

regarded as an instrument, regarding *himself* as an instrument played upon by his poem, rather than as a conceiving and executing *agent*, making his poem. All this answers well enough, I suppose, to some part, but by no means the whole, of what poets have always experienced in the act of composing a poem. Some centuries ago Spenser might have covered it all by an invocation to the Muses—calling on ‘ye learned sisters’ to help him with his poem—and his readers would have understood. Are we really much wiser, if we substitute Olson’s Field, with its beguilingly pseudo-scientific package of terms out of the higher journalism of psychology, for the old classical conventions? Nobody had to *believe* in the heavenly Muses, but everybody knew what was meant; simply that half the poet’s art was his sense of a power, a source in his own being, beyond ideas, beyond any mere skills with language. What I am suggesting is, of course, that Olson’s Field is a truism disguised as a discovery. I think Coleridge’s remarks on this kind of thing fit the case rather well:

There are not, indeed, examples wanting in the history of literature, of apparent paradoxes that have summoned the public wonder as new and startling truths, but which, on examination, have shrunk into tame and harmless truisms; as the eyes of a cat, seen in the dark, have been mistaken for flames of fire.²

Like ‘projective’ itself, this word ‘Field’ finds its place in a vocabulary of mystification. (In passing, we may note the affinity of ‘Projective’ with some usages of psychiatry, from which it borrows a bit of its magic.) ‘Field’ has an intriguing variety of connotations, more than enough to account for its cultish popularity. It connotes natural, spontaneous growth (‘field mushrooms’, uncultivated); magnetic attraction; ‘field of vision’; ‘field-work’, *viz.* fact-finding, with a happy suggestion of scientific rectitude; ‘open country’; ‘in the field’, *viz.* ‘out where the real fighting is’; ‘my field’, my specialty; any number of ‘happy fields’, sporting or Elysian. It is indeed a highly suggestive term, but I don’t imagine it is more than just that. I confess that Olson’s use of it adds nothing to the little I have learned from the experience—the strange experience that it always is—of composing poems. It shrinks into a truism, or swells into a solipsism. It may for all I know have helped some poets to write more poems, longer poems, or even better ones; but I am sure they are mistaken if they make a verbal talisman of it, or some kind of hierophantic password into the house of poetry.

Once the aspiring ‘projective’ poet has mastered, or thinks he has mastered, the mystery of the FIELD, he can then try to grasp what Olson calls the *principle*—the *law* which ‘presides conspicuously over such composition, and, when *obeyed*, is the reason why a