson pays tribute to Fitz Hugh Lane. He does this in the last volumes of *The Maximus Poems*, where Lane’s practice supports his own. Olson appreciates most “Lane’s eye-view of Gloucester”; this is equivalent to a “Phoenician eye-view,” that is, to the active seeing associated with *periplus*. Lane is remarkable among American landscapists because he does not devote himself to wilderness views. He devotes himself to Gloucester and with

exact detail renders the life of the place, gives us its geography and weather and, especially, its remarkable light. Olson puts Lane in the *areal* tradition that he connects with discovery, with the first/fresh viewing of such American contemporaries of Lane as John Stephens, William Prescott, Francis Parkman, and Noah Webster; a tradition he also associates with the conspicuous practice—the practice of close attention—of the pragmatists. This is to say that he places Lane in a tradition where act precedes idea, where experience is primary and one considers organism-in-environment.

From Sauer, Olson learned that landscape is an area, a physical, geographical region, to be understood only when one “‘has learned to see it as an organic unit, to comprehend land and life in terms of each other.’” The concluding phrase contains the title of Sauer’s collected writings, *Land and Life*, and gives us the gist of cultural geography: land, itself a living thing, is a place of—and for—life; life is an activity of—and in—place. Now Sauer, with Olson, means human life, the life, as we are fearfully learning, that so radically modifies the natural landscape. With Sauer, as with Olson, we do not find ourselves in pristine wilderness but in a cultural landscape. Geography gives us the facts of place, history gives us the facts of time; bringing these facts together, cultural geography gives us time in space, an account of what happened there and transformed it, human history of the most significant kind. The immediate point of these considerations is that “in this view,” as Sauer says, “there is no place for a dualism of landscape. . . . In the sense used here, landscape is not simply an actual scene viewed by an observer.”

The areal definition of landscape resets man in the field and gives him practical field work to do. By means of the human sciences—Olson called them the sciences of man, among them those particularly his, historiography, archeology, mythology—he recovers the life, the sense of place. Olson’s initial “dramatic reconnaissances” in Gloucester follow Sauer’s practice. He looks for evidence of time in space, and this is first of all a matter of walking. Walking, as in Thoreau’s excursions and Williams’ *Paterson*, is the mode of *The Maximus Poems*, a mode of attention and meditation. And Olson is a walker, coming, as he says, from “the last walking period of man”—a phrase in one of the last poems that tells the pleasure he now finds in the “still handsome & efficacious environment”:

And so I walked
thinking as I did so, I come
 from the last walking period
 of man, homeward,
happy and renewed, in that sense, by the
 sight of the
original cave of the City populated
megolithically, & pure Brythonic

This sense of place comes, of course, from all the previous walking, those daily walks that make his poem a “walker,” all those excursions in which Olson practices “genetic human geography.” In his field work Olson also follows Herodotus—he personally looks for evidence of what was said—Herodotus, endorsed by Sauer in a footnote citing Alexander von Humboldt’s appreciation of the ancient historians who attractively intermingled physical geography and history. Now in doing this work, Olson finds, as Sauer promised, that “it is real discovery . . . to take old documents into the field and relocate forgotten places”; he even realizes the “high moment,” when, as Sauer says, “the picture begins to fit together” and “the past is clear, and the contrasts with the present are understood.”

We know, in volume one of *The Maximus Poems*, how dismaying Olson’s realization is. Not only was the newness of America dirtied from the start but the spirit of enterprise was such that “Venus/does not arise from/these waters. . . .” As Olson’s researches people America, give it a history, the landscape that matters to him empties. The present is “dreamless”; it is “worse,” he says in the most disconsolate verses, where, lamenting the lack of mythic understanding, he projects his future work. Finding “America” in history, Olson finds only “the lost America of love,” as we might say with Ginsberg, who identifies this theme with Whitman and so with much of American literature. And Olson feels this loss because he knows it in his own lack of psychic wholeness—and knows it in Gloucester, where the very landscape declares it.

A footnote in volume one explains this and the departure of his subsequent work. He speaks in the footnote of the Hopi language as “adjusted to the topological as a prime and libidinal character of a man, and

therefore of all of his proximities, metric is then mapping. . . .” Space and self, landscape and psyche correspond, as do mapping and metric, field work and poetry. Olson wants us to appreciate the fact that in *The Maximus Poems* he locates himself in the Hopi fashion—he is concerned with “Gloucester, and myself as here-a-bouts.” But the word that strikes us is *libidinal*. The topological, he says, is a libidinal character of a man: the topological is not separate from us; it is intimately ours, and so we cannot fail to respond to it, and, in the instance of the first *Maximus Poems*, as loveless. Our task is to fill the loveless space with love, not only by loving attention but by realizing in mythic awareness—and this means an awareness of the presence of myth—the still-active, living processes of earth; by realizing that these processes are themselves erotic, that Eros, Love, as Olson argues in his Hesiod poem, was there at the beginning, in the first acts of cosmological creation. When, at the end of *The Maximus Poems*, Olson gives us the gift of “an actual earth of value,” the actual earth has value not only because his love has valorized it but because it is love.

The fact that the topological is a libidinal character of a man allows Olson to complement Sauer with Jung. Myth, which he reads as earth history and archetypal experience, enables him to follow both masters, though there is the displacement he notes when he speaks of turning from Herodotus to Hesiod. He is looking now, in the later installments of his poem, for primordial beginnings, for the ground of *begründen*, the rich word, glossed by Kerényi in *Essays on a Science of Mythology*, that proposes Olson’s work: the grounding of the self that is the founding of a city, the achievement of “cosmos of being” (as Olson said of Whitman) and cosmopolis. Kerényi’s book, written in collaboration with Jung, was published in 1949, and we need read only these lines to assess its importance to Olson and to learn why Maximus, not Gloucester, identifies the poems: “To rebuild the world from that point *about* which and *from* which the ‘fundamentalist’ [*Begründer*] himself is organized. . . .”

Though there are particular landscapes or views in *The Maximus Poems*; it is the circumambient landscape of the complete work that accords with Olson’s notion of self-and-cosmos and provides the sense of place. Space is merely the extensive plane of history, the dimension of dispersion, where place, including this horizontal dimension, is round and

coherent. It is a sphere that turns on the vertical self and includes all the topologies, all the landscapes of being—underworld, earth, and heaven. And so to inhabit it, to map it, as Olson does in making his *mappemunde*, is, in Jung's terms, to experience wholeness and know the healing of individuation. We may read Olson's map as the record of a remarkable journey to individuation. And one of the notable things about it, as he said of the writing of John Smith, is that "the *geographic*, the sudden *land* of the place, is . . . there. . . ." Just as it is no longer a view, so Olson's landscape is not a psychic landscape, a symbolic projection of the Ego. He knows that the world is not completed when one takes it into oneself; to eat the apple of the entire world, as Emerson in a dream of consciousness dreamed of doing, is no longer the way. Olson's landscape is a real landscape—an areal landscape—in which the self has a place and finds itself at home. *The Maximus Poems* are the consummate landscape of this consummation.

To transcendentalize is to transubstantiate, as Olson said of the painting of Marsden Hartley. This is one of the reasons he didn't countenance Thoreau, the writer whose concern with place equals his and whose work in so many ways is comparable with his own. Walden and Gloucester are places, given to us in the way Dorn mentions, and so they are sacred to us—and sacred in Eliade's use of the word, places to be differentiated from profane space. Olson was not, I think, a sympathetic reader of Eliade chiefly because he wished to remain in history, and to use history, rather than look back to and repeat archaic ways. Though he recognizes the qualitative difference between the profane and the sacred, he doesn't see them in Eliade's antithetical fashion. This suggests another reason for his dismissing Thoreau.

In American thought the profane and the sacred have been variously translated into such oppositions as Europe *vs* America, Civilization *vs* Nature, City *vs* Wilderness. We know where Thoreau stands in respect to all of them, and some of us, following Thoreau, subscribe to an ethic that holds the wilderness—unsullied Nature—sacred. But not Olson, whose place is a city, who wished to ground the city in nature, who would not divorce but join the elements of Nature and Culture he first appreciated in *Gilgamesh*. Olson, so much more social than Thoreau, is a man of the polis, that "nest of solidarity," in Richard Schechner's fitting phrase. Maximus of Tyre not Thoreau of Walden (or even

Concord) is Olson's model. Of his public task—the initiation of another kind of nation—we may say that he has the distinction of giving us another kind of place, an urban place hitherto denied in our thought. And with this, he has the distinction of teaching us, in his poetics and his practice, how to relocate where we are, how to renew the spaces of our lives, to make them, as Apollonius made Tyana and he made Gloucester, “capable of verticality,” places, therefore, where we willingly stay put and dance sitting down.

For there we will celebrate “the joys of the rounded cosmos in which we live happily.” Being, Bachelard insists in the wonderful rounding off of his phenomenology of roundness—“being is round.” We know already the image that confirms this for him. It is the bird, whose being in its cosmic condition, he says, had been thought of by Michelet as “a centralization of life guarded on every side, enclosed in a live ball. . . .”

Olson's chii-mi, the gulls of Gloucester harbor departing the ridge-poles, the cormorant and the spindle of Shag Rock invite us to centralize in this way and so recover “the being of round life.” These tutelary birds—birds are muses in Olson's meditation on the vocational choice he had made—these birds led him to the dominion of song:

we speak with water
on our tongues when
Earth
has made us parts of the World again,
Poets, & the Airs which
belong to Birds have
led our lives to be these things instead of
Kings