

one of them posthumous, of his *Maximus* poems, which I'm not competent to discuss, not having read them. I cannot pretend to compare them with Pound's *Cantos* or Williams's *Paterson*, with which I'm pretty familiar; evidently *Maximus* owes a good deal to those two great works of the modern period, but whether it equals or rivals them remains at least a matter of debate. I have confined myself strictly to the theory of 'projective' or 'open form' verse. The genius of the poet needn't, after all, be vitiated by the weakness of his theory—as Coleridge was happy to remark in the case of Wordsworth: 'And I reflect with delight, how little a mere theory, though of his own workmanship, interferes with the processes of genuine imagination in a man of true poetic genius . . .'

Yet, as I've just said, the 'mere theory' of a poet can be slippery ground; perhaps safe enough for its author, but full of traps for his disciples.

### *Afterword*

Since this lecture was delivered, C. K. Stead has justly remarked to me that perhaps a poetic theory is worth discussing only if one cares for it, and reminded me that no such theory can ever be comprehensive enough. He also wondered if I had done justice to the question of the 'long poem'. I think I see how intimately this last is related to the whole debate about 'open form'. My difficulty was, how to stick closely to the terms of Olson's essay, so far as I follow them, without seeming to forget that the argument is about poetry, not terms. I cannot expect to have been entirely successful. Nor can I hope that others who have indisputably found a good deal of sense—and a positive poetic impetus—in aspects of the theory, will be much troubled by what troubles me most about it: that it does make extraordinarily comprehensive claims, and challenges criticism on grounds far exceeding the bounds (assuming such bounds can exist?) of a *poetic*. The *poetic* claims for 'Projective Verse' are not easily separated from the *philosophical* claims of, for instance, Olson's 'Human Universe' essay, and from the latter's questions like, '*Was ist der Weg?*' and the nature of 'the absolute'. One does not willingly concede that such a separation *ought* to be easy, or for that matter (ultimately) considered possible. Very likely, in 'buying' a poetic, one must be aware that something like a world-view is contained in the package; certainly in Olson's case it could hardly be spelt out more plainly. With such things on my mind—not to mention a few notions (prejudices, if one likes) about poetry itself—I was hardly likely to do justice to the best parts of the 'Projective Verse' manifesto: these are, I believe, a few exceptional insights into the experience of writing poems, precious in