

Incidentally, it is ironic, and Olson himself concedes the point, that we should attach the typewriter to poetry, like a prosthetic limb or gland, when we have rejected the 'closed' conventions of the printing press. Does this perhaps leave us, not with an 'open form', but with a multiplicity of 'closed' forms; every new poem, in fact, *self-enclosed*, more tightly straitjacketed than by any of the discarded conventions? Is this perhaps what many of us want? Is it one more aspect of the kind of paradox which Camus found in Husserl: 'a whole proliferation of phenomena, the wealth of which has about it something inhuman'?

The poetics of 'projective verse' may have reached this part of the world a little late though, as I've mentioned, they have had their followers in New Zealand since the sixties. Of course, there's no good reason, in history or nature, why a movement in art can't be fruitful, whatever the date or the place. So much that happens is sheer accident. It seems to me that Olson's theory, with all its oddities and self-contradictions, with all its appeal to the semi-educated and the half-gifted, owes most of its influence to the historical coincidence, that it came right on time for the American 'Beat generation' of the fifties, and the generation which grew up in the sixties. As a *poetic*, it was neither new nor instructive. But it provided a doctrine, an ideology, a kit of terms, along with an evangelical enthusiasm, all highly seductive to a generation which was forming its ideas of prose from Kerouac and Burroughs and of poetry from Ginsberg and Snyder. It coincided also with the interpenetration of American writing and teaching in American colleges and universities; with the creative writing class and the study of contemporary literature.

I began by saying that *poetics*, the theory of the thing, is a secondary product; poets teach their art by example, not theory, and that young poets had better mind their step on the slippery ground of another poet's theory. The poet as *guru* is least of all to be trusted.

How far, or how directly, Olson and his teaching have influenced, or continue to influence, the shape of poetry in this country; this is a matter for speculation. His vocabulary and a few of his ideas do seem to have been adopted by a number of poets like Loney and Michael Harlow and Alistair Paterson; and Ian Wedde, gifted and original writer as he is, has been known to borrow an Olson mannerism, like addressing the reader as 'citizen'. I think there's enough evidence to justify the trouble I have taken to put a few thoughts together on the subject; if only to clear my own mind and test my prejudices.

The reputation of Charles Olson, himself, as a poet is another question altogether. I suppose it rests mainly on the six volumes,