THE POETICS OF POSTMODERNISM: ROBERT CREELEY AND OPEN-VERSE

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes to examine the relationship between poetic technique and aesthetic principles in the poetry of Robert Creeley. In addition, Creeley's later poetry, more specifically, Pieces, A Day Book, Away, Hello, and Later, will be analysed in terms of his thematic concern, which is the integration of subjectivity and objectivity in a unified vision. In this respect, Creeley's theory of composition will be evaluated in terms of the open-form poetics that he derived from Ezra Pound, the Imagists, the Objectivists, William Carlos Williams, and Charles Olson. These influences will be examined in order to assess possible similarities and differences between modernist and postmodernist poetic theories. The contention of this thesis is that Robert Creeley, as both theorist and practitioner, expresses most clearly in both his poetics and later verse the open-form aesthetics of postmodernism.

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LA THÉORIE POÉTIQUE DU POSTMODERNISME: ROBERT CREELEY ET LA VERSIFICATION LIBRE

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RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse se propose d'étudier le lien entre la technique poétique et les principes esthétiques de la poésie de Robert Creeley. De plus, certaines des dernières poétiques de Creeley, plus précisément, Pieces, A Day Book, Away, Hello, et Later seront analysées en fonction de la préoccupation thématique de l'auteur, qui réunit objectivité et subjectivité. À cette égard, la théorie de composition de Creeley sera analysée en fonction de l'art de la versification libre. Il a créé sa théorie en s'inspirant d'Ezra Pound, des imagistes, des objectivistes, de William Carlos Williams et de Charles Olson. Ces influences seront étudiées afin d'établir les ressemblances possibles entre les théories de la poésie moderne et postmoderné. Cette thèse soutient que Robert Creeley, en tant que théoricien et poète, exprime clairement, au moyen de sa théorie et de ses dernières oeuvres, l'esthétique de la versification libre du postmodernisme.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study is the result of my interest in postmodern poetics; more specifically, it came to be written as a response to the concerns of Robert Creeley as they were manifested to me through the reading of his various collections of poetry as well as his statements on poetics. I hold Creeley's aesthetics and theory of composition to be a significant consolidation of the evolution of twentieth century verse from the poetry of the early modernists (the Imagists and the Objectivists) to that of the later proponents of projective and open-verse, most commonly known as postmodernism. This thesis is the first such study to establish both an historical link to literary movements and to demonstrate Robert Creeley's thematic concern throughout the body of his poetry to arrive at a "stance" that unifies form and content in poetry.

It is not my purpose in this thesis to deal in exhaustive detail with the history of the modernist movement; such studies have already been written. Rather, it is my intent to highlight certain significant aspects of various literary movements and influences—Imagism, Objectivism, William Carlos Williams, Charles Olson—and demonstrate their influences upon and connection to Creeley's own work. Even though I will deal with a large body of Creeley's poetry, I have chosen to concern myself with the poems in each collection that represent his thematic concerns with the objectives outlined in this thesis. Consequently, it is not my intention to justify the inclusion of every single poem within a

specific collection, but rather to illustrate Creeley's poetics in action through a reading of those poems that clearly embody his concerns.

Since the concern of this thesis is with the question of subjectivity and objectivity in poetry, I have been obliged to use certain terms interchangeably. What is referred to as the subjective may also be defined as the personal and emotional point-of-view that the poet brings to his work (his "Self"). Alternately, the objective refers to the world of objects outside of this "Self". Therefore, terms like the "Self" and the "world" will be used to demonstrate the disparity between these seemingly different means of perception. However, the purpose of this thesis is also to demonstrate the way in which Creeley integrates these different points-of-view into a unified perception.

I have borrowed two expressions that occur throughout this thesis that may serve to clarify the sometimes abstract terms that one must necessarily utilize in a study of this type. These expressions—"essents" and "Dasein"— occur in the philosophical writings of Martin Heidegger in his An Introduction to Metaphysics.[1] The word "essents" is an expression that was coined by Heidegger's translator, Ralph Mannheim, and is translated by him as "existents" or "things that are."[2] This term will then be used interchangeably with what I refer to as the objects of the world, or alternately the "world" as differentiated from the "Self". The other expression, "Dasein," is defined by

Manheim as "being-there,"[3] which is a poetic embellishment of the more literal translation, "existence".

The use of the term "Dasein" is especially appropriate to the study of Creeley's poetry and poetics because of Creeley's insistence on the equal presence of his "Self" with the objective world and the consequent drive on his part to discover this unity in his verse. Manheim's translation of "Dasein" as "being-there" is most appropriate since Creeley's poetry depicts the process of arriving at such a stance. Thus "Dasein," as it is used in this thesis, relates in a fundamental way to the moment of encounter between the poet's "Self" and the "essents" or objects of the world that results in illumination, or what Creeley refers to as "revelation and discovery."[4]

The use of such terms, however, does not confine Creeley to a "school" of philosophy, nor does this suggest that the readings of Creeley's poems will be conducted from a phenomenological bias. While such a study might be appropriate in the case of a poet like Wallace Stevens, it is not my intention to relate Creeley in any way to a mode of thinking or to suggest a reading of his poems confined to certain metaphysical precepts. Heidegger's writings are relevant only insofar as they approach phenomena in a fashion similar to Creeley and his modernist predecessors.

Finally, the use of these two terms derived from Heidegger is especially relevant when we consider the point of departure for Heidegger's phenomenological ontology, which was the return

to the things (or "essents") themselves. This served as the major concern of the early Imagists and is equally apparent in the poetics of Williams, Olson, and the projectivists. In a recent interview, Creeley discussed this general connection to Heidegger's metaphysics and to the broader ideas of Heraclitus, Herodotus, Olson, Keats, Lawrence, and others.[5] The eclectic range of Creeley's interests is reflected in this interview and in others as well as in the body of his writings; hence, it is important to note that his relation to Heidegger is, at best, superficial, and that to confine Creeley's poetics to a system of thought is to ignore the variety of influences that has bearing on his art.

I am indebted to those critics and scholars whose studies of Robert Creeley's poetry and poetics have made my work possible; my indebtedness to them will be duly noted in the body of the text. I am deeply grateful for the advice and encouragement I have received from my advisor, Professor Ronald Reichertz, whose insight, criticism, and friendship made my work possible. Professors William Wees and Peter Ohlin of McGill University both offered encouragement and advice throughout my research, and I thank them for their understanding and humanity. I would also like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Steve Luxton and Keith Henderson of Vanier College whose stimulating discussions helped consolidate many of my own ideas on modern poetry.

During my research I have received important financial assistance in the form of research grants from the Friends of

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NOTES TO PREFACE

[1] Martin Heidegger, An Introduction to Metaphysics, translated by Ralph Manheim (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1959).

[2] Ibid., p. 1.

[3] Ibid., p. ix.

[4] These terms will be defined within the context of my argument in the chapters that follow.

[5] William V. Spanos, "Talking with Robert Creeley" in Boundary 2, Volume VI, No. 3; VII, No. 1 (Spring/Fall, 1978).

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis proposes to examine the relationship between poetic technique and aesthetic principles in the poetry of Robert Creeley. In this respect, Creeley's theory of composition will be evaluated in terms of the open-form poetics that he derived from Ezra Pound, the Objectivists, William Carlos Williams, and Charles Olson. These influences will be examined in order to assess the similarities and differences between modernist and postmodernist poetic theories. In addition, Creeley's poetry will be analysed in terms of his thematic concern, which is the integration of the subjective and objective stances as they merge into a unified vision. Since the contention of this thesis is that Creeley's poetics is essentially concerned with this question, only poems that illustrate this particular vision will be the objects of this study.

A useful distinction between modernism and postmodernism is made by the critic, Robert Kern, who wrote:

> In its most typical formulation, for example, modernist poetics stresses the way in which the poem is a closed, self-sufficient object whose unity depends on the formal relationships of its parts. . .

while postmodern writing:

> . . . seeks a greater openness for the poem, an openness to the world and to experience which culminates in the ideal of the text not as a utopian structure immune to the contradictions of immediate experience but as continuous with, or an extension of such experience, the here and now of ordinary reality.[1]

Thus defined, modernism would seem more concerned with the formulation of an aesthetic concerning the components of a poem (the form), or what may be termed the technical criterion. This concern with technical criterion was evident in the "Principles of Imagism," as well as in the writings of T. E. Hulme. Also, Ezra Pound, in his early writings, equated the technical specification of poetry with objectivity which became known as the Imagist "movement" and, consequently, the first example of actual modernist poetry.

During this Imagist period, the modernist poem came to operate on the principles that poetry should present rather than comment upon its subject matter. This position will be referred to as the objective stance within the context of the first chapter of this thesis. Ezra Pound opposed this objectivity to a subjectivity that worked through the process of internalization and consequent distortion whereby the mind acted upon instead of coexisted with the subject matter of the poem.[1]

On the other hand, postmodern aesthetics, especially the open-form poetics advocated by Olson and Creeley, stressed the importance of the psychic state of the poet figuring in direct relation to his technique. Creeley termed this particular relationship as the form (the technique or the objective approach to the ordering of data) never being more than an extension of content (the psychic criterion or subjective inclusion). The contention of this thesis is that Robert Creeley, as both theorist and practitioner, expresses most clearly in both his later verse

(Pieces, A Day Book, Away, Hello, Later) and poetics the open-form aesthetics of postmodernism.

In addition, Creeley seeks to integrate the relationship of the "subjective" and the "objective," or the "Self" and the "world". He defines objectivity as "confronting divers phenomena in their own particulars, rather than as extensions of one's own senses,"[2] its use being "the wish to transmit, free of imprecise 'feeling' the nature of 'that' which has moved one to write in the first place. As such, this wish intends as complete a break as possible with the subjective."[3] However, Creeley understands the subjective in a more basic sense as "'belonging to, or of, or due to, the consciousness. . ." and goes on to maintain that it is "impossible to write anything, lacking this relation of its content to oneself."[4] Understanding the subjective in this basic sense, Creeley maintains that "a man and his objects must both be presences in this field of force we call a poem,"[5] implying the need to unite the subjective with the objective in poetics.

This idea was certainly an attempt by Creeley to go beyond the limits of early Imagism which dealt with simple mood or impression, or the modernist standpoint of T.S. Eliot's belief in an "objective correlative" as the possible formula for a particular emotion. Creeley's desire to fully integrate the subjective with the objective in his poetics and poetry is an attempt to incorporate these two points of view into a new vision of not only the role of the poet in relation to his craft, but a new definition of Humanism that is derived from Olson's essays,

"Human Universe" and The Special View of History.

Structurally, this thesis will begin by examining the origins of postmodern poetic theory in Imagism and Objectivism. Chapter I will assess the early debate on subjectivity and objectivity in verse, most particularly through the writings of T. E. Hulme and Ezra Pound which established a set of criteria for poetry that came to be known as Imagism. In this respect, the two aspects of Imagism—the technical and psychic criteria (represented by Hulme and Pound respectively)— will be examined. The early poetics of Pound and the Objectivists, while restricted by an overemphasis on form, did open poetry to new possibilities. These possibilities provided a beginning (especially evident in the poetics of the Objectivists) to a whole new mode of address that was to become an important part of Creeley's aesthetics. Chapter I will conclude by demonstrating this specific link.

Chapter II will discuss W. C. Williams' influence upon postmodern poetics. The first part of this chapter will establish the influence of Pound and Imagism on his early work. Williams' own discussions of Imagism and Objectivism in The Autobiography, as well as his major statements on poetics (Spring and All, "Introduction to The Wedge," "The Basis of Faith in Art," and "Prologue to Kora in Hell") will be evaluated in order to establish his position as the first actual spokesman for an open-form poetics. Williams was also the first poet who elaborated on the synthesis of technique and psychic criteria (form

and content) in his statement on measure where he defined poetic language as an expression of the poet's emotions. His poetics provided a concrete link to the projective poetics of Olson and Creeley.

Chapter III will deal primarily with the Creeley-Olson correspondence in order to demonstrate a similarity in the development of their ideas. Olson's beliefs also reflect Williams' attempt to synthesize form and content; however, his greatest contribution to postmodern aesthetics is more in the philosophical stance he advocated in essays like "Projective Verse," "Human Universe," and The Special View of History than in the body of his actual poetry. It was Creeley who was able to practice Olson's open-form poetics by providing clear demonstration of this theory actually applied to the form of his later poetry.

Chapter IV will deal mainly with Pieces as the actual example of the balance between subjective and objective perceptions maintained within the poem. In this work, Creeley's idea of language as "revelation and discovery" (where words serve as both literal, objective referents as well as emotional registers of the poet's "psychic" life) is represented through the development of the continuous poem and serial writing which seek to include all the possibilities of the poet's life experiences. Chapter V, the final chapter, will deal with Creeley's work after Pieces (A Day Book, Hello, Away, and Later) and will further illustrate Creeley's technical as well as thematic concerns as they pertain to an open-form poetics.

The methodology involved in this thesis will be two-fold. First, since an evolution of poetic theory is being researched, an historical progression will be established. This will be demonstrated by the chronological development of postmodern poetics from Imagism, Objectivism, Williams, and Olson. Secondly, the methodology will involve an analysis of the data highlighting the similarities and differences to Creeley's own ideas. Finally, a theory will be offered illustrating Creeley's open-verse poetics as the synthesis of the various ideas put forward by his modernist predecessors. Consequently, the definition of open-verse that I will offer at the conclusion of this thesis will be one that has evolved from the origins of the modernist movement.

[1] Robert Kern, "Composition as Recognition: Robert Creeley and Postmodern Poetics," Boundary 2, VI, VII (Spring/Fall, 1978), pp. 215-216.

[2] Robert Creeley, "A Note on the Objective," in A Quick Graph (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1970), p. 18.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 19.

[5] Ibid.

CHAPTER I

IMAGISM, OBJECTIVISM, AND THE MODERNIST MOVEMENT IN POETRY

Imagism and Objectivism, insofar as they advocated specifically recognizable techniques, were less valid as "movements" or schools of poetry than as particular theories of poetics practiced and advocated by some writers concerning the construction of a poem. A proper study of these terms should concern itself with the principles and practices of those poets who agreed, in theory, on a new sense of awareness regarding the utilization of language in poetry. This stance may be considered the proper beginning of modernism in poetry and, more relevant to this thesis, as the specific historical origins of open-verse and the postmodern poetics of Robert Creeley.

The group of poets (Hulme, Aldington, Flint, H.D., and Ezra Pound) included in the original Imagist group rebelled against much of the poetry of the nineteenth century and, in particular, against those post-Victorian poets who were founders of the Georgian Anthology and who, Pound felt, confined themselves to the surface of the poem—things like sound quality and a mannered form of presentation. Ezra Pound referred to that period of literature as "a rather blurry, messy sort of period" where poetry was "merely a vehicle. . .for transmitting thoughts poetic or otherwise."[1] This kind of poetry that had as its central position the transmitting of thoughts or abstractions was a counter to his notion of "pure art," which also

exemplified the aspirations of his fellow Imagists.

The first reference to an Imagist "movement" occurred in the "Notes on Contributors" of Poetry magazine in 1912. In the biographical notes on Richard Aldington the "Imagistes" were referred to as a group of "ardent Hellenists who are pursuing interesting experiments in vers libre; trying to attain in English certain subtleties of cadence of the kind which Mallarmé and his followers have studied in French."[2] The verses of these first "Imagistes" were characterized by a spare, economical lyric language and the use of concrete images. Ezra Pound, commenting for the first time in print on "Imagisme," talked about that method in an essay called "Status Rerum," printed in the January, 1913 issue of Poetry:

> . . .one of their (Imagiste) watchwords is Precision, and they are in opposition to the numerous and unassembled writers who busy themselves with dull and interminable effusions, and who seem to think that a man can write a good long poem before he learns to write a good short one, or even before he learns to produce a good single line.[3]

The so-called "Principles of Imagism" were published in the March, 1913 issue of Poetry as a short note by F. S. Flint in response to requested information about the movement. These principles, formulated primarily by Pound, were:

1.) Direct treatment of the "thing" whether subjective or objective.
2.) To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3.) As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.[4]

While points one and three were fairly ambiguous assertions,

point two may be seen, at least theoretically, as the cornerstone of modern poetics. This statement stressed spareness and precision in the use of poetic language. It became the technical criterion or methodology for the construction of a "modern" poem. "Direct treatment" also stressed the direct manner in which language could be used. Thus language was viewed as a device not to embellish, but to present afresh, skirting norms or labels, the subject of the poem or the experience of the poet.

Ezra Pound's essay, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," appeared as a companion piece to Flint's notes. In that essay Pound stated his famous "Doctrine of the Image," which attempted to provide a psychic criterion for the judgment of a poem:

> An Image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. . . It is the presentation of such a "complex" instantaneously which gives that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.[5]

These two aspects of early Imagism seemed to contrast the technical and psychic specifications of the Imagist poem. Hugh Kenner made this distinction:

> . . .we observe that Imagisme was named for the component of a poem, not the state of the poet, and that its three principles establish technical, not psychic criteria.[6]

While the psychic criteria, according to Kenner, are evident in Pound's "Doctrine of the Image":

> All the confusion about Imagism stems from the fact that its specifications for technical hygiene are one thing, and Pound's "Doctrine of the Image" is another. The former, which can be followed by

> any talented person, helps you to write what may be a trivial poem. The latter is not applicable to triviality.[7]

Kenner is suggesting that Pound, even during his brief involvement with Imagism, saw the necessity of going beyond the realm of simple mood or impression in order to demonstrate the "invisible action of the mind"[8] in the poem.

As L. S. Dembo suggested, the Imagist attempt to depict truth and beauty in the vividness of the world represented an aesthetic value of "picture making without comment." The dicta of Imagism reflected an aesthetic response to the world and the Image became a new vision in itself.

> The implication is that the image is not simply a vehicle for transcribing a sensation but represents part of the sensation itself—or, better, it is an idealized re-creation of a sensation, a 'new vision', which has come to be a thing-in-itself.[9]

A further statement by Pound lends support to Dembo's ideas: ". . .an image. . .is real because we know it directly,"[10] and "the point of Imagisme is that it does not use images as ornaments. The image is itself the speech. The image is the word beyond formulated language."[11] By this statement, Pound meant that the Image was the formulation of an idea that went beyond the mere descriptive qualities of language.

Pound's early ideas and statements on Imagism were partly derived from his association with T. E. Hulme, whose "Complete Poetical Works" (consisting of five poems in the Imagist manner) were published as a sort of companion piece to Pound's own early work. Hulme's prescription for a poetry based on

"accurate, precise and definite description" was expressed in his essay "Romanticism and Classicism."[12] In this essay Hulme attacked the sentimentality of the Romantic disposition, which he viewed as too personal and individual, opposing it to the objective attitude of Classicism. Hulme felt that it was the goal of the poet to keep the reader aware of the reality (physicality) of what he was describing, as opposed to the presentation of abstract ideas. Also, in order to stay away from abstraction, Hulme believed that emotions had to be anchored in this physical reality; thus, concrete images should be used to depict an emotional state.

Hulme viewed the use of images in verse as the essence of an intuitive language. Intuition, according to Hulme, promoted synthesis as opposed to the intellect, which only promoted analysis. He had learned this distinction from Henri Bergson, who defined intuition as:

> . . .the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible.[13]

Intellection, or the process of analysis, ". . .is to express a thing as a function of something other than itself. . .All analysis is thus a translation, a development into symbols."[14] Or, as Pound wrote some years later, an entry into the "region of remoter and progressively remoter abstraction."[15] Bergson also suggested an empirical approach that established a pyschic criterion that both Hulme and Pound were to echo in their theories of poetic language:

> . . .a true empiricism is that which proposes to get as near to the original itself as possible... and is obliged for each new object that it studies to make an absolutely fresh effort.[16]

"Fresh effort" may be another way to describe both Hulme's and Pound's efforts to present the poetic experience in its immediacy.

Images in verse, according to Hulme, "are not mere decorations, but the very essence of an intuitive language."[17] Hulme viewed poetry as a visually concrete language, its goal being "to arrest you, and to make you continually see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process."[18] This prescription for technical hygiene in the use of poetic language, together with Hulme's own effort to provide samples of what he considered to be experiments in the use of images in his five poems, provided a formula for a new type of poetry that was direct and vivid. Hulme also believed that the poet was compelled to create new metaphors in order to lend a new vitality to language and to restore direct contact between language and experience. For this purpose, plain speech was inaccurate. "It is only by new metaphors," Hulme stated, "that is, by fancy, that it can be made precise."[19]

Hulme's emphasis on precision in poetic language in his theory as well as in his poetry announced, primarily, a change in poetic technique that was evident in the Imagist works of Pound, as well as some of the other Imagists. As one critic pointed out:

> The most remarkable aspect of the new technique

> is the disappearance of the poetic 'I'. The poet no longer speaks out in his own voice and person but seeks for an analogy or a number of analogies which, separately or working together, will represent his own inner world of private emotions.[20]

So it was not really the subject matter or the poet's attitude to the subject that changed, but a new emphasis on poetic technique that resulted from Hulme's theory of the Image.

If we examine the totality of Pound's statements concerning the Image, it then becomes apparent that the function of the Image remains that indicated in its original definition as an "intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." It is also at this point that Hulme's influence upon Pound's poetics ceased. Hulme's emphasis on technical precision certainly appealed to Pound. However, Pound's major concern in poetry was much more than the representational or impressionistic qualities that followed from the technical specifications of the principles of Imagism.

Pound felt that there were two types of images that occurred in poetry, the "subjective" and the "objective":

> The Image can be of two sorts. It can arise within the mind. It is then 'subjective'. External causes play upon the mind, perhaps; if so, they are drawn into the mind, fused, transmitted, and emerge in an Image unlike themselves. Secondly, the Image can be objective. Emotion seizing upon some external scene or action carries it intact to the mind; and that vortex purges it of all save the essential and dominant or dramatic qualities, and it emerges like the external original.[21]

It is important to note that, according to Pound's scheme, the function of even the "objective" image was not one of representation because the action occurred in the "vortex" of the mind

so that the action was really between the perceiver (the mind) and the perceived (the object). Such a view redefined the specifications of a strictly objective method of presentation of early Imagism.

Hygiene in language and objectivity in the mode of presentation became the technical criteria of the new poetry. Economy of thought and concreteness in the language of presentation were the results of these early experiments with new form. However, the poet also worked at realism, his goal being to reproduce faithfully the details of the world that he observed. To do this, the poet dealt with "sincere" and significant emotions, which became the psychic criterion of Pound and the poets who followed his ideas.

Unlike Hulme, who felt that plain speech was "essentially inaccurate," Pound, in an early letter to Harriet Monroe, asserted quite the opposite:

> Poetry must be as well written as prose. Its language must be a fine language, departing in no way from speech save by a heightened intensity (i.e. simplicity). . .Objectivity and again objectivity, and expression. . .no Tennysonianness of speech; nothing—nothing that you couldn't, in the stress of some emotion actually say. Every literaryism, every book word, fritters away a scrap of this sense of your sincerity. When one really feels and thinks one stammers with simple speech. . . .Language is made out of concrete things. General expressions in non-concrete terms are a laziness; they are talk, not art, not creation. They are the reaction of things on the writer, not a creative act by the writer.[22]

This statement on objective necessity in the language of poetry, rather than opposing it to subjectivity, sought for an integration

of the two. The "creative act by the writer," according to Pound, would be the poem that resulted from the perfect interaction of the perceiver and the perceived—when the inner and the outer fused. This had happened, Pound wrote, during the composition of his Metro poem, which he felt was an attempt at ". . .trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective."[23]

The Image, as a direct result of this "creative act" became, according to Pound, a sincere rendering based on concrete, physical reality or raw, felt emotion. The Image was not an idea, rather ". . .a radiant mode or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing."[24] Thus Imagism, as defined by Pound, was more than just a stylistic movement or a critical response to the sentimentality of nineteenth century poetry. It advocated, in its best manifestation in the writings of Pound, both technical and psychic criteria.

Because of this necessity to assert a correspondence between the perceiver and the perceived, the poet relied on metaphor. Metaphor was needed to bring together two different concepts and to assert a similarity or relationship between the two. Pound had learned from Ernest Fenollosa's essay, The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry, that metaphor was the use of "material images to suggest immaterial relations."[25] Pound had acquired Fenollosa's essay in 1913 and its influence

upon his poetry and poetics was paramount. At the core of this essay are statements on subjectivity and objectivity in verse that influenced much of modern poetics.

Fenollosa argued for concreteness, sincerity, and objectivity in the mode of presentation in poetry. Objectivity and sincerity, according to Fenollosa, could only be properly expressed if the poet did not rely upon a purely subjective vision that isolated the reader from testing the "truth of a sentence". The poet's use of metaphor, "the revealer of nature. . .the very substance of poetry," was to assert objective relations:

> . . .metaphors do not spring from arbitrary subjective processes. They are possible only because they follow objective lines of relations in nature herself.[26]

Fenollosa believed in the objective necessity in poetry, opposing this to subjective inclusions:

> The moment we used the copula, the moment we express subjective inclusions, poetry evaporates. The more concretely and vividly we express the interaction of things the better the poetry.[27]

By rejecting the "copula," Fenollosa was rejecting the excessive use of the verb "to be" as the mere sign of predication. Rather, he urged the use of verbs that expressed action and the interrelation between objects as opposed to the verb "be" that merely expressed a static state.

Objectivity and the use of metaphor in poetry also advanced economy of thought, creating a poetic thought that worked by suggestion "crowding maximum meaning into the single phrase pregnant, charged and luminous from within."[28] This spare, precise type of poetry, according to Fenollosa, was the highest

language, surpassing even prose "especially in that the poet selects for juxtaposition those words whose overtones blend into a delicate and lucid harmony."[29] This was essentially the same as the technique of creating a new image through the juxtaposition of two different ideas, such as Pound's Metro poem.

Pound understood Fenollosa's idea of an objective necessity on the part of the poet as his (the poet's) desire to:

> . . .see to it that the language does not petrify in his hands. He must prepare for new advances along the lines of true metaphor, or image, as diametrically opposed to untrue or ornamental metaphor.[30]

The emphasis on an objective methodology in both Fenollosa's and Pound's theories was a statement against abstraction. In his A B C of Reading Pound talked of an objective, scientific method that the poet should use to approach his subject matter. Similarly, Fenollosa praised the scientific mode of thought which

> consists in following closely as may be the actual and entangled lines of forces as they pulse through things. Thought deals with no bloodless concepts but watches things move under its microscope.[31]

The "Principles of Imagism," Pound's "Doctrine of the Image," and Fenollosa's views on objectivity exercised a great influence upon Louis Zukofsky, the editor of An "Objectivists" Anthology (1932) and co-founder, with George Oppen, of TO Publishing which reprinted some Pound, as well as W. C. Williams' first collection of poems. Zukofsky understood the notion of "direct treatment" to refer to the manner in which language was used to treat the object of the poet's perception. Zukofsky's statement that "poems are only acts upon particulars, outside

of them. . .only through such activity do they become particulars themselves—i.e. poems"[32] intimated that the poem synthesized into a complex of words acting together to provoke a new perception.

Zukofsky and his fellow "Objectivists" (Oppen, Reznikoff, and Rakosi, the other poets included in his Anthology), like Pound, also felt that words, when properly utilized, achieved a form that depicted the sincerity of the poet. Zukofsky stated at the end of his anthology that:

> In sincerity shapes appear concomitants of word combinations, precursors of (if there is a continuance) completed sound or structure, melody or form. Writing occurs which is the detail, not mirage of seeing, of thinking with the things as they exist, and of directing them along a line of melody.[33]

The Objectivists, like the Imagists, saw observing and recording as the essential beginnings involved in writing good poetry. Words, as "details of seeing," combined into sincere perceptions only when care was taken with each separate word. This care consisted of using words as referents to an authentic reality, as opposed to words as abstract concepts.

Zukofsky, in his essay "Sincerity and Objectification," referred indirectly to the care applied by the Imagists in their craft.[34] He felt that sincerity (as care for the single word) was a starting point for the poet writing in his time. In this essay Zukofsky cited Charles Reznikoff's one-line poem as an example of the care that was involved in the poet's craft:

APHRODITE URANIA

The ceaseless weaving of the uneven water.

Zukofsky felt that each word possessed a distinct energy as an image of water in action, and the title carried connotative and associative meaning in itself and in relation to the line. Thus care was taken to ensure an authentic presentation of reality as well as for the sound of the words or the aural quality of the line.

Zukofsky's own early poem, "Ferry," is an example of care for the single word and the minuteness and exactness of detail in the presentation of images:

FERRY

Gleams, a green lamp
In the fog:
Murmer, in almost
A Dialogue

Siren and signal
Siren to signal.

Parts the shore from the fog,
Rise there, tower on tower,
Signs of stray light
And of power.

Siren to signal.
Siren to signal.

Hour gongs and the green
Of the lamp.

Plash. Night. Plash. Sky.[35]

Poetry occurred, Zukofsky felt, when one started with care for the object that was presented, as well as care for the single word as the honest "detail of seeing." However, Zukofsky, like Pound, understood the limits of a purely pictorial method

of presentation, realizing that a strictly objective presentation did not ultimately satisfy or provoke thought. The poem became more complete when the reader could become aware of the poet's mind working toward the presentation of the object being described, when, as Zukofsky noted, one thought "with the things as they exist." Sincerity alone, he felt, was a starting point, but insufficient by itself to make a complete poem:

> Presented with sincerity, the mind even tends to supply, in further suggestions which do not attain rested totality, the totality not always found in sincerity and necessary only for perfect rest, complete appreciation. This rested totality may be called objectification—the apprehension satisfied completely as to the appearance of the art form as an object.[36]

Zukofsky's idea of "rested totality" implied that a complete poem passed beyond the mere presentation of impressions or moods. "Rested totality" implied a self-sufficiency of thought where the mind that created the poem provided a full equation between the object that was described, and the fullest implications of the poetic mind drawing conclusions from its perception of the object. This was, in a sense, a move away from the pure objectivity of the earliest Imagist poems and implied the necessity for a more subjective treatment of the poetic material, "subjective" in that the reader became aware of the poet's mind and personality working on his subject matter.

Zukofsky's idea of "rested totality" was similar to Pound's idea of the Image as a Vortex through which "ideas are constantly rushing." The poem that conveyed ideas, for Pound, was "lord over fact"—more than mere description and presentation. Pound

also believed in the necessary equation of the poetic mind with the subject matter of the poem:

> They (referring to the statements of analytic geometry) are the thrones and dominations that rule over form and recurrence. And in like manner are great works of art lords over fact, over race-long recurrent moods, and over tomorrow.[37]

The poem as a "rested totality" (Zukofsky) and as "lord over fact" (Pound) conveyed the idea of self-sufficiency of thought—what Zukofsky defined as "objectification." This self-sufficiency was conveyed when, in Kenner's words, "the 'plot' of the poem is that Mind's activity, fetching some new thing into the field of consciousness. . .the poem (is) not the transcript of one encounter but the Gestalt of many. . ."[38] Thus "objectification" was (by Zukofsky's own definition) achieved in a small poem like Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," where the equation is constructed between natural images and a mechanical world (the machine of the Metro), as well as the "faces" which are transformed into the possible vision of "crowds in Hades,"[39] etc. Pound's poem is both an "emotional and intellectual complex" because of the complex of allusions conveyed in the two lines. Because of this complexity, the reader is aware of the "mind's activity," the self-sufficiency of thought whereby the poem attains "perfect rest."

Zukofsky's idea of "objectification" added to Pound's prescription for not just technical but also psychic criteria in modern verse. This new criterion was the notion that the ideas in a poem developed as a direct consequence of the thing

or object that was being described in the poem. The beginning of this idea, as in Imagism, started from an interest in clear or vital particulars, arising from the phenomenological view that the senses are assaulted with objects which the mind must then order into useable patterns. The "rested totality" that was "objectification" was seen by Zukofsky as the arrangement of words into an apprehended unit: "the resolving of words and their ideation into structure."[40] Poems, seen by the Objectivists as these moving mental structures, thus resolved into ideas. "Rested totality" occurred when this order was achieved:

> . . . it may be said that each word possesses objectification to a powerful degree; but that the facts carried by one word are, in view of the preponderance of facts carried by combinations of words, not sufficiently explicit to warrant a realization of rested totality such as might be designated an art form.[41]

"Objectification" was achieved when the poem passed beyond being merely presentational or pictorial toward the presentation of ideas, which implied a fuller explication of the poet's own mind and personality manifested in his creation. The words in the poem could be presented in the way that notes occurred in music—exposing the harmony and order that was the notation of ideas and themes (Zukofsky thought of the words in a poem as the "notation of the particulars"):

> The order of all poetry is to approach a state of music wherein the ideas present themselves sensuously and intelligently and are not of predatory intention.[42]

As a result, ideas as abstractions would not insinuate themselves and thereby alter the poet's essential attention to the concrete

reality of his work. The ideas would result from the real, not prey upon it.

The Objectivists had learned from the Imagists the premise of sincerity: to have an authentic encounter with the thing being described in the poem. Their principles concurred in their emphasis on a sense of form achieved as the idea of "objectification". Zukofsky's, Reznikoff's, Oppen's and Rakosi's ideas on "objectification" were similarly expressed and stated.

George Oppen stated in an interview that he felt he was, as a poet:

> . . .beginning from imagism as a position of honesty. The first question at that time in poetry was simply the question of honesty, of sincerity. But I learned from Louis (Zukofsky) as against the romanticism or even the quaintness of the imagist position, the necessity for forming a poem properly, for achieving form. That's what 'objectivism' really means. There's been tremendous misunderstanding about that. People assume it means the psychologically objective in attitude. It actually means the objectification of the poem, the making an object of the poem.[43]

The "romanticism" Oppen referred to was the attitude of rebellion on the part of the Imagists toward the Victorian standards of poetry. More importantly, the second point Oppen expressed in his interview is one of the keys to the Objectivist notion of poetry:

> . . .the attempt to construct meaning, to construct a method of thought from the imagist technique of poetry—the imagist intensity of vision.[44]

This sincerity or "test of truth," Oppen felt, occurred when the writer believed his perception of truth was real in the moment of expressing it. This integrity of expression was realized in

the poem which became a construct of meaning from such a conviction. The implication of this statement is not that other writers did not so believe, rather that their beliefs did not get expressed in such proper constructs.

Carl Rakosi, in his own theory of poetics, pinpointed the digression from Imagism that occurred in the poems of the Objectivists:

> You might think for a moment that, after all objectivism is a form of imagism or naturalism. But imagism as I recall. . .was a reaction to the period immediately preceding, against literary affectations. So the imagists set out to do what the French impressionists in painting did: go out into the open and look, see what you see, and put it down without affectation of the then dominant literary influences. And that's as much as they did, but it wasn't complete. It was only the first step in the poetic process. That's why imagism is not altogether satisfying; the person of the poet is not sufficiently present.[45]

Rakosi suggested the essential difference between Imagism and Objectivism when he noted that the Imagists were actually more objective in their handling of their subject matter. He observed that the concept of the Image as being purely objectively presentational was insufficient, of itself, to sustain a total poetic form of expression. He noted the integrity that was involved in the construction of an Objectivist poem—the integrity of the "thing" that had been the cause of the poetic experience, and the integrity of the poet, the portrayer of the "thing," as the totality of the poetic experience. The Objectivist poem thereby sought to achieve a totality in the form of presentation of these two factors.

Rakosi, like the other Objectivists, was impressed by the

need for precision and exactness in verse, things that did not take anything away from the "thing" being described and the poet's integrity. He felt that the rhythm and form of the poem should be an expression of both the "thing" and the poet's emotion, yet the two should interrelate to produce a desired effect. Charles Reznikoff expressed a similar belief in the relation of these two factors:

> By the term 'objectivism' I suppose the writer may be meant who does not write directly about his feelings but about what he sees and hears; who is restricted almost to the testimony of a witness in a court of law; and who expresses his feeling indirectly by the selection of his subject-matter and, if he writes in verse, by its music.[46]

Reznikoff intimated in the previous passage that the poet was testifying to a feeling or sentiment he had gained from an unclouded or unbiased perception of the world. The poet realized that he coexisted with the fact of things in the world. The care for words, achieved when words could most attain the synthesis of the poet's emotion to the "thing" being described, made him an objectivist of his craft. As Zukofsky also noted:

> The objectivist, then, is one person not a group, and as I define him he is interested in living with things as they exist, and as a 'wordsman', he is a craftsman who puts words together into an object.[47]

The "object" that resulted from the presentation of this twofold integrity was, for Zukofsky and the others, the poem: a complete structure to be passed on as a unit of energy when the poet's emotion and the "thing" being described attained a self-sufficient synthesis. The Objectivist writers used direct

speech (speaking in "significant specifics") in their poems. They had the ability to reduce a large body of material down to the "significant specifics." In this manner, their poems carried an understated impact where the maximum of simplification resulted in a maximum of suggestiveness. As Milton Hindus pointed out about the poetry of Charles Reznikoff:

> It was Reznikoff's conviction that when objectification in art is completely successful, the comparisons, analogies, and interpretations which it suggests may be 'sometimes better than the writer himself intended and profounder.' He alluded to a Hindu saying that 'a work of art has many faces.'[48]

The poet, George Oppen felt, responded to his own experience of the world through an act of faith. He believed that the poet would write more about the nature of reality, rather than forcing his own comments on it. The poet's experience was of reality, made manifest through a faith in the physically apprehensible world; therefore, words became a "notation of (these) particulars" affirming reality. Oppen stated:

> . . .the little nouns are the ones I like most; the deer; the sun, and so on. You say these perfectly simple words and you're asserting that the sun is 93 million miles away, and that there is shade because of shadows, and more, who knows? It's a tremendous structure to have built out of a few small nouns. . .it's certainly an act of faith.[49]

The "little nouns" Oppen mentioned were referents to a concrete reality that he perceived as a verity. The poem therefore had to consist of words that did not misrepresent or misplace this reality.

Oppen attested in his poetry to the "life of the mind,"

which he saw as a lyrical reaction to the world. The system of thought in the poem, according to Oppen, became the poetic notation of structure through the poetic imagination, which was a lyrical reaction to the facts that, because they arose from a sense of awe concerning existence, provided a special imaginative order in the poem. In this way, the "little words" Oppen so valued in his poems attested to the validity of the reality that he, as the poet, was naming:

> The little words that I like so much, like 'tree', 'hill', and so on, are I suppose just as much a taxonomy as the most elaborate words; they're categories, classes, concepts, things we invent for ourselves. Nevertheless, there are certain ones without which we really are unable to exist, including the concept of humanity.[50]

That the "little words" were just as important as the more elaborate ones was an important point in the Objectivist concept of poetry. Oppen was asserting in the above passage a belief that the Objectivists shared in their poetics: that the poem should be concerned with the sensory experiences of the poet's life, as opposed to the creation of myths and abstractions. The images of a poem centered on the real, and value was apprehended from the mundane facts of things. Oppen also stated:

> I'm trying to describe how the test of images can be a test of whether one's thought is valid, whether one can establish in a series of images, of experiences. . .whether or not one will consider the concept of humanity to be valid, something that is, or else have to regard it as simply a word.[51]

There is a sharpness and immediacy to Oppen's poetry, like that of his fellow Objectivists. The words that are such basics of human experience become freer through their under-

stated tone. The words, because they are so carefully selected, serve as testament to the poet's attention to reality and the form of the completed poem; the "object" that is the product of the poetic imagination or process is testament, not to the words as components of myth, but to an idea about language as the human process of "notation of the particulars":

> Possible
> To use
> Words provided one treats them
> as enemies.
> Not enemies-Ghosts
> Which have run mad
> In the subways
> And of course the institutions
> And the banks. If one captures them
> One by one proceeding
>
> Carefully they will restore
> I hope to meaning
> And to sense.[52]

In the poem of the Objectivists, the poetic locus is shifted from the "I" to an "eye." When the "voice" of the poet becomes fused with the essence of the "object" of his poem, a unity is achieved. Louis Zukofsky asserted this in the sixth movement of his long poem, "A":

> The melody, the rest are accessory—
> —my one voice; my other——
> An objective-rays of ~~the~~ object brought
> to a focus
> An objective-nature as creator-desire for
> what is objectively perfect,
> Inextricably the direction of historic and
> contemporary particulars.[53]

Zukofsky intimated in the above lines that the poet, by focusing on the perfect existence of nature (the world), is, in the form of the poem, "perfecting (the) activity of existence, making

it—theologically, perhaps—like the Ineffable. . ."[54] In this manner, Zukofsky and the other Objectivists sought to reach out from language to a particular (humanist) vision of reality. Zukofsky's metaphor of the "rays of the object brought to a focus" relates directly to Pound's and Fenollosa's views on objectivity as the "following as closely as may be the actual and entangled lines of forces as they pulse through things."[55] Zukofsky's desire was to give voice, as accurately as possible, to the impressions that the poetic object had created within the poet's mind.

The Objectivists' ideas of thinking with the "thing" implied a process of discovery in the act of writing. Words that were strictly referential could thus be realized as new combinations in the finished poem. Starting from the premise that words are referents to "things," the poet, through his own active engagement, could direct them toward a process of discovery. Words took on different meaning when the poet ordered them along his line of thinking. The "totality of perfect rest" occurred when the poem became the precise evidence of the interaction between the describer (the poet) and the "thing" being described. The Objectivists' ideas of this process of interaction between the poet and his subject matter was an important transition from the pictorial method of presentation of early Imagism, and the subjective inclusion of the poet's emotions made possible the poetics and poetry of Robert Creeley, a natural heir to this post-Imagist group of poets.

For Creeley, writing is the process of being engaged with one's feelings about something and making a discovery in the process—what the Objectivists called "thinking with the 'thing'." In an interview Creeley stated: "In writing I'm telling something to myself, curiously, that I didn't have the knowing of previously."[56] Creeley, like the Objectivists, feels the necessity for keeping words free-floating, thereby maintaining a sense of randomness in his writing:

> There is a kind of aspect of the random in the process (writing) for me just that the intention can be in obvious ways a real and necessary human occasion. But again, when I'm trying to discover what words are saying, if I impose upon them an extraordinary intention, then I have only their congruence with my intention to serve as measure. I'm trying to use the words to discover what the nature of human expression and/or emotion and/or statement can thus be got at or revealed.[57]

Creeley also notes the difficulty involved in a purely objective or subjective method of presentation in poetry. In matters of poetry, objectivity, he feels, amounts to a wish to transmit, free of imprecise feeling, the nature of the "thing" which has moved one to write in the first place. This impulse is concerned with abstracting the experience as objective data. However, Creeley feels that it is impossible to write anything lacking the relation of the "thing" to oneself. His conclusion that "a man and his objects must both be presences in this field of force we call a poem"[58] echoes a belief similar to that voiced by the Objectivists in their notions of this two-fold integrity involved in the craft of poetry.

The interaction of subjectivity and objectivity in Creeley's

poetry implies the same sense of "sincerity" that was a dominant factor in Pound's poetic as well as in those of the Objectivists. When asked in an interview whether a poet could write on a subject he had no feeling about, Creeley replied:

> I don't see how. If one respects Pound's measure of 'only emotion endures' and 'nothing counts save the quality of the emotion', then having no feeling about something seems to prohibit the possibility of that kind of quality enduring.[59]

Similar to the Objectivists, Creeley understood "sincerity" within the context of poetry, like Zukofsky's notion of "care for the single word":

> In other words, sincerity as a quality is one thing . . . . But I'm going to take sincerity in my own references which again goes back to Pound, that ideogram that he notes: man standing by his word. That kind of sincerity has always been important to me and is another measure of my own commitment to what I'm doing.[60]

Using Pound's and the Objectivists' ideas on sincerity as the measure, Creeley notes the qualities involved in a good poem:

> I don't feel that what the poem says in a didactic or a semantic sense—although this fact may be very important indeed—I don't feel that this is what the poem is about primarily; I don't think this is its primary fact. I feel rather it is the complex of emotion evident by means of the poem, or by the response offered in terms of that emotion so experienced, that is the most signal characteristic that a poem possesses. So, I feel that the measure of poetry is that emotion which it offers, and that, further, the quality of the articulation of that emotion—how it is felt, the fineness of its articulation, then—is the further measure of its reality.[61]

Creeley implies in the above passage that the poem needs to survive in its own statement. The poem needs to exist through itself, through agency of its own activity; only then does it

have meaning. This notion is like Zukofsky's idea of "objectification" as the "totality of perfect rest," which implied a self-sufficiency of thought whereby the poem itself was the "object," newly arrived at by the poet.

Creeley's idea of the poem as an act of discovery presupposes that the poet, in dealing with his subject matter, approaches it not with a singleness of purpose that will bend the experience according to his personal whim, but rather that the poet will interact with his experience. Seeing that the purely subjective stance toward any experience will alter it, he tries to maintain a balance whereby his own purpose or intention will not negate the possibility of an objective stance where the precise detail of the experience can most exactly be manifested:

> Such strangeness of mind I know
> I cannot find there more
> than what I know.
>
> I am tired of purposes,
> intent that leads itself
> back to its own belief.[62]

In Creeley's poetry there is the constant struggle to express the difficulty of the subjective process being balanced with an objective stance. He sometimes attempts to resolve this problem by presenting facts and details of, say, a simple scene objectively:

> Listless,
> the heat rises—
> the whole beach
>
> vacant
> sluggish.
> The forms shift.

The effect he creates in the beginning of this poem is one where an eye slowly takes in a scene at the beach. Then he resumes the poem, including in its process a "mind" that fixes this scene within the context of meaning and references:

> before we know,
> before we thought
> to know it.
>
> The mind
> again, the manner
> of mind in the
>
> body, the
> weather, the waves
> the sun grows lower
>
> in the faded
> sky. Washed
> out—the afternoon
>
> of another day
> with other people
> looking out of other eyes.
>
> Only the
> children, the sea,
> the slight wind move
>
> with the
> same insistent
> particularity.[63]

It is always the "mind" that intrudes and controls the events of perception and experience, according to Creeley. The "mind" that defines things, fixes them within the stasis of meaning, prevents the flux of life from being experienced. This poem is a plea for the type of immediate reaction to events that the static mind seems incapable of. Only the "children" in the poem move with the same motion or flux as the "sea" and the "slight wind." And the almost-hidden "perceiver" (the "voice" of

the poem) moves from his "mind" to note the relation of the "children" and the natural elements of "sea" and "wind."

The literalness of Creeley's poetry promotes this almost objective notation of the "things" he writes about. His poetry evokes the sense of an attentive mind that interacts with the events of its perceptions, moving with them in an effort to test the validity of what it perceives. Thus the "voice" of his poems evokes a feeling or emotion without the romantic sense that would make the perception a purely subjective one. Describing the statues of an unknown artist in his poem, "The Figures," Creeley starts with simple description (the same sense of an objective "eye" Zukofsky spoke of) and moves toward speculations on the process of art and the interaction of the artist with his material:

> The stillness
> of the wood,
> the figures formed
>
> by hands so still
> they touched it
> to be one
>
> hand holding one
> hand, faces
> without eyes,
>
> bodies of wooden
> stone, so still
> they will not move
>
> from that quiet
> action ever
> again. Did the man
>
> who made them find
> a like quiet? In
> the act of making them

> I feel that what the poem says in a didactic or a semantic sense. . .is not what a poem is about primarily. . .I believe, rather, that it is that complex of emotion evident by means of the poem, or by the response offered in that emotion so experienced that is the most signal characteristic that a poem possesses. So, the measure of poetry is that emotion which it offers, and further, the quality of the articulation of that emotion—how it is felt, the fineness of its articulation.[69]

Since Creeley is concerned primarily with the expression of the quality or the "intensity of the emotion" in his poems, it would seem that a subjective stance would not be needed. However, Creeley draws the materials of his poetry strictly from his subjective experiences:

> I am given as a man to work with what is most intimate to me——those senses of relationship among people. I think, for myself at least, the world is most evident and most intense in those relationships. Therefore they are the materials of which my work is made.[70]

He is able sometimes, as in one of his finest poems, "The Moon," to objectively abstract his most intimate experience as an "intense emotion." In this poem Creeley, through straight description of mundane, everyday events, builds up to the intensity of his observations on aloneness in human relationships:

> Earlier in the evening the moon
> was clear to the east,
> over the snow of the yard
> and fields——a lovely
>
> bright clarity and perfect
> roundness, isolate
> riding as they say the
> black sky. Then we went
>
> about our businesses of the
> evening, eating supper, talking,
> watching television, then
> going to bed, making love,

"intent. . .leads to its own belief." There is less involvement with the subjective presentation of such a "mind" and more of an emphasis on simple emotion:

> Feeling, or perhaps best to call it emotion, is for me the most significant content of a poem. I don't always or even often care what the poem is talking about, but I do care very markedly about the senses and the intensity of the emotion thus engendered.[66]

Creeley's terms of measure for the possibility of a poem originated from Pound's two statements: "only emotion endures" and "nothing matters save the quality of affection." The sense of measure Creeley noted in the writings of both Pound and Williams was perceived by him to be the balance of form and content (the subjective and the objective/technical and psychic criteria). Creeley had stated in an interview that Williams and Pound were the centers for his own sources.[67] Pound was important because:

> . . .(he) brought us immediately to the context of how to write. It was impossible to avoid the insistence he put on precisely how the line goes, how the word is, in its context, what has been done, in the practice of verse—and what now seems possible to do. It was, then, a measure he taught —and a measure in just that sense William Carlos Williams insisted upon.[68]

Pound's method (the ideogrammic method he had learned from Fenollosa and his study of Chinese) was presentational, rather than analytic. Rather than talk about something in verse, Pound would present the literal instance side by side with the fact that gave it context. Therefore, as Creeley understood it, the poem became important through the quality of the emotion it presented:

it must have been
so still he heard the wood
and felt it with his hands

moving into
the forms
he has given to them,

one by singular
one, so quiet,
so still.[64]

In this poem, the subjective speculation begins only with the lines: "Did the man/ who made them find/ a like quiet?". This speculation is underlined by a more forceful statement: "It must have been/ so still he heard the wood/ and felt it with his hands/ moving into/ the forms/ he has given to them." This notion of the artist finding ideas in his material is similar to Williams' discussion of the artist and his material in "The Yellow Flower" where he thinks of the sculptures of Michelangelo: "And did he not make/ the marble bloom?".[65] Williams finds an affinity with another artist while realizing that his own ideas come from "things." Williams' use of the floral metaphor implies the nurturing of that intrinsic "something" within the raw material of his creation. Creeley writes of this also in "The Figures," but this poem is not a direct statement like Williams' "the power/ to free myself/ and speak of it," rather, it is an approximation of the emotions of the artist in relation to his material.

Since Creeley's poem is more subdued in tone, there is less of a subjective statement in it. Rather, he evokes a quiet, intense emotion that seeks to approximate the intense moment of creation that is "so quiet/ so still," unlike the "mind" whose

and then to sleep. But before
we did I asked her to look
out the window at the moon
now straight up, so that

she bent her head and looked
sharply up, to see it.
Through the night it must
have shone on, in that

fact of things—another
moon, another night—a
full moon in the winter's
space, a white loneliness.

I came awake to the blue
white light in the darkness,
and felt as if someone
were there, waiting, alone.[71]

Creeley achieves an intense observation in this poem by starting with an objective cataloguing of events and then moving to a moment of intense personal observation:

I came awake to the blue
white light in the darkness.
and felt as if someone
were there, waiting, alone.

This final observation is at once subdued and surprising. It is subdued because of the previous, seemingly mundane description of events. The fully personal statement in the last stanza surprises because it is a departure from the rest of the poem. However, the tone is maintained, as the final subjective inclusion is balanced by the objective descriptions preceding it.

This balance between a subjective and objective stance was first considered by the Imagists and Objectivists in their poetics. It originated from a desire to merge the technical and psychic criteria in the completed poem. For the Imagists, who may be considered the first "modernists," it became an attempt

at creating an organic whole where words had to be carefully selected to attain proper juxtaposition to form a new image, as in Pound's Metro poem. Creeley, however, and his fellow postmodernists took this one step further. They worked toward an open-form in poetry where the trivial accounts of mundane, daily things could be presented, simply because they existed—were there.

However, the attempt to merge the technical and psychic aspects in the poem was still of paramount importance to Creeley and the other postmodernists. Speaking of this relationship of the form (the technical) to the content (the psychic content), Creeley stated:

> I felt that the way a thing was said would intimately declare what was being said, and so therefore, form was never more than an extension of what it was saying. The what of what was being said. And the how (the mode) then became what I called 'form'.[72]

This notion evolved into Creeley's now-famous declaration printed in Charles Olson's "Projective Verse" essay—"Form is never more than an extension of content."

This balance of form and content became, for Creeley, that sense of measure he noted in the writings of Pound and Williams. William Carlos Williams was perhaps the greatest influence on Creeley's early poetry. Williams gave Creeley a "sense" of poetry—a stance that upheld the integrity of the poet as orderer of reality coexistent with the poem as a newly arrived-at object. As Williams saw it, it was not what the poet said that counted as a work of art, rather:

> . . .it's what he makes with such intensity of perception that it lives with an intrinsic movement of its own to verify its authenticity.[73]

The role of the poet, as orderer, was seen by Williams as a special moment:

> When a man makes a poem, makes it, mind you, he takes words as he finds them interrelated about him and composes them—without distortion which would mar their exact significance into an intense expression of his perceptions and ardors that they may constitute a revelation in the speech that he uses.[74]

As Creeley noted in reference to this passage: "All use is a personal act, and I have used this sense, of poetry, insofar as I have been capable."[75] The "sense of poetry" Creeley speaks of is the "measure" Williams sought to define in his poetics. What follows will be an attempt at interpreting Williams' poetics in relation to Imagism and Objectivism, as well as locating it as the other "source" for Creeley's own poetics. In addition, Williams will be evaluated as the definitive link between the "modernism" of the Imagists and the Objectivists and the postmodernist theories of Charles Olson and Robert Creeley.

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CHAPTER II

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS AND "MEASURE"

Even though William Carlos Williams had grown dissatisfied with the limitations of Imagism early in the 1920s, certain ideas he had derived from Pound were still apparent in both his poetry and his statements on poetics. Poetry, for Williams as well as for Pound, had to be a vivid description of what IS, as he asserted in his "Notes in Diary Form":

> The good poetry is where the vividness comes up 'true' like in prose but better. . .poetry should strive for nothing else, this vividness alone, per se, for itself. The realization of this has its own internal fire that is 'like' nothing. Therefore the bastardy of the simile. That thing, the vividness which is poetry by itself, makes the poem. There is no need to explain or compare. Make it and it is a poem.[1]

Instead of writing a didactic account of what happens in a poem, Williams sought to make

> . . .the thing insofar as possible happen on the page. The imagistic method comes in there. You can't tell what a particular thing signified, but if you see the thing happening before you, you infer that that is the kind of thing that happens in the area. That is the imagistic method.[2]

This lack of didacticism was further emphasized by Williams in an interview with Walter Sutton:

> The design of the painting and of the poem I've attempted to fuse. To make it the same thing. And sometimes when I write I don't want to say anything. I just want to present it. Not a didactic meaning. I don't care about the didactic meaning—the moral. To add some tag is absolutely repulsive to me.[3]

Williams discussed the intents of the Imagists and his role

in relation to their poetics in his Autobiography:

> To my mind the thing that gave us (the Imagists) most a semblance of a cause was not imagism, as some thought, but the line: the poetic line and our hope of its recovery from stodginess.[4]

Williams saw the "immediate image" as essentially impressionistic. He was interested in the design or pattern of the poem—the phenomenological relationship the parts of the poem made to each other. As such, the poem became in itself a reality, an object that was not simply an imitation of reality. Speaking of the painter, Cézanne, whom Williams called a designer, he stated:

> He put it down on the canvas so that there would be a meaning without saying anything at all. Just the relation of the parts to themselves. In considering a poem, I don't care whether it's finished or not; if it's put down with a good relation to the parts, it becomes a poem. And the meaning of the poem can be grasped by attention to the design.[5]

Two examples of poems by Williams that were written in the Imagist mode and were impressionistic are "Poem" and "The Red Wheelbarrow":[6]

The Red Wheelbarrow

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

What is immediately apparent in this poem is the influence of still-life paintings that was also evident in poems like "Metric Figure," "Woman Walking," and "Gulls" in his collection of poems

entitled Al Que Quire!. In addition to the vividness of the colors (the "redness" of the wheelbarrow contrasted with the "whiteness" of the chickens), the relation of the parts is asserted in the very first line of the poem: "so much depends." It is this line that carries the poem beyond mere impression because an interrelation is asserted between objects that, in turn, provoke thought. Like a Cézanne painting, this poem is a depiction of the interdependence of all phenomena, recalling a state where nothing is separate but rather in harmony with other objects. The first line of this poem asserts this harmony and, therefore, the reader becomes aware of a "mind" that has established this correspondence.

The second example is "Poem":

As the cat
climbed over
the top of

the jamcloset
first the right
forefoot

carefully
then the hind
stepped down

into the pit of
the empty
flowerpot.

What carries this poem beyond mere impression toward an awareness of a "mind" perceiving a pattern is the attention to detail. We recognize that while we may have observed a cat moving in a similar situation, we have not really "seen" or noticed the delicateness of its movement. The attention to detail is

apparent in the exact manner of the cat's movement: "first the right/ forefoot. . .then the hind". We are made aware of the tension of the scene as the cat steps into the empty flowerpot. One almost expects to hear the crash of broken pottery, but Williams' use of the adverb "carefully" creates a whole feeling of delicateness which seems to be the purpose of this poem. It is almost as if the moment has been frozen, yet the picture still conveys an intimation of activity and motion that is the basis of most still-life painting.

It is the intrinsic quality of life—a sense of "quiet" and being (what the philosopher, Martin Heidegger, termed as "Istigkeit") that is apparent in these two poems. There is an essential simplicity that is evident here, as well as a sincerity on the part of the poet toward his subject matter. The reader senses the honesty of the poet as well as the poet's fascination with any aspect of life, however mundane or trivial it might seem in comparison with the purported "great" themes of literature. This attitude of simplicity was asserted by Williams when he commented on his first book of poems:

> It is typical of me to want my first book of poems to be called simply Poems. And also typical that the first poem is called 'Innocence' and the second 'Simplicity'. I appear to be stating my case right from the beginning. The first line in the first poem reads, 'Innocence can never perish.' I really believed that then, and I really believe it now. It is something intrinsic in a man. And I still care about simplicity. I have been outspoken. I try to say it straight, whatever is to be said.[7]

The impressionistic qualities that were involved in writing poems stayed with Williams throughout his early and middle periods.

However, Williams grew dissatisfied with the limitations of Imagism early in the 1920s, and it was for this reason that he joined Zukofsky and the Objectivists in an attempt to integrate objectivity and subjectivity in the form of the poem. Zukofsky recognized the similarity of Williams' concerns, and in his preface to An "Objectivists" Anthology he cited four of Williams' poems—"To Elsie," "The Botticellean Trees," "It is a Living Coral," and "Full Moon"—as being among the poems which exemplified the theoretical principles of Objectivism.

For Williams, the objectification of an Image meant:

> . . .both to intensify its qualities and to blur or eliminate the features of its surroundings. In the same way, a person who is 'objective' eliminates all irrelevant or accidental responses in order to 'focus' his mind more entirely on the subject of his experience. The operation of the objective of the lens is therefore analogous to the conventional meaning of objective as 'free from or independent of personal feelings, opinions. . .detached; unbiased.'[8]

Yet this reference to the "objective of a lens" (derived partly from Zukofsky's statement) pointed only to the poet's concern with form, and it was Williams' goal to integrate subjective content (psychic criterion) with this objectivity. As such, Williams viewed Objectivism as a step beyond the mere impressionistic presentation of the image in the poem:

> . . .the poem, like every other form of art, is an object, an object that in itself formally presents its case and meaning by the very form it assumes. Therefore, being an object, it should be so treated and controlled—but not as in the past. For past objects have about them past necessities—like the sonnet—which have conditioned them and from which, as a form itself, they cannot be freed.
>
> The poem being an object (like a symphony or cubist painting) it must be the purpose of the poet

> to make his words a new form: to invent; that is, an object consonant with his day. This was what we wished to imply by Objectivism, an antidote, in a sense, to the bare image haphazardly presented in loose verse.[9]

The bare image as impression was inadequate for Williams because it failed to assert the relationship between the observer and the observed. Commenting indirectly on the technical aspects of Imagism, Williams stated:

> 'Simply physical or external realism' has an important place in America still. We know far less, racially, than we should about our localities and ourselves. But it is quite true that the photographic camera will not help us. We can though, if we are able to see general relationships in local settings, set them down verbatim with a view to penetration.[10]

The obvious key phrase in the above statement is "a view to penetration." From this statement as well as others in the body of his critical writings, we can conclude that Williams wanted to penetrate into the emotional reality of the relationship between the poet and the inexplicable world of phenomena that surrounded him. Only when this was achieved without preconceptions and learned rhetoric could the poet view the world as an essentially "new" experience and thereby permit the poem to exist as an object unto itself:

> A man writes as he does because he doesn't know any better way to do it, to represent exactly what he has to say CLEAN of the destroying, falsifying, besmutching agencies with which he is surrounded. Everything he does is an explanation. He is always trying his very best to redefine his work until it is nothing else but 'useful knowledge'. I say everything, every minutest thing that is part of a work of art is good only when it is useful and that any other explanation of the 'work' would be less useful than the work itself.[11]

Meaning, therefore, was derived from the authenticity of the poetic imagination (the subjective mind) asserting a congruity with the world of objective reality. The poem as this self-sufficient object presented to the reader the world of the artist which was a "world of the imagination where there is nothing but truth and beauty."[12]

In his introduction to The Wedge, Williams defined the poem as "a small (or large) machine made of words. When I say there's nothing sentimental about a poem I mean that there can be no part, as in any other machine, that is redundant."[13] The use of the term "machine" seems to indicate an emphasis on the purely objective, devoid of any subjective or emotional content. However, Williams went on to expand on the dual necessity (the subjective and the objective) that went into the construction of the poem. First, he described the role of the poet as the orderer of the objective data he had gathered:

> When a man makes a poem, makes it, mind you, he takes words as he finds them interrelated about him and composes them—without distortion which would mar their exact significances—into an intense expression of his perceptions and ardors that may constitute a revelation in the speech that he uses.[14]

Here, the "perceptions and ardors" of the poet may be equated with the emotions and feelings (the subjectivity) he brings to the work. The poet had to feel sincerely in order to communicate the intensity of the experience that had prompted him to write in the first place. Secondly, Williams stated the manner in which the poem became an object, sufficient unto itself:

> It isn't what he says that counts as a work of art,

> it's what he makes, with such intensity of perception that it lives with an intrinsic movement of its own to verify its authenticity.[15]

The statement "intrinsic movement of its own" implies the objectivity that must be apparent if the poem is to be successful. The poem had to move beyond a purely personal and subjective statement to the larger sense of a universal experience. The objective validity remained in the fact that the reader's imagination could accept the poem as the intense perception of an individual who recognized certain truths that were basic and authentic and thereby extended beyond the limits of one's subjective experience to include a larger, more objective whole.

Williams felt that the poem had to be more than the simple reiteration of objective data. He felt that the subjective and the objective had to be equally present in a poem:

> . . .the artist is limited to the range of his contact with the objective world. True, in begetting his poem he takes parts from the imagination but it is simply that working among stored memories his mind has drawn parallels, completed progressions, transferred units from one category to another, clipped here, modified there. But it is inconceivable that, no matter how circuitously, contact with an immediate objective world of actual experience has not been rigorously maintained.[16]

Therefore, as difficult as this was to achieve, the ideas in a poem had to stem from a primary impression of the objective world —"No ideas but in things."

The tension between the subjective and the objective, between the words (ideas) and the data (things) in the poetics of Williams, was noted by Joseph Riddel:

> Words are not things for Williams, nor is he guilty

> of committing himself to the pathetic task of restoring words to some lost ideal identity with things. On the contrary, his compulsion to restore language to its facticity to sharpen the edges of images, acknowledged the fundamental difference between the word and the thing as the very thing that defined this relation. Facts became facts in the relation provided them by language. And poetry, original poetry, is the refreshing of the discovery of this relation.[17]

When Williams stated that "it is not what you say that matters but the manner in which you say it,"[18] he was alluding to this fundamental use of language to serve as the means of relating the subjective, inner world to the objective, outer one. Williams was against emotions for their own sake and believed that emotions did not control the poem, rather the objective mind "which drives and selects among them (emotions) as though they were a pack of trained hounds."[19]

Williams thus discriminated between the subjective and the objective by rejecting particular and sentimental emotions: "the true value is that peculiarity which gives an object a character by itself. The associational or sentimental value is the false."[20] This "true value" was achieved only through the poetic Imagination which examines the apprehendable, physical reality of the objective world. Implicit in this concept of a poetic Imagination were two factors. The first factor denoted a Mind that sought to reconcile the personal, subjective experience of the poet with a larger awareness of the external world. The "dance of the Imagination" was therefore one of the poetic Mind that became a Self only insofar as it established relations with the unknown and communicated this relation to others via the medium of

language. Poems attained power through an awareness of a greater metaphysical structure:

> . . .a poem is tough by no quality it borrows from a logical recital of events nor from the events themselves but solely from that attenuated power which draws perhaps many broken things into a dance giving them thus a full being.[21]

The second factor implicit in Williams' conception of the poetic Imagination was the seeming contradiction and difficulty of the artist ever attaining an equal synthesis of subjectivity and objectivity in his poems:

> But the thing that stands eternally in the way of really good writing is always one: the virtual impossibility of lifting to the imagination those things which lie under the direct scrutiny of the senses, close to the nose.[22]

Throughout his career as a poet Williams was constantly concerned with reconciling this dilemma of translating sensory experiences into the logical constructs of language without losing the texture of the experience in the rhetoric. The first step, he felt, was for the poet to assert the uniqueness of each "object" about which he wrote. Doing this, the poet "discovers in things those inimitable particles of dissimilarity to all other things which are the peculiar perfections of the thing in question."[23]

Williams' conclusion was that the artist must possess the psychic and technical considerations equally in his poetry. (In this case "psychic" may be taken to mean a humanistic concern.) The artist was "he with the most profound insight into the lives of people and the widest imaginative skill in its technical interpretations—or any part thereof."[24] Williams' principal

contribution to the poetics of open-verse lay in his ability to define this psychic criterion in terms of a new "measure" for poetic speech, a measure that integrated the form of the poem as it appeared as verbal utterance on the page in a technical sense with the attitude of the poet toward his subject matter, as Joseph Riddel noted:

> Language is Williams' measure of man. Man lives in the house of language, and carries out his transactions there. And language is the perfect instance of touch as measure. Through language man touches the world of things. He does not take possession of the world but takes his place in it, not as subject but as object. Through language man touches other men; he becomes a self only in his relation with the other and to the unknown. This is objectification, knowledge.[25]

Williams sought to embody in a work of art the element of "timelessness" which, he felt, was evident through the world of the senses and was depicted in the sensuality of a work of art. Describing the role of the artist in the creation of a work of art, he stated: "A work of art is important only as evidence, in its structure, of a new world which it has been created to affirm."[26] Yet this "new world" did not confine the artist to an ivory-tower of the imagination. Williams felt that all art, all experience, was rooted within the actual, physical world, and the poem had to create this "new world" from an apprehension of the real. The artist, he wrote, "does not translate the sensuality of his materials into symbols but deals with them directly. By this he belongs to his world and time, sensually, realistically."[27]

The effect Williams strove for as an artist (and this was

a testament to his humanity) was to assert a relative truth or insight that could be generally applicable. To do this he sought to keep himself "objective enough, sensual enough" so that his audience "may the better see, touch, taste, enjoy their own world differing as it may from mine. By mine, they, different, can be discovered to be the same as I, and, thrown into contrast, will see the implications of a general enjoyment through me."[28] This commitment to the communication of the sensuality of the poet's experience was apparent in Williams' use of an idiomatic poetic language—what he defined as the sense of "measure" that attempted to integrate subjectivity and objectivity or psychic and technical criteria within the poem.

Williams rejected past notions of poetic structure and felt that modern poetry was in the process of perpetuating a "revolution in the conception of the poetic foot."[29] He believed that in the past "there was. . .a subject matter that was 'poetic' and in many minds that is still poetry—and exclusively so—the 'beautiful' or pious (and so beautiful) wish expressed in beautiful language—a dream."[30] However, going beyond this "romantic" notion of poetry—the same notion that Pound had criticized when he referred to the nineteenth century as a "blurry, messy sort of period"—Williams offered that "there could be a new subject matter and that that was not in fact the poem at all," meaning that "the serious poet has admitted the whole armamenture of the industrial age to his poems."[31]

The only aspect of the poem that Williams upheld as perm-

anent and sacrosanct was structure and, as a result, the only reality the poet could know was the "measure" associated with it. Williams felt the necessity for a new measure because:

> Our lives also have lost all that in the past we had to measure them by, except outmoded standards that are meaningless to us. In the same way our verses, of which our poems are made, are left without any metrical construction of which you can speak, any recognizable, any new measure by which they can be pulled together.[32]

Therefore this "new measure" would involve "a new way of measuring that will be commensurate with the social, economic world in which we are living as contrasted with the past. It is in many ways a different world from the past calling for a different measure."[33] Williams therefore rejected the past structures and subsequent values because of his concern with the immediacy of experience. In this way he laid the groundwork for the open-verse of Olson and Creeley that sought to include any aspect of experience into the structure of the poem. By being "open" to the demands of the immediate world, this measure of Williams embraced new, psychic concerns within the structural framework.

Williams' predisposition to the rejection of the past and a plea for an open-form poetics came as a partial reaction against the predominant influence of T. S. Eliot's poetry and poetics in the 1940s. In his Autobiography, Williams described Eliot's The Waste Land as "the great catastrophe to our letters" because it "gave the poem back to the academics."[34] Williams felt that Eliot was in opposition to the movement he was involved in, which was "the rediscovery of a primary impetus, the elementary prin-

ciple of all art, in the local condition."[35] The "local condition," for Williams, meant a rejection of the past, of a binding tradition that belied discovery of a new form and fresh, original poetic language.

Perhaps the most fiercely rejected work of Eliot's by Williams and the other proponents of open-form poetics like Olson and Creeley was the essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" which appeared as part of a collection, The Sacred Wood, in 1920. T. S. Eliot felt that tradition played an integral part in the sensibility of the poet:

> It (tradition) involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity.[36]

Eliot also referred to the concept of a universal "Humanity," "the mind of Europe. . .which he (the artist) learns in time to be much more important than his private mind."[37] This statement seemed to focus on the notion of an absolute truth as opposed to the relative, personal truth that Williams, Olson and Creeley argued for in their poetics. In addition, the "mind of Europe" was in direct opposition to Williams' concern with a local liter-

ature, history, and idiom that was expounded upon in his collection of essays entitled In the American Grain where Williams stated a case for the primacy of American culture.

Eliot also argued that "the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality,"[38] thereby asserting an impersonal theory of poetry with regard to the relation of the poem to its author. The mind of the poet, according to Eliot, "may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material."[39] Eliot's use of the term "transmute" is especially interesting in the previous passage. Transmutation, particularly in this context, is an alchemical term that refers to the process of transforming base substances into a more pure form. Eliot wished to "transmute" the "base" emotions and passions (the subjective) into a "rare" or purer construct of the intellect: "For it is not the 'greatness', the intensity, of the emotion, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process. . .that counts."[40] This outright rejection of a passionate, sensual response to the objective world ran counter to Williams' belief that all art, all experience, was rooted in a psychical (and consequently personal) apprehension of the world.

T. S. Eliot's poetry and poetics thus rejected the emotional content within the poem. He felt that:

> It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting.[41]

Eliot also distinguished between the common emotions shared by men and the "rarer," purer emotion of a poem:

> The business of a poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all.[42]

One can notice almost a distaste for human problems, feelings and passions in this passage. It is as if emotions were slovenly, to be "worked up" into poetry, which implied that emotions needed to be made to cohere in a more orderly fashion through the use of poetic language.

Eliot was against the whole notion of a "personal" viewpoint being expressed in the poem (precisely what makes Williams and Creeley so readable) because he felt that:

> Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.[43]

In order to compensate for or to deal with the elements of subjectivity and emotion Eliot, in the essay "Hamlet and His Problems," derived the notion of an "objective correlative" that could serve as a means of or formula for expressing emotions:

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.[44]

Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a perfect example of the use of the "objective correlative." Yet, despite the technical brilliance of this poem in its use of language, metaphor, allusions, and images, what remains after reading this

seemingly most emotional of testaments is a personality without substance. It can, of course, be argued that this was exactly Eliot's intent. However, "Prufrock" is really a poem with meaning but little substance. It remains as not much more than a deliberately satiric portrait of a neurotic, despairing personality who lacks personality perhaps because the projection of the poet himself into his work is missing.

How much more real (and comically poignant) is the portrait of loneliness Williams paints in "Danse Russe":

> If when my wife is sleeping
> and the baby and Kathleen
> are sleeping
> and the sun is a flame white disc
> in silken mists
> above shining trees,—
> if I in my north room
> dance naked, grotesquely
> before my mirror
> waving my shirt round my head
> and singing softly to myself:
> 'I am lonely, lonely.
> I was born to be lonely,
> I am best so!'
> If I admire my arms, my face
> my shoulders, flanks, buttocks
> against the yellow drawn shades,—
>
> Who shall say I am not
> the happy genius of my household?[45]

This portrait of Williams, the venerable pediatrician and family doctor, dancing naked in his room is both comic and touching. Even though the poem is optimistic (after all, he is the "happy genius!"), there is a sense of bemusement and wonder at the fate of Man who is aware of his aloneness in an inexplicable world despite seemingly familial comforts. Despite the oddness of his "grotesque" humanity,

Williams' poem affirms the mystery of one's seemingly meaningless humanness.

Williams rejected the "rare" manner of Eliot's poetry and even applied this criticism to Pound because he felt that a new poetic language had to be discovered to provide for a full psychic and technical measure in a poem. The words of the poem had to fit the occasion of their utterance and, for this purpose, Williams' "measure" came to include a proprioceptive awareness of the poet's place and role toward his subject matter that was expressed through the idiom of common speech:

> I've always wanted to fit poetry into the life around us because I love poetry. I'm not the type of poet who looks only at the rare thing. I want to use the words we speak and to describe the things we see, as far as it can be done. I abandoned the rare world of H. D. and Ezra Pound. Poetry should be brought into the world where we live and not be so recondite, so removed from the people. To bring poetry out of the clouds and down to earth I still believe possible. Using common words in a rare manner will advance the cause of the Poem infinitely.[46]

In this particular instance, the "rare manner" may be interpreted as the psychic stance the poet takes toward his subject matter—the manner in which he brings his Self to interact with the world.

The "new measure," for Williams, implied a type of structural concern whereby the language of the poem corresponded to the "intensity of feeling" (Creeley's phrase) thus evoked. Williams stated:

> Most poems I see today are concerned with what they are <u>saying</u>, how profound they have been given to be. So <u>true is</u> this that those who write them have forgotten to make poems at all of them. Thank God we're not musicians, with our lack of structural invention we'd be ashamed to look ourselves in the

> face otherwise. There is nothing interesting in the construction of our poems, nothing that can jog the ear out of its boredom.[47]

Williams suggested that the poet should attempt to achieve the effect of a pure or clear line or a clear statement by "trying to speak outright."[48]

In addition, Williams felt that the poem had to make an explicit statement that directly linked reality to the poetic "idea":

> Measure, an ancient word in poetry, something we have almost forgotten in its literal significance as something measured, becomes related again with the poetic. We have today to do with the poetic, as always, but a relatively stable foot, not a rigid one. That is all the difference. It is that which must become the object of our search. Only by coming to that realization shall we escape the power of these magnificent verses of the past which we have always marveled over and still be able to enjoy them. We live in a new world pregnant with tremendous possibility for enlightenment but sometimes, being old, I despair of it. For the poem which has always led the way to the other arts as to life, being explicit, the only art which is explicit, has lately been left to fall into decay.[49]

This discussion of "measure" by Williams found its way into the common rhythms of everyday speech in its practical application, especially in the body of his later poems. The "hints toward composition" Williams presented involved a view of language that came to correspond with Olson's and Creeley's ideas on open, projective verse. The "new" speech of Williams was an assertion of the posibilities implicit in the "American idiom":

> This does not mean realism in the language. What it does mean, I think, is ways of managing the language, new ways. Primarily it means to me opportunity to expand the structure, the basis, the actual

making of the poem.

> It is a chance to attack the language of the poem seriously. For to us our language is serious in a way that English is not. Just as to them English is serious—too serious—in a way no dialect could be. But the dialect is the mobile phrase, the changing phrase—as their languages were to Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dante, Rabelais in their day.
>
> It is there, in the mouths of the living, that the language is changing and giving new means for expanding possibilities in literary expression and, I add, basic structure—the most important of all.[50]

By "basic structure" Williams meant a "live syntax," not unlike Fenollosa's prescription for a language charged with energy through the use of active verbs. The increased use of "dialect" in Williams' poems—the use of an "American idiom"—promoted a poetic speech that was in direct relation to the personal, subjective world of the poet. The utterance of the poem, therefore, corresponded to the natural speech of the poet and the form of the poem could serve as a direct testament to the natural way the poet spoke and moved with the intensity of his emotions that became evident in the transcribed language. Williams justified the use of the "American idiom" by pointing out his natural affinity to that speech:

> I said what I had to say, using the American idiom; I felt free with it. The rhythmical construction of a poem was determined for me by the language as it is spoken. Word of mouth language, not classical English.[51]

The language of the poem had to arise from an acute experience of the local condition. This local condition, for Williams, was the American environment, the world he was intimately familiar with, and his language was the spoken language of the people:

> I couldn't speak like the academy. It had to be modified by the conversation about me. . . not the speech of the English country people, which would have something artificial about it; not that, but language modified by our environment; the American environment.[52]

In addition to defining the use of language and its consequent expression through idiom within the poem, Williams described the common subject matter of his poems as the concern with the everyday experiences of the poet, or what can be seen as a concern with mundanity. "Mundanity" is certainly not being used here as a term of disparagement. Yet if we look at a poem like "This is Just to Say," we wonder whether, in fact, this is a "poem" at all:

This is Just to Say

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold.[53]

Certainly the concern of this poem (its subject matter) seems to be anti-poetic with respect to poetic tradition. If we examine its theme we are similarly baffled. Reading into this work we can vaguely discern guilt (for having eaten the plums) and a type of justification through the praise of their sensual delight ("so sweet/ and so cold"). Yet Williams justified this

concern with the mundane when he stated:

> . . .everything in our lives, if it's sufficiently authentic to our lives and touches us deeply enough with a certain amount of feeling, is capable of being organized into a form which can be a poem.[54]

and,

> You see, the theory is. . .that you can make a poem out of anything. You don't have to have conventionally poetic material. Anything that is felt, and that is felt deeply enough or even that gives amusement is material for art.[55]

If we accept this, then we can accept this poem as an authentic statement on the part of Williams of sensual delight in the world. The poem's psychic "measure" rests in the felt and shared amusement that is communicated to the reader.

Williams believed that his poetic material was anti-poetic with respect to accepted tradition:

> All poets have a tendency to dress up an ordinary person, as Yeats does. It has to be a special treatment to be poetic, and I don't acknowledge this at all. I'd rather look at an old woman paring her nails as the essence of the "anti-poetic" . . . .I wanted to get to the real situation, not human nor aesthetic—almost a philosophical truth which can ignore all human categories.[56]

The reference Williams made to the image of "an old woman paring her nails" was a basis for the justification of his concern with the mundane. Williams was against abstraction in poetry. The "philosophical truth" was the recognition of an order, a truth, gained from an apprehension of the concrete world:

> It is the fashion of the age to be abstract but the reality of what we see puts a vigor, a sturdiness into one, that is essential. There is but one thing we can know directly and that is the world we own and we do own it, which is not so insignificant a matter after all, even if we must share our star

> with a few others. And if all truth contains everything, why, is not this world a part of the whole truth, the very existence, a greater mystery than any other mere abstract law.[57]

Williams' concern with language as an expression of the poetic experience resulted in the theoretical groundwork he laid for the integration of form and content in the poem that was the basis for Olson's and Creeley's projectivist poetics. Williams felt that it was in the poetic "line" that a well conceived form within which modification might exist occurred. This modification came to exist in his concept of the "variable foot." It was here, Williams felt, that invention could take place. Williams described this in a letter to Kay Boyle:

> The metronome beat of doggerel makes us restless, lowers us to nonsense. The forced timing of verse after antique patterns wearies us even more and seduces thought even more disastrously—as in Eliot's work. But a new time that catches thought as it lags and swings it up into the attention will be read (by those interested) with that breathlessness which is an indication that they are not dragging a gunny sack flavored with anise around for us to follow but that there is meat at the end of the hunt for us—and we are hungry.[58]

Williams' theory of the "variable foot" was based on the model of the poem in Paterson, Book Two, section 3:

> The descent beckons
> as the ascent beckoned
> Memory is a kind
>
> of accomplishment
> a sort of renewal
> even
>
> an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new places.[59]

We can read this poem metrically in terms of rising and falling

action. We pause, briefly, after the first line to think, to evaluate the emotion being expressed. The words plot the movement of the poet's mind as it asserts and ruminates over the ideas. It is possible to note here Williams' influence on Olson's units of breath (which will be further discussed in Chapter III). We can see the content of the poem giving shape to the poetic form. The theory of the "variable foot" is made even more explicit in Williams' "Asphodel, that greeny flower." The structure of the perceptions as they came to exist in the lines of this poem was seen by Williams as "a way of escaping the formlessness of free verse."[60]

Williams' aim in "Asphodel. . . ." (one of the last poems he was to write) was to break up standard metrical patterns. Thus, in order to get away from conventional patterns, Williams divided the lines by breath, by inflection. This "measure" tried to integrate the music of the poem (the "beat") with the pace of the emotions that dictated the flow of perceptions. Williams discussed this technique at length with specific reference to his poem, "To Daphne and Virginia," in a letter to the poet, Richard Eberhart:

> The stated syllables, as in the best of present day free verse, have become entirely divorced from the beat, that is the measure. The musical pace proceeds without them.
>
> Therefore the measure, that is to say, the count, having got rid of the words, which held it down, is returned to the music.
>
> . . .By measure I mean musical pace. Now, with music in our ears the words need only be taught to keep as distinguished an order, as chosen a character, as regular, according to the music, as in the best of prose.

> By its music shall the best of modern verse be known and the resources of the music. The refinement of the poem, its subtlety, is not known by the elevation of the words but—the words don't so much matter—by the resources of the music.
>
> To give you an example from my own work—not that I know anything about what I have written: (count):—not that I ever count when writing but, at best, the lines must be capable of being counted that is to say, measured—(believe it or not)—at that I may, half consciously, even count the measure under my breath as I write.—
>
> (approximate example)
>
> (1) The smell of the heat is boxwood
> (2) when rousing us
> (3) a movement of the air
> (4) stirs our thoughts
> (5) that had no life in them
> (6) to a life, a life in which
>
> . . .Count a single beat to each numeral. You may not agree with my ear, but that is the way I count the line. Over the whole poem it gives a pattern to the meter that can be felt as a new measure. It gives resources to the ear which result in a language which we hear spoken about us every day.[61]

It is important to note Williams' emphasis on "breath" as measure because it points to the open-form poetics that was expressed in Charles Olson's "Projective Verse" essay.

Feeling that poetry had constantly to be involved in the creation and discovery of new form, Williams eventually expressed even a dissatisfaction with Pound, his old mentor. He felt that Pound had not really solved anything in terms of an open poetic form that Williams was drawn to because Pound's poetic line, he felt, was no more than classic adaptation. For Williams, there could no longer be serious work in poetry written in a standard, previously used, "poetic" diction:

> It is in the newness of a live speech that the new line exists undiscovered. To go back is to deny the first opportunity for invention which exists.

> Speech is the fountain of the line into which the pollutions of a poetic manner and inverted phrasing should never again be permitted to drain.[62]

This need for "live speech" was the end of a closed "poetic" world and permitted the "act of the instant" of projective verse. This open verse, as Williams described it in a letter to Harriet Monroe that was written as early as 1913, was an apprehension of life as a constant process of renewal. And the language of the poem, Williams sensed even so early in his career, had to express the immediacy of this perception:

> Now life is above all things else at any moment subversive of life as it was the moment before—always new, irregular. Verse to be alive must have infused into it something of the same order, some tincture of disestablishment, something in the nature of an impalpable revolution, an ethereal reversal. . .[63]

The immediacy of the perception was ultimately rooted within the personality of the poet and in the consequent response of the poet's "Self" to his experiences of the world, according to Williams. Thus poetry was:

> . . .language charged with emotion. It's words rhythmically organized. . . .A poem is a complete little universe. It exists separately. Any poem that has worth expresses the whole life of the poet. It gives a view of what the poet is.[64]

The language of the poem therefore came to serve as testament to the emotional and intellectual life of the poet, intimately linked to the poet's personality:

> . . .once the writing is on the paper it becomes an object. . . .It has now left the region of the formative past and comes up to the present. . . .It is this part of writing that is dealt with in the colleges and in all forms of teaching but nowhere does it seem to be realized that without its spring from

> the deeper strata of the personality all the teaching and learning of the world can make nothing of the result. . .we know that in language is anchored most or all of the wisdom and follies of our lives.[65]

This psychic measure of the poem was incorporated by Robert Creeley into his own poetics and provided the foundation for his belief in the unity of form and content in an open-form poetry.

Early in his career as a poet, Creeley wrote to Williams asking him to describe his own "program" for writing and to provide a theoretical justification for the "new" poetry that was emerging in the 1950s. Williams' response came in the form of a letter that was published in the first issue of Cid Corman's magazine, Origin, with which Creeley was linked for a time before he joined the editorial staff of The Black Mountain Review. Creeley, as Paul Mariani pointed out, took from Williams "a poetic which focused on a language rinsed as much as possible of its literary associations, an anti-Symbolist stance, the words sharp, distinctive, their energies supplied by their specific context and space."[66]

The "specific context" was the way in which the experience described in the poem came to be linked with the specific experience of the poet's life. Creeley, acknowledging his debt to Williams, feels he had learned how ". . .we actually speak to other people in this medium (the poem) in a way that's not exclusively personal, but in a way that is our own determination."[67] The poet's "own determination" here refers to the natural manner of speaking that is a valid depiction of the poet's own personality. However, the distinction that Williams made and Creeley incorpor-

ates from him was the notion of the objectification of the poet's personal experience. Creeley is against being "exclusively personal" because such a purely subjective, confessional statement would, he feels, retard communication. Even though the poet draws on his subjective, emotional experiences to provide the core of the poem, the manner of address and poetic posture must make an objective determination clear. Specific examples of this technique will be discussed later in this thesis in relation to Creeley's poetry.

Particular collections of Williams' poems Creeley admires are The Desert Music and Pictures from Breughel and Other Poems. Creeley feels that the poems in these collections integrate the subjective with the objective and are examples of the best type of open-verse. Creeley sees this notion of an open-verse poetic as stemming from the statement by Williams, "No ideas but in things." Creeley takes this statement to mean that "all which moves to an elsewhere of abstraction, of specious 'reliefs,' must be seen as false. We live as and where we are. . . ,"[68] which becomes the literal "here" and "now." Thus: "What device, means, rhythm, or form the poem can gain for its coherence are a precise issue of its occasion."[69]

Commenting further about Williams' later poems, Creeley states:

> . . .what can be said now is that there is all such truth, such life, in them. I cannot make that judgment which would argue among the poems that this or that one shows the greater mastery. I think there must come a time, granted that one has worked as Williams to define the nature of his art, when it all

> coheres, and each poem, or instance, takes its place in that life which it works to value, to measure, to be the fact of.[70]

Creeley intimates here that the way one could structure or apprehend the measure that arises from language would be through an intuition similar to the sense Hulme learned from Henri Bergson. Williams himself concluded this:

> We have no measure by which to guide ourselves, except a purely intuitive one which we feel but do not name.[71]

This intuitive sense came about through the ear one had for language, dialect and the idiom—all concepts that reflected an intensity of feeling. This statement by Williams pointed to the poetics of projective verse that was espoused by Charles Olson in his essay, "Projective Verse," an essay that Williams felt was so important that he quoted it in almost its entirety in his Autobiography. Williams saw the importance of Olson's contribution to the "new" poetry primarily because of Olson's argument for looking at the poem as a field rather than an assembly of enclosed lines. Also, the argument for the synthesis of form and content (technical and psychic criteria) that Olson discovered through his correspondence with Creeley was elaborated upon in this essay. The chapter that follows will examine the influences of Charles Olson on the evolution of Creeley's poetics as well as discuss the Olson-Creeley correspondence which serves as a remarkable document that is the basis for the open-form poetics of postmodern verse.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1] William Carlos Williams, Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams (New York: Random House, 1954), pp. 67-68.

[2] Linda Wagner, ed., Interviews with William Carlos Williams (New York: New Directions, 1976), p. 309.

[3] Ibid., p. 53.

[4] William Carlos Williams, The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams (New York: New Directions, 1948), p. 148.

[5] Interviews with William Carlos Williams, p. 53.

[6] William Carlos Williams, The Collected Earlier Poems (New York: New Directions, 1966), p. 340; p. 277.

[7] William Carlos Williams, I Wanted to Write a Poem (London: Jonathan Cape, Ltd., 1967), p. 21.

[8] James Guimond, The Art of William Carlos Williams (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1968), p. 96.

[9] The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams, p. 264.

[10] William Carlos Williams, letter to the Editor of A Year Magazine (April, 1934) in The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams, ed. J. C. Thirlwall (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1957), p. 146.

[11] Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams, p. 180.

[12] Ibid., p. 189.

[13] Donald Allen and Warren Tallman, ed., The Poetics of the New American Poetry (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1973), p. 138.

[14] Ibid., p. 139.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams, p. 35.

[17] Joseph Riddel, The Inverted Bell (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), pp. 10-11.

[18] Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams, p. iii.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., p. 11.

[21] Ibid., p. 14.

[22] Ibid., p. 11.

[23] Ibid., p. 16.

[24] Ibid., p. 195.

[25] Riddel, p. 32.

[26] Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams, p. 196.

[27] Ibid., p. 197.

[28] Ibid., pp. 197-198.

[29] Ibid., p. 281.

[30] Ibid., p. 282.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., p. 337.

[33] Ibid., p. 283.

[34] The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams, p. 146.

[35] Ibid.

[36] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in The Sacred Wood (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1920), p. 49.

[37] Ibid., p. 51.

[38] Ibid., p. 53.

[39] Ibid., p. 54.

[40] Ibid., p. 55.

[41] Ibid., p. 57.

[42] Ibid., p. 58.

[43] Ibid.

[44] "Hamlet and His Problems" in The Sacred Wood, p. 100.

[45] The Collected Earlier Poems of William Carlos Williams, p. 148.

[46] John C. Thirlwall, "William Carlos Williams's Paterson" in New Directions 17 (1961), p. 253.

[47] Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams, p. 339.

[48] Ibid., p. 291.

[49] Ibid., p. 340.

[50] Ibid., pp. 290-291.

[51] I Wanted to Write a Poem, p. 87.

[52] "William Carlos Williams," an interview by Stanley Koehler taped in April, 1962, published in The Paris Review, VIII, No. 32 (Summer-Fall, 1964), pp. 9-10.

[53] The Collected Earlier Poems of William Carlos Williams, p. 354.

[54] Interviews with William Carlos Williams, p. 17.

[55] Ibid., p. 21.

[56] Ibid., pp. 60-61.

[57] William Carlos Williams, "Beauty and Truth" in The Embodiment of Knowledge, edited by Ron Loewinsohn (New York: New Directions, 1974), p. 168.

[58] The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams, p. 136.

[59] William Carlos Williams, Paterson (New York: New Directions, 1946), p. 77.

[60] I Wanted to Write a Poem, p. 101.

[61] The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams, pp. 326-327.

[62] Ibid., p. 134.

[63] Ibid., p. 24.

[64] "Mike Wallace Asks William Carlos Williams: Is Poetry a Dead Duck?" The New York Post, October 18, 1957, p. 46.

[65] Interviews with William Carlos Williams, pp. 98-99.

[66] Paul Mariani, "'Fire of a Very Real Order': Creeley and Williams." Boundary 2, Vol. VI, No. 3; VII, No. 1 (Spring/Fall, 1978), p. 176.

[67] "Robert Creeley Interview" in The Sullen Art, edited by David Ossman (New York: Corinth Books, 1963), p. 58.

[68] Robert Creeley, A Quick Graph (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1970), p. 117.

[69] Ibid., p. 118.

[70] Ibid., p. 120.

[71] Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams, p. 339.

CHAPTER III

OLSON AND CREELEY: PROJECTIVE VERSE

In the late 1940s Robert Creeley was living in Littleton, New Hampshire where he tried, unsuccessfully, to start a literary magazine. At this time Creeley first established contact with Williams in an effort to solicit some material for his magazine, and to open a dialogue on approaches to the "new writing" that was emerging in the United States. During this time Creeley received some poems in the mail from Charles Olson through an intermediary, Vincent Ferrini, for consideration in the magazine. At Williams' urging Olson had sent Creeley some poems through Ferrini after Williams' letter to Olson on April 20, 1950.[1] Creeley wrote to Ferrini rejecting Olson's work stating: "I'm rather put off by Mr. Olsen's (sic) language which doesn't seem to come any kind of positive diction. . ."[2] This prompted a reply from Olson to Creeley that resulted in a massive correspondence that continued until Olson's death in 1970.

By 1954 with the success of Creeley's publishing venture, the Divers Press in Majorca, Spain, Olson and Creeley decided to put out a new publication called The Black Mountain Review originating from Black Mountain College where Olson was then the rector. Commonly referred to as "The Black Mountain School of Poetry," many of the poets who appeared in the review went on to become the proponents of the new, open-form poetry that formed the nucleus of Donald Allen's anthology, The New American Poetry,

which appeared in 1960. However, more important than any sense of a movement (similar to the rejection of such an appelation by the proponents of "Imagism" and "Objectivism") were the common concerns of those who sought to establish a new poetic. Creeley discusses these goals:

> . . .a very conscious concern with the manner of a poem, with the form of a poem, so that we are, in that way, freed from any solution unparticular or not particular to ourselves. Olson, I believe, was a decisive influence upon me as a writer, because he taught me how to write. Not how to write poems that he wrote, but how to write poems that I write. This is a very curious and very specific difference.[3]

This concern with the particulars of the Self, with the subjective, psychic criterion, points to the philosophical basis for an open-verse poetics that had already emerged in Williams' poetics and poetry. Olson's influence on the evolution of Creeley's ideas consolidated this effort to merge the subjective and objective in the form and content of the poem.

It is this notion of psychic dynamics that Olson proposed in his essay, "Projective Verse," that first appeared in Poetry New York in 1950. Olson referred to projective verse as "open" verse or "field composition." What he was after in a poem was the kinetics of the work, or how the poet transferred the kinetics of what he was writing about over to the reader through the poem (which Olson viewed as a high energy construct) without losing that sense of energy. This problem of transferring the energy, Olson believed, was solved through field composition, which had to do with a departure from the closed form into an open field of composition, thereby forcing new recognitions of structure

upon the poet: "From the moment he ventures into FIELD COMPOSITION—puts himself in the open—he can go by no track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself."[4]

This leads to the principle or law which governs this type of composition, phrased by Creeley as: "form is never more than an extension of content."[5] This principle, in effect, means that the informing principle is the content of the poem (the psychic criterion) and the form of the poem is dependent upon this content. Creeley elaborates on this as follows:

> . . .by that I mean that the thing to be said will, in that way, determine how it will be said. So that if you're saying, 'Go light the fire,' 'fire' in that register will have one kind of emphasis, and if you start screaming, 'Fire! Fire!' of course that will have another. In other words, the content of what is semantically involved will very much function in how the statement of it occurs. Now the truncated line, or the short seemingly broken line I was using in my first poems, comes from the somewhat broken emotions that were involved in them. Now, as I begin to relax, as I not so much grow older, but more settled, more at ease in my world, the line can not so much grow softer, but can become, as you say, more lyrical, less afraid of concluding.[6]

This was different, Olson felt, from the principles surrounding "closed verse," where the form was predetermined and the content had to fit that form. What Creeley's maxim dictates is simply an emphasis upon the fact that the poet is given to write poems. That is, writing is an activity and, as such, one cannot remove oneself from the act of writing by anticipating the significance of what one is saying. Rather, as one writes one is in the activity of writing, and the form will follow from the content in the way the content is exposed by the poet. Creeley

asserts this when he states, "that verse was something given one to write, and that the form it might then take was intimate with that fact."[7]

The final process of the poem, how the principle brings about the accomplished form that occurs through the shaping of the energies, comes about through the notion that "one perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception,"[8] according to Olson. There were two aspects that united the kinetics and the principle: that, in writing, the thing to be said will, in that way, determine how it will be said; or, to view the second aspect which is closely related to the first: the content of what is semantically involved will function in how the statement of it occurs. Form, then, is dependent on content or use, and the whole process is everything that is involved in how one uses the content of one's utterance. To keep to this process is to stick to the significance of the content as it manifests itself. Taken this way, content can be equated with the "known." By further implication, we can infer that Olson came to the belief that this type of writing that moves perceptions "instanter, on another" is related to the condition of a man's (the poet's) experiences by the manifestation of which, in poetry, he can perform the "proper and characteristic function" of himself.

Olson continued by stating that the way the perceptions followed one another, falling into form, created the particular rhythm of the poem. He used the notion of the breath unit (an idea that had been anticipated by Williams) to point to this

particular rhythm. By following his own rhythm (his own flow of breath), by writing with that as a sense of measure, the poet could stay inside himself, thus giving the content of experiences its proper due in the form and shape his utterances would take. It is in this respect that Olson saw the act of writing as a dynamic action of the individual. Like Fenollosa whom he cited in this essay, Olson saw art as an active process that did not merely describe, but enacted the energy and vitality of one's feelings and perceptions.

The significance of "Projective Verse" was that it reasserted man as not only subject but an object of nature and, as such, this essay posited a stance toward reality on the part of the poet that stressed a proprioceptive awareness that was apparent in the use of language, rhythm, and structure within the projectivist poem. The rhythm of the breath unit Olson discussed related to an actual physical activity. Using his physicality, his breath, as measure, man could then regard his dimensions in such terms. As a result, Olson believed, man's very contents, his conception of himself and the matters he would turn to for the subject of this poetry, would change according to his recognized dimensions, and the content of his life would be regained. Olson summed up this psychic stance in the following manner:

> It comes to this: the use of a man, by himself and thus by others, lies in how he conceives his relation to nature, that force to which he owes his somewhat small existence. If he sprawl, he shall find little to sing but himself, and shall sing, nature has such paradoxical ways, by way of artificial forms outside himself. But if he stays inside himself, if he is

> contained within his nature as he is participant in a larger force, he will be able to listen, and his hearing through himself will give him secrets objects share. And by an inverse law his shapes will make their own way. It is in this sense that the projective act, which is the artist's act in the larger field of objects, leads to dimensions larger than the man. For a man's problem, the moment he takes speech up in all its fullness, is to give his work his seriousness, a seriousness sufficient to cause the thing he makes to try to take its place alongside the things of nature. This is not easy. Nature works from reverence, even in her destruction (species go down with a crash). But breath is man's special qualification as an animal. Sound is a dimension he has extended. Language is one of his proudest acts. And when a poet rests in these as they are in himself (in his physiology, if you like, but the life in him, for all that) then he, if he chooses to speak from these roots, works in that area where nature has given him size, projective size.[9]

Viewed projectively then, the poem becomes an act based on this psychic stance and perception. Just as Olson felt that a human life was the dynamics of the expression of this possibility, so art or poetry was the dynamics of this human form of expression. A further evidence of Olson's stance toward reality was expressed more thoroughly in The Special View of History and his essay, "Human Universe."

The psychic stance Olson proposed in The Special View of History was based upon the premise of viewing history as a function of the individual: that is, how man regarded reality, the "known." "History is the intensity of the life process—its life value," Olson wrote, "By this I do not mean to imply any imparted value, whether moral, aesthetic or intellectual; the life value is simply conditioned by its determining power, which is manifested in definite historical operations (effects). And

of course, taking it this way, I do not at all mean that history is a force."[10]

"Function" is how a thing acts, Olson believed. There was a "natural proper or characteristic action of anything," which was its function. History is that function of a human life, the "how" of how a human acts or functions. Thus history, as employed by Olson, was "a concept denoting intensity or value."[11]

History, as Olson saw it, was the context of a life, and the goal of history was to view man, to define him within his own context that would yield a successful concept of his dimensions—how man regarded himself. Feeling that man had lost the proper sense of himself, Olson quoted Heraclitus in the forward to his book: "Man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar."[12] This estrangement was from the awareness of his (man's) own dimensions, his humanity. Olson believed that the proper method of historical inquiry was not to interpret, but to expose. Olson used as his reference point the method of inquiry and the definition of history by the Greek historian, Herodotus. The term used by Herodotus to define history was 'istorin, which Olson translated as "to find out for oneself."[13] Or, as Olson phrased it in a poem:

> I would be an historian as Herodotus was, looking
> for oneself for the evidence of
> what is said.[14]

The two concepts that pertain to this historical stance Olson propagated are value and use. Value is to use energy, to be aware of the intensity of the life-process. Use relates to the

method of knowing, discovery, and inquiry. Olson believed that the conditions of an active, willful life were for man to act and thereby define himself. Olson felt that the "human universe" was the universe of man (just as history was his reality), but man also belonged to the laws of nature, which are independent from human laws. The dilemma of a man's life, according to Olson (and similarly asserted by Williams), was that man is both subject and object, both "the instrument of discovery and the instrument of definition."[15]

There were, Olson believed, two kinds of estrangement having to do with man as subject and object, and these factors denoted the major qualities which made a man "human." For Olson there were four factors or conditions which defined this sense of humanity: "ourself as nature, man, civilized, and proceeding forward at a rapid rate of culture."[16] The first factor, man as object of nature, was defined by Olson as "object in field of force declaring self as force because is force in exactly such relation and can accomplish expression of self as force by conjecture."[17] This means, simply, man is an object of nature (the "field of force" of the "life-force") "declaring self as force" (actively using his will to assert his own "life-force"). "Civilized" means to regard man within the context of his own species. Man "proceeding forward at a rapid rate of culture" relates to the condition of flux (man as continuously changing in time). And man as "man" (as human) means to underline, once again, the "natural and characteristic action"—his human function.

As Olson defined these factors he saw no opposition between nature and man—one of the two types of estrangement he noted (the estrangement having to do with a man as object). The other type of estrangement comes under man as subject; that is, man as proper subject of his own life, or how man has come to regard himself. Man as human, "civilized," and "proceeding forward at a rapid rate of culture" is the familiar, because these three factors are all aspects of the one unique power, the determinative that isolates a human being from any other creature or thing of the earth. Thus man acts to determine his life, and this capacity is what makes him uniquely human. He creates a civilization and culture all within the context of his own species, creating it from the concept he has of himself. Man makes history from what he knows, what he is familiar with.

At the same time, Olson believed, a man does not act but is also a function of nature. Man is an object who is "both the boundary and the door, both in and out."[18] So man as object is also an imperative of the familiar. Olson noted that one type of estrangement was the notion that either man and nature are in conflict and struggle (the belief that man must "tame" nature to his service), or that man is at the mercy of nature (man is always invaded or intruded upon). In both cases, he felt, the familiar, or the truth of man's relationship to nature, is disregarded.

History (in the sense that it is what man <u>does</u>) is an imperative and, as such, was viewed by Olson as the subjective

imperative (just as man as object of nature is the objective imperative.) What man does by acting from the stance he holds, the knowledge and conception of himself he has inherited, is to misdirect his energies and estrange himself further from the truth of what he is, according to Olson. Man's estrangement from his proper context has worked to take away from him the "dimension of the familiar." The subjective imperative has been misdirected to the point where man regards himself as isolated or empty, a being who does not belong. Man, Olson believed, is empty because his life is empty of content, which is coherence and focus.

The result of the objective and subjective estrangements was a stance that did not yield a regard of human dimensions that was creatively useable and acceptable for Olson. Living in estrangement from this dimension of the human, from the "proper and characteristic function" of oneself, did not allow a man the possibility to function dynamically. Such a stance toward reality served only to disengage man from the "familiar," from the reality of what he is.

Man acts from what he knows, from the regard he has for himself, Olson believed. He felt that it was possible in our present time to cease to be estranged from ourselves because science had especially reaffirmed and defined our condition. The two major theories which had a direct bearing on the new way we, as humans, could come to regard ourselves, according to Olson, were Einstein's theory of relativity, and Heisenberg's uncertainty

principle. Olson felt that these two theories gave back to man his proper dimension and reaffirmed the methodology by which man could act in a positive context.

Olson believed that the two above-mentioned theories reaffirmed John Keats' notion of Negative Capability, which asserted a new view of man as center (man being the center point where his subjective imperative—his history—coincided with the objective imperative—that he is also an object of nature). Ideas previous to Keats had stressed man as the center of experience, but in such a way that it was man's capacity for reason that gave meaning to his life. This notion, Olson felt, was a further estrangement because it meant always seeking explanation and, consequently, engaging in contemplation instead of acting directly.

To seek explanation was quite different from knowing, as Olson saw it. Knowing, for Olson, meant to become reacquainted with the familiar. On the other hand, seeking explanation, the "rational activity," meant undoing the paradox, removing the mystery from experience, and consequently making the familiar ordinary. Thus Keats' statement on Negative Capability gave Olson a methodology he could apply to experience:

> Brown and Dilke walked with me back from the Christmas pantomime. I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, and at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is, when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason—Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the

> Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge.[19]

Relativity and uncertainty are two notions that are similar to Keats' Negative Capability because they define the conditions of life as uncertain, asserting that there are no absolutes, just value itself. By recognizing the condition of uncertainty and relativity, Olson believed it was possible to regain a direct apprehension of the familiar "without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." These notions placed man back within the dimension of flux, back to the idea that his life is a "process." It was in this sense that Olson saw history as ceasing to be static, becoming instead prospective. Value could be gathered from the past, but coherence was not to be found there. Events obtained meaning in the sense that they were prospective, that they yielded a future.

To view history in such a manner was to give man back the possibility of acting from a proper regard and dimension of himself. To end the estrangement, to have the familiar known, meant to reassert the mystery. Consequently, Olson took the dictionary definition of humanism ("a mode or attitude of thought or action centering upon distinctively human interests or ideals") and offered a new definition which appeared in his essay, "Human Universe." Olson believed that the dictionary definition of humanism was the inherited formula or belief that had brought about man's estrangement from the objective imperative. This inherited humanism dealt with man seeing himself strictly as subject, or "the notion of himself as the center of phenomenon by fiat or of

god as the center and man as god's chief reflection. . .(the trouble) is that both set aside nature as an unadmitted or suppressed third party."[20]

What Olson actually proposed in his new definition of humanism was an end to the notion of man as a being removed from the very world he inhabits by false conceptions of his humanity which place him a notch above the rest of "creation." The long-accepted notion that external reality is only important in the sense that it is merely the substance man takes in and to which he gives importance by the process of internalization was singled out for criticism by Olson. The belief that the "soul" of man is something that stands apart, being the internal reality that selects and orders the external, chaotic world of nature was similarly refuted. Olson stressed that it was incorrect to separate man's inner energies from the direct, physical way he apprehended the world. He urged a proprioceptive awareness of this physical reality: "what happens at the skin is more like than different from what happens within."[21] This proprioceptive stance encompassed the belief that man's objective ("at the skin") apprehension of reality was no different from the subjective apprehension ("what happens within"), a view that regarded man within the undifferentiated dimension which merged his physiognomy with his intellect.

Olson believed that each man made his own special and unique selection from the field of phenomena, thereby creating his own personality (his personal history). By being "active"

and "willful," by living his life and enacting the kinetic of it, man made his history. The full circuit, the "process" of a man's life, was that man took from the external world and gave back to it. At the same time, if he had no regard for his responsibility as a human being, he was in danger of severing himself from the world at the direct point where he encountered it: "The meeting edge of man and the world is also his cutting edge."[22] The alternative to estrangement, the recognition of the subjective and objective imperatives as equal forces, gave man back the dimension of the familiar so that his present energy could provide a regard of himself that was useable. This was to live according to the conditions of one's humanity, which Olson perceived in the following way:

> If man is active, it is exactly here where experience comes in that it is delivered back, and if he stays fresh at the coming in he will be fresh at his going out. If he does not, all that he does inside his house is stale, more and more stale as he is less and less acute at the door. And his door is where he is responsible to more than himself. Man does influence external reality. . . . If man chooses to treat external reality any differently than as part of his own process, in other words as anything other than relevant to his own inner life, then he will use it otherwise. He will use it just exactly as he has used it now for too long, for arbitrary and willful purposes which, in their effects, not only change the face of nature but actually arrest and divert her force until man turns it even against herself, he is so powerful, this little thing. But what little willful modern man will not recognize is, that when he turns it against her he turns it against himself, held in the hand of nature as man forever is. . . .[23]

Inasmuch as Olson sought to give back to man the dimensions of the familiar in his view of history, he also desired

to recover language and reinstate it back into the action of definition and discovery. Olson saw language as possessing two aspects: "(logos) and of shout (tongue)."[24] The distinction that he made between the two was that "shout" is language as "the act of the instant," while "logos" is the "act of thought about the instant."[25] He felt "logos" (logical discourse) had initiated abstraction into our concept of language to such an extent that the other function of language, which is speech ("the act of the instant"), had been lost sight of.

For Olson, language was synonymous with action. This, he believed, was manifested by certain apprehendable laws of the "human" universe:

> In fact, by the very law of the identity of definition and discovery, who can extricate language from action? Though it is one of the first false faces of the law which I shall want to try to strike away, it is quite understandable—in the light of this identity—that the Greeks went on to declare all speculation as enclosed in the 'Universe of discourse.' It is their word, and the refuge of all metaphysicians since—as though language, too, was an absolute, instead of (as even man is) instrument, and not to be extended, man and language, is in the hands of: what we share, and which is enough, of power and of beauty, not to need an exaggeration of words, especially that spreading one, 'universe.' For discourse is hardly such, or at least only arbitrarily a universe. In any case, so extended (logos given so much more of its part than live speech), discourse has arrogated to itself a good deal of experience which needed to stay put—needs now to be returned to the only two universes which count, the two phenomenal ones, the two a man has need to bear on because they bear so on him: that of himself, as organism, and that of his environment, the earth and planets.[26]

Discourse, then, partitioned reality (just as the traditional view of history fragmented and estranged man). Olson's desire

was to repossess language of its dynamic, to recognize the instance and source of its conception.

This stance toward reality that Olson put forward was derived, partly, from a discussion of the proprioceptive impulse by D. H. Lawrence in his "Introduction to New Poems." In this brief essay Lawrence suggested a need for a new kind of poetry—a poetry that dealt with the matters at hand, a poetry of the immediate present in which the moment, the instant, "the incarnate Now" was supreme.[27] Lawrence also believed that free verse, this "new" poetry, had to be the "direct utterance from the instant, whole man. It is the soul and the mind and body surging at once, nothing left out."[28] This integration of the mind and the body suggested by Lawrence is paralleled by Olson in his statement that the laws of the "human universe" posited man as both subject and object. The subjective (the mind of a man—his intellect) had to exist equally with the objective (his actual place in the world by virtue of his physicality). Lawrence, like Olson, felt this necessity of merging the physiognomy with the intellect in the form of the poem.

Therefore, the definitions of "free-verse" by Lawrence and "open-verse" by Olson and Creeley were similar. Lawrence wrote:

> . . .in free verse we look for the insurgent naked throb of the instant moment. To break the lovely form of metrical verse, and to dish up the fragments as a new substance, called vers libre, this is what most of the free-versifiers accomplish. They do not know that free verse has its own nature, that it is neither star nor pearl, but instantaneous like plasma. . . .The utterance is like a spasm,

> naked contact with all influence at once. It does not want to get anywhere. It just takes place.[29]

This statement by Lawrence certainly suggests Olson's own statement on "field composition." Lawrence's phrase about the poem establishing a "'naked contact with all influence at once" was echoed by Olson in "Projective Verse" where he suggested that the perceptions of the poet must move "instanter, on another" as one's mind and feelings make contact with the everchanging reality of the world.

Likewise, Lawrence's statement that the poet's utterance was "instantaneous. . .like a spasm" was picked up by Olson when he differentiated between "logos" and "shout." Olson's idea of "shout" as poetic language that is an "act of the instant" was anticipated by Lawrence when he wrote about the difference between the artificiality of the structure of "closed" verse as opposed to the spontaneous structure of a free verse that proceeded into form by virtue of the psychic content:

> We can get rid of the stereotyped movements and the old hackneyed associations of sound and sense. We can break down those artificial conduits and canals through which we do so love to force our utterance. . .we can see that utterance rushes out without artificial form or artificial smoothness.[30]

This last statement by Lawrence anticipated Olson's "composition by field" and his statements on the structure of the projectivist poem. In addition, Lawrence anticipated a psychic attitude or "measure" by which the immediacy of the poet's feelings and percpetions could be expressed. As a consequence, the form is not "artificial" in any sense, but rather becomes, as

Creeley suggests, a direct extension of the poet's life, feelings or "content." Olson affirmed this connection to Lawrence when he wrote:

> . . .the writing and acts which I find bear on the present job are (I) from Homer back, not forward; and (II) from Melville on, particularly himself, Dostoevsky, Rimbaud and Lawrence. These were the modern men who projected what we are and what we are in, who broke the spell. They put men forward into the post modern, the post-humanist, the post-historic, the going live present, the 'Beautiful Thing'.[31]

It is interesting to note Olson's use of "the going live present"—a typical Lawrence expression. This emphasis on the immediacy and primacy of experience was what Olson meant as the "act of the instant" and what Creeley defines as "each moment . . .(as) evidence of its own content, and all that is met with in it, is as present as anything else."[32]

Olson summarized the concerns of the projectivist poet in the following manner:

> In the work and dogmas are: (1.) How, by form, to get the content instant; (2.) what any of us are by the work on ourself, how make ourself fit instruments for use (how we augment the given—what used to be called fate); (3.) that there is no such thing as duality whether of the body and the soul or of the world and I, that the fact in the human universe is the discharge of the many (the multiple) by the one (yrself done right, whatever you are, in whatever job, is the thing—all hierarchies, like dualities, are dead ducks.[33]

In essence, Olson gives a formula in the above passages for the psychic stance that desires to integrate the subjective with the objective. The poet who honoured these precepts was, therefore, not an "inventor" of a new poetic reality, but rather someone

who acted with instead of upon the objective world of phenomena (the "given") and "augmented" or gave something of himself back to it. Olson referred to this stance in "Projective Verse" as "objectism"—the "getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego."[34] The poem was the means by which the subjective and objective could gain accord through utterance inasmuch as it became evidence "of the process of poetry as approaching truth with no other guise than itself."[35]

This "objectism" presupposed a conception of the cosmos as a place of inherent harmony and value which could be approached by the subjective mind only when it was prepared to abandon logic and react to experience at the spontaneous, physical, and emotional levels. This plea for a proprioceptive, "at-the-skin" awareness of the physical world was asserted by Olson as:

> an actual earth of value to
> construct one, from rhythm to
> image, and image is knowing, and
> knowing, Confucius says, brings one
> to the goal. Nothing is possible without
> doing it. It is where the test lies, malgre
> all thought and all the pell-mell of
> proposing it. Or thinking it out or living it
> ahead of time.[36]

According to Creeley, this proprioceptive stance that Olson assumed in his poetics made evident the content of "any man as literal experience in and of his body—not a 'psychology' (which he feels on 'the surface' merely) but the data, a depth sensibility/ the 'body' of us as object which spontaneously or of its own order produces experience of, 'depth'."[37] Creeley, reflecting back on the importance of Olson's "Projective Verse" when it

first appeared, sees this essay as a pivotal turning-point for modern poetry because it admitted the possibility of verse as an "open-field" whereby the poem's technique could reflect the psychic concern that the poet makes evident. Creeley, who began his correspondence with Olson in the spring of 1950, was frustrated by the closed system of verse that then existed under the regime of the New Criticism where poems were patterned upon exterior and traditionally accepted models. The excitement Creeley felt toward Olson's then only partly developed ideas on open-verse and Creeley's consequent frustration with the poetic tradition of his time is evident in the body of their correspondence. The Olson-Creeley letters are also interesting because it becomes evident that Olson was equally indebted to Creeley for many of his ideas. Finally, Olson's assumptions in the poetry and statements on poetics he forwarded to Creeley echoed a psychic stance of "a way of being in the world" that Creeley could assume.[38]

In an early letter to Olson, Creeley, who was then involved with the creation of a new literary magazine, was intensely concerned with the formulation of a "program" for the New Poetry: "I don't think we can get to an exact 'program' which will embrace with sincerity the present concerns of Williams, Pound, etc., etc. In the case of the Dr. (Williams): we come close because we take him to be a focus for these matters. But always, our own way, has to be it."[39] It is interesting to note here that Creeley, like his predecessors, rejects any notion of

a "movement" or a "formula" for writing. We see here evidence of a poetics in formulation which acknowledges the concerns of the proponents of "open-form" who held that the act of writing was a continuous process of discovery and revelation. Creeley rejects the use of any "models" because the implication is that such an activity would presume imitation of another's form. Already here Creeley is working toward the idea that the poem's form must be based upon the individual content, and since such content is always unique, the form of the poem cannot mimic a previous structure; rather, it has to be aligned with the poet's own experience and be made evident through the construct of his personal utterance.

Creeley commented on the distinction between the objective and the subjective: "What is 'objective': the fact that I sit here, forced to this typewriter and this paper: what I can put down as 'subjective' as I can make it" (OCC, Vol. I, p. 31). Here Creeley distinguishes between one's literal situation (the objective) that is allied to what one brings of oneself to bear on that event. The subjective is the "voice" that is "to be heard . . . what IS there, in any given instance" (OCC, Vol. I, pp. 38-39). The projected form of what "IS there," for Creeley, was manifested through "the emphasis. . .on 'speech' patterns. . . ." (OCC, Vo.. I, p. 39). In an early letter Creeley refers to the music of the bebop artist, Charlie Parker, and he views the statements of Parker's solos as intimate expressions of the artist's imagination. Thus, "by 'speech' patterns" Creeley means that the

form of the poem should follow the emotions as they come to be spaced on the page. Like the frenetic expressions of a jazz solo, the poet should utter language in direct conjunction to the intensity of the emotions he wishes to articulate. Creeley saw this in specific relation to Olson's preliminary notes on "Projective Verse" which he refers to as "the matter of one's own stake in the content: or what cd serve as reason," and the poetry that results "must smack of the single intelligence: must be deadcenter under the will" (OCC, Vol. I, pp. 63-64). For Creeley, this meant making one's own content (one's personality) count as equally valid as the desire to be objective. Creeley evaluates poetry as a "personal" utterance because he feels that the poet has to "make use, if possible, of what best goes with yr thinking. Yr own method of apprehension" (OCC, Vol. I, p. 67).

Creeley even criticized Williams' short stories in the early letters to Olson because he felt Williams did not really attempt anything more than documentation and thereby ignored the "transformation" that Creeley felt should occur in the work of art, which was the establishing of "the relation between you & what you're writing abt" (OCC, Vol. I, p. 68). The method by which to move into such a "transformation" and to depict the relation of the subjective criterion (the content) was expressed in Creeley's statement that "form is never more than an extension of content. An enacted or possible 'stasis' for thought" (OCC, Vol. I, p. 79), which is the first appearance of the "formula" that Olson incorporated into his "Projective Verse" essay. In this same letter

of June 5, 1950, Creeley anticipated the examples Olson gave in "Projective Verse" for the actual method by which the form should express the content. This was achieved, Creeley felt, through "the line: running, IN STASIS. . .which means no more than it: is held, in tension, the line of the intelligence as manifest by its expression" (OCC, Vol. I, p. 81).

Olson responded enthusiastically to Creeley's statement on form and content by writing that this necessary "transformation" was "a matter of ploughing in, from the man, his content (& it better be good) and forcing, always forcing on, not by way of it as statement, but it as it brings about its form" (OCC, Vol. I, p. 93). Olson intimated that the poem should not concern itself with didactic meaning (which was identical to Williams' assertion), but that it should concern itself with a sincere depiction of the subjective "presence," which is the poet's Self or personality. Creeley responded to this with a further expansion of the subjective and psychic "transformation" on the part of the poet as he attempts to relate to the world of which he is witness. Creeley saw this as "the shading between the assumption of an 'event' and the multiple 'sensings' of 'value' in it" (OCC, Vol. I, p. 95). Here, Creeley is distinguishing between simple documentation ("the assumption of an 'event'"), while at the same time anticipating Olson's statement on "the use and value of a life" in The Special View of History and "Human Universe." The "'sensings' of 'value'" become the "transformation" that occurs between subject and object—the Self and the World—which equates

to the psychic stance that is asserted by the proponents of projective poetry. Therefore, even so early in his career as a poet, Creeley sensed the meaning of "projective" as a stance whereby the poet enters into an intimate relationship with his subject matter.

This stance goes against a poetic "posture" and suggests, instead, the assumption of a "voice" that stems from one's actual physical determination of speaking. Thus the rhythms of the poem come to be based on the poet's own unique style of speaking, which directly aligns the language of the poem not to any previous form or mode of expression (like Eliot's assumption of an Elizabethan posture in some of his poems and plays), but rather with a language current to one's place and time. The parallels to Williams' sense of idiom and "measure" are apparent within this context, but Creeley, through his concept of "transformation," extends his "measure" to embrace both the technical and psychic criteria.

Creeley saw the difficulty of maintaining "a logos, a power of method, derived from (form)(from content)/that lays bare: yr center, or: of what use the document, IF: no final stripping, can be effected" (OCC, Vol. I, p. 106). To look for the content, Creeley felt one had to find its root "in the head & Self" (OCC, Vol. I, p. 118), to pay attention to one's mode of thought and to be faithful to that fact. Once again, Creeley seems to be anticipating Olson through the implication of a stance the poet takes in relation to the world. In reference to the discovery of a new form, Creleey rejected innovative techniques or new methods for

their own sake because "an apparent logos in method/new/ can mean no NEW content. A man, each man, is NEW. If his method, his form IS the logic of his content: he cannot be but: NEW/ 'original'. But the changes, whatever, in an existing method, by a man coming up, will most certainly, not of necessity: mean: new content" (OCC, Vol. I, p. 118). Content is, therefore, the awareness that the poet is working deliberately with his own vision. As such, the poet has to move beyond the influence of his mentors and the traditions of the past (which, in Creeley's case, meant moving beyond the influence of even Pound and Williams): "That is our function, to go beyond, in time, in reach, in the head & heart" (OCC, Vol. I, p. 119).

The original form of Olson's eventually revised "Projective Verse" essay came to Creeley in a letter dated June 21, 1950. In this letter Olson wrote:

> I have a hunch that, emotion being what it is, its control on our own breathing is such, that any of us, who will stay out in the open, in the OPEN FIELD, will, unknown to ourselves. . .declare, every so often, unawares, a base beat and flow which will, order is such a part of the law of rhythm, also declare itself (OCC, Vol. I, p. 127).

Creeley responded to this by commenting on the "breath unit" and the method of composition Olson suggested: "Well, it is the breath/what you have there. That makes the way. The head cannot shape a line more than the ear can hear" (OCC, Vol. I, p. 149). Once again, Creeley anticipated the idea that Olson articulated in "Projective Verse" of the "law of the line," which was: "The HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE/the HEART, by way of the

BREATH, to the LINE."[40] Olson based this maxim on his acknowledgment of Fenollosa's ideas set forth in The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry since, as Olson wrote to Creeley, Fenollosa was correct in assuming that the sentence was "the passage of force from subject to object" (OCC, Vol. II, p. 10). Creeley responded to Olson's outline for his "Projective Verse" essay stating, "I take it that you have got hold of the ONLY workable 'dynamic' for experiment with line" (OCC, Vol. II, p. 13).

The psychic stance that Olson posited in his letters, which was later more fully articulated in "Projective Verse," "Human Universe," and The Special View of History, was recognized by Creeley to be:

> a profitable 'attitude' for working THRU a poem, both for a potential reader or/a practising poet. I mean: under yr schema for energy, is that room, for 'building' in a poem, under hand, toward: end. It gives us a logic tight enough to hold over our material, but at the same time, cuts out of the cramping of so-called formal metrics (OCC, Vol. I, p. 14).

Creeley was against "a period wherein words were getting attention mainly as carriers of: meaning, limited, oddly, by the anti-social tag. It was a head: biz, purely" (OCC, Vol. II, p. 14). This statement by Creeley projects toward Olson's distinction between language ("shout") as "act of the instant" and "logos" as "act of thought about the instant." It is a plea to make the language of the poem an expression of an intense feeling or emotion while asserting that the act of writing is not so much a deliberate act, but rather a spontaneous one.

Creeley's statement also recalls two other influences. The

first of these is Pound, who commented on the logic of discourse in his ABC of Reading:

> In Europe, if you ask a man to define anything, his definition always moves away from the simple things that he knows perfectly well, it recedes into an unknown region, that is a region of remoter and progressively remoter abstraction.[41]

Pound felt that this type of discourse ignored the "thing" itself, and, therefore, had no place in poetry. Creeley's affirmation of this acknowledges the debt both he and Olson felt toward their modernist predecessor. The other influence whom Creeley was later to incorporate into his sense of poetics was the German philosopher, Wittgenstein, whose statement that "meaning is use" pointed Creeley toward the recognition that language possessed an intrinsic energy that had to be realized during the act of writing. In a recent interview Creeley was asked by this writer if when he (Creeley) was putting words down on a page the form was retained as it occurred, or whether a breakup resulted in a revision on the printed page. Creeley replied that the form remained "just the same. . . the form is all accomplished in the writing."[42]

Creeley also felt that Olson's ideas in "Projective Verse" promoted an open-form poetry in which the particulars of the poet's experiences could find expression:

> The point is: that when we can come, clearly (as you already have), to such an attitude toward line, word, and base stress: we open it up, wide open/and make possible: anything/ that the head. . . can get to (OCC, Vol. II, p. 15).

However, while Creeley felt that "Projective Verse" provided a very good argument, Olson offered too little actual illustration.

What Creeley was looking for as early as June of 1950 was a line that could effectively express the content of the Self (the "head"). He recognized an essential contradiction here that he tried to resolve in his own poetry: the fact that "the clearer the head gets on a 'point', the tighter it wants to make its comment: what IS needed is an attitude that can combine, the tightness of the head/ with the actual extension possible into sounds/poetry" (OCC, Vol. II, p. 16). Using Olson's principle of Field Composition, Creeley felt the need to "tighten the poetic line: Tighten: as the act of 'precision', being right—NOT cramped" (OCC, Vol. II, p. 54). The process of "tightening" that Creeley suggests will be examined in Chapter IV which will deal with specific technical and psychic concerns Creeley applied to the construction of his poems. In addition, the concept of a minimal, reductive style that Creeley works toward will be dealt with in light of his previous statements.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

[1] George F. Butterick, ed., Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence, Vol. I. (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 159.

[2] George F. Butterick, "Creeley and Olson: The Beginning." Boundary 2, Vol. VI, No. 3: VII, No. 1 (Spring/Fall, 1978), p. 130.

[3] "Robert Creeley Interview" in The Sullen Art, edited by David Ossman (New York: Corinth Books, 1963), p. 58.

[4] Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," in Selected Writings, edited by Robert Creeley (New York: New Directions, 1966), p. 16.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ossman, The Sullen Art, pp. 59-60.

[7] Robert Creeley, "The Art of Poetry" in A Sense of Measure (London: Cape Goliard Press, 1971), p. 86.

[8] Olson, "Projective Verse," p. 17.

[9] Ibid., p. 25.

[10] Charles Olson, The Special View of History (Berkeley: Oyez, 1970), p. 18.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., p. 14.

[13] Ibid., p. 20.

[14] Charles Olson, "Letter 23 Maximus broke it," from Maximus IV, V, VI (London: Cape Goliard Press, 1968).

[15] Charles Olson, "Human Universe" in Selected Writings, edited by Robert Creeley (New York: New Directions, 1966), p. 53.

[16] Olson, The Special View of History, p. 34.

[17] Charles Olson, "Mayan Letters" in Selected Writings, edited by Robert Creeley (New York: New Directions, 1966), p. 112.

[18] Olson, The Special View of History, p. 32.

[19] John Keats, The Letters of John Keats, ed., Hyder E. Rollins (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 193-194.

[20] Olson, "Human Universe," p. 59.

[21] Ibid., p. 61.

[22] Ibid., p. 62.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., p. 53.

[25] Ibid., p. 54.

[26] Ibid.

[27] D. H. Lawrence, Selected Literary Criticism, ed. Anthony Beal (London: Heinemann Educational Books, Ltd., 1964), p. 86.

[28] Ibid., p. 87.

[29] Ibid., p. 88.

[30] Ibid., pp. 87-88.

[31] Charles Olson, "The Present is Prologue" in Additional Prose, edited by George F. Butterick (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1974), p. 40.

[32] Robert Creeley, A Quick Graph (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1970), p. 188.

[33] Olson, "The Present is Prologue," p. 39.

[34] Olson, "Projective Verse," p. 24.

[35] Charles Olson, Poetry and Truth: The Beloit Lectures and Poems, transcribed and edited by George F. Butterick (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1971), p. 15.

[36] Charles Olson, The Maximus Poems: Volume Three, edited by Charles Boer and George F. Butterick (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1975), p. 190.

[37] Creeley, A Quick Graph, p. 193.

[38] Ibid., p. 178.

[39] George F. Butterick, ed., Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence, Vol. I (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 25. All subsequent page references to this edition are given in parentheses after the quotations as they appear in the text.

When necessary to identify from which volume a quotation is taken, the following abbreviations will be used:

OCC, Vol. I: Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence, Vol. I

OCC, Vol. II: Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence, Vol. II

[40] Olson, "Projective Verse," p. 19.

[41] Ezra Pound, ABC of Reading (New York: New Directions, 1934), p. 19.

[42] Zsolt S. Alapi, ed., "Interview with Robert Creeley" in Atropos, Vol. I, No. 1 (Spring, 1978), p. 28.

CHAPTER IV

FORM AND CONTENT: THE OPEN-VERSE OF PIECES

The integration of subject and object and an open-form poetry came about partially as a reaction to the "tradition" on the part of Olson and Creeley. Creeley believed that the New Criticism and the legacy of the poetry of the 1940s were responsible for an "insistence upon an idea of form extrinsic to the given instance."[1] He felt that the proponents of an open-form acknowledged the psychic stance of Olson in their poetry wherein the particulars of one's own experiences concerned the poet who wished to acknowledge the possibilities of his own life. As such, the Heideggerian assumption of the "condition of reality"[2] became the poet's primary concern. As Creeley wrote:

> The point seems that we cannot, as writers—or equally as readers—assume such content in our lives, that all presence is defined as a history of categorical orders. If the nature of the writing is to move in the field of its recognitions, the 'open field' of Olson's "Projective Verse", for example, then the nature of the life it is demands a possibility which no assumption can anticipate.[3]

This promotes a sense of reality that is both literally "objective" and "subjective." One holds to the objective reality of the world outside of the Self, but it is equally important to note the significance of one's emotional, subjective content when encountering this "other" reality. For "either one acts in an equal sense—becomes the issue of a term 'as real as real can be' —or else there is really nothing to be said."[4] In a letter dated the 9th of July, 1950, Creeley wrote to Olson on his views of

objectivity, feeling that it should not be a disassociation of the Self from the content. Rather, to be objective meant, for Creeley, "to be 'subjective' that the possession of content (as it pertains to the 'outside') is complete enough for the poet to hand over. . . ." This premise leads to a sincerity in the way the content is handed over, which is "the intention/as belief: to be as subjective as is possible; abt any thing which the attention finds. Subjective describes a man's grip on what IS acting upon him, as opposed to the 'what IS acting,' minus such comprehension—that being, in short: the objective."[5]

Similarly, Olson's proposition of subjectivity and objectivity was based on the premise that: "Energy is larger than man, but therefore if he taps it as it is in himself, his uses of himself are EXTENSIBLE in human directions and degree not previously granted."[6] Thus, for both Creeley and Olson the poem came to exist not as the compiling of data to present an idea, but rather as the interaction of the subjective mind that encounters the physical reality of the objective world. As Warren Tallman points out:

> Creeley spends less time thinking 'thoughts' more time thinking 'the world'. By 'thoughts' I mean ideas, wisdoms, meanings, beliefs, and imply a criticism of poets who do only this as though such . . .were the whole of life. By the 'world' I mean the always arriving, occurring, departing relationships which surround each man as he moves. . .[7]

In discussing his two greatest influences—Williams and Olson—Creeley writes that Williams "engaged language at a level both familiar and active to my own senses, and made of his poems an intensively <u>emotional</u> perception. . ."[8] Williams, as well as

Oppen and Zukofsky, made clear to Creeley the role of the poet in relation to the object of his perception:

> No wonder that I've never forgotten Williams' contention that 'the poet thinks with his poems, in that lies his thought, and that in itself is the profundity. . . .' Poems have always had this nature of revelation for me, becoming apparently objective manifestations of feelings and thoughts otherwise inaccessible.[9]

According to these assessments of Williams by Creeley, the form of the poem had to depict the emotional content of the poet's involvement with his subject matter:

> In poetry the attentions can come to govern, as a man might govern by what he loves or despises, or what number of things his hands can hold. Seeing the thing, even so it remains outside him until he can give it substance in the multiple involvement—which means only that he and the thing, and the possibility which has no limit; can coexist in a form which it is his own responsibility to effect.[10]

Both Williams and Olson made evident to Creeley that writing could be an intensely specific revelation of one's own content. Creeley admired the fact that Olson attempted to go beyond the idea or attitude of humanity to an actually explicit experience or humanness that would be depicted through the emotional intensity of the poetic line. Creeley wrote:

> I am most impressed that, in Olson's writing, these several measures of human terms are adamant: 1.) that the instant in human time and/or all that can be so felt must be so present, or else cannot exist; 2.) that human content and possibility are the issue of acts and are only absolute in that finiteness. . . .[11]

Creeley's insistence on human "time" suggests his belief that poems are a "complex" of the encounter of the subjective mind with the objective world. Thus, the poet is a "transmitter" of reality and

the form of his utterance must be rooted in his own individual content. Creeley asserted this in a letter to Olson when he spoke about his role as a writer:

> I am not in any sense a moralist, more than I can be, a transmitter, thru which work: forces, moral or otherwise. I ask only that exactness, that the words keep with the head/as that carries thru, to consciousness, what charge the emotions are capable of. The complex. To that, to only that, should any art commit itself. It is to have no hesitance between what the head is thinking & the hand is putting down. To force that coupling. To NOT avoid.[12]

The "coupling" of the "head" (the mind) and the "hand" (the actual act of writing, as opposed to the formulation of ideas) suggests that Creeley already felt so early in his career as a poet (August, 1950) that writing had to be what Olson called an "act of the instant." "The act of writing," Creeley wrote to Olson, "belies the conclusion which it might get to—because it is when I've finished, that it all occurs to me, what might have been done."[13] It is interesting to note that Creeley felt that writing was an act of discovery of the Self and that the premise of "open-verse" and the concept of the continuous poem was articulated by Creeley so early in his career.

It is important to note the consistency of Creeley's poetics as evidenced by his letters, interviews, and essays. It demonstrates a firm belief in the psychic criterion that underlies the poetic principles of both Creeley and Olson—principles that Olson seemed to bypass or disregard in the body of his writing. Creeley, on the other hand, retains as the "subject" of his poetry the struggle of his attempts to merge the subjective and the

objective—the form and content—within the poem. Ann Mandel points out the seeming contradiction of Creeley's quest:

> He (Creeley) discloses, in the clear unshadowed light of an exacerbated consciousness, a sensibility of tensions, cares, apprehensions. Here is a man who, prizing grace and clarity, suffers an unsure body, a voice stumbling towards lucidity through syntax; who, wanting to be all he can for those he loves, knows, too in despair, his own anger and wilfullness; who, admiring largeness, openness, nakedness to the world, feels he is closed in his own small forms, habits of being, isolation.[14]

What follows will be an analysis of Creeley's middle and later period as a poet through an investigation of Creeley's "voice" and his method of articulation throughout these poems.

In talking about Creeley's "voice" it is important to consider his own statement to Olson about his own unique style of "talking" which extends to his method of writing poetry: "I had been brought up in the country, on a farm, and the language, the way I speak: is, or has to do with, that slowness & slow laps say, around a center."[15] This technique of using language to circumlocute an issue, to depict a hesitancy and uncertainty, is immediately apparent in reading a Creeley poem. In addition to accurately depicting the emotional state of the poet (his uncertainty, awkwardness, as well as occasional emotional intensity), this technique of presenting an accurate, individual voice forwards the concept of a physical determination for one's way of speaking in verse. It is a technique Creeley noted in Williams' sense of "measure" and Olson's method of "field composition"; but it is, primarily, an original device on Creeley's part that has been much imitated and has greatly influenced many young,

contemporary poets.

Creeley's "voice" from his earliest poems to his present works is centered around his belief that language should be non-referential, since this would reduce the communicative meaning of words to where "they (i.e., the words) speak rather than someone speaking with them," returning them "to an almost objective state of presence."[16] This desire to remain "objective" in his statements creates the tension in much of Creeley's verse, a tension that is stressed between the poet's subjective Self (the mind or ego) and his desire to maintain the objective, psychic imperative in his writing.

Creeley articulated this tension in his early poetry through the use of aphorisms. His distrust of the Self, of subjectivity and the tricks of the mind, is apparent in an early poem, "The Kind of Act Of," where he writes: "The mind/ beside the act of any dispossession is/ lecherous."[17] Creeley feels that the mind and the ego stand in the way of an encounter with the intrinsic reality of the "thing"—a stance he shares with the early Imagists and Williams. As such, he is interested in phenomena, and an early passage in "The Immoral Proposition"—"to look at it is more/ than it was" (For Love, p. 31) suggests the Heideggerian "dasein" that posits the necessity of an objective encounter between the "thing" and the Self.

The limitations of the mind and self-enclosure become consequent themes throughout Creeley's poetry. This is already apparent in an early poem, "La Noche," where he draws a parallel

between the moon (an objective reality) and the Self: "The moon is/ locked in itself, to/ a man a/ familiar thing" (For Love, p. 50). Interestingly, this early poem anticipates the more complex discussion of isolation in the poem, "The Moon," from Pieces.

One of the most compelling instances of Creeley's struggle not to yield to the "lecherous" activity of the mind occurs in an early poem, "The Name" (For Love, p. 144). In this poem Creeley begins by urging his daughter to:

> Be natural
> wise
> as you can be

The sense of his subjective identity, his name, is objectified by Creeley in an effort to demonstrate the uniqueness of his child:

> let my name
> be in you flesh
> I gave you
> in the act of
>
> loving your mother

The child was conceived through the act of love ("sensuality's measure"), not through the mind's formulation: "there was no thought/ of it but such/ pleasure all women/ must be in her,/ as you."

Finally, the poet urges the child to simply "be" and not to indulge in analysis and self-reflection:

> Let the rhetoric
> stay with me
> your father. Let
>
> me talk about it,
> saving you such
> vicious self-
> exposure, let you

pass it on
in you. I cannot
be more than the man
who watches.

The poet acknowledges two things: (1.) a desire to spare his child from the pain of "vicious self-exposure" since he hopes that the Self she possesses will not be awkwardly distorted by the same kind of self-consciousness the poet indulges in, and (2.) that the child's "inheritance" will be simply the gift of life the parents gave to it and not the excess baggage of guilt, doubts, and obligations. While this poem has certain Romantic overtones, especially in that its sentiment makes us recall Blake's "Infant Joy," the final three lines reflect the struggle that Creeley is depicting. The admission that he cannot be more than someone "who watches" has dual connotations. First, we see it as a moment of pathos where the parent realizes that he cannot do more than observe its offspring grow up and cannot spare it the trials of life to which it will become subjected. Also, more important, is the admission of a person (the poet) who can oftentimes only be an observer of life and not a participant because of his mind and self-conscious subjectivity.

Creeley's concern with the obsessive nature of the mind is evident in his acute dissection of relationships. Words and Pieces, in particular, deal with the mind's struggle to establish relationships not only on a personal level, but also between the Self and the "world." However, an earlier poem, "For Love" (For Love, pp. 159-160), written to his second wife, Bobbie, who is also the subject of much of his later love poetry, describes this

struggle. The poem begins with the poet expressing a desire to articulate a strong emotion, insight, or inspiration he had felt. However, in the present, the mind that had offered abstraction and analysis of this primary emotion now:

> . . . despairs of its own
> statement, wants to
> turn away, endlessly
> to turn away.

Trying to retrieve the experience of having felt love, the poet distorts it through the mind:

> Now love also
> becomes a reward so
> remote from me I have
> only made it with my mind.

And the mind leaves the poet with a sense of despair:

> Here is a tedium,
> despair, a painful
> sense of isolation and
> whimsical if pompous
> self-regard.

The speaker also points out that his ego, or subjective Self, has distorted the woman into the images he wishes her to become:

> Nothing says anything
> but that which it wishes
> would come true

Finally, the speaker recognizes the need to discard the tricks of the mind as he desires to regain the primary feeling of love that instigated his original mental speculation:

> Let me stumble into
> not the confession but
> the obsession I begin with
> now.

"Confession" belongs to the mind and the whole mental anguish the poet is expressing throughout this poem. "Obsession," on the

other hand, is his feelings of love for the woman, "that sense above the others" in the opening stanza. As the face of the woman fades in the last stanza, returning "into the company of love," so the original emotion and feeling of love returns, but only when there is "no/ mind left to/ say anything at all."

Creeley's next collection of poems, Words,[18] continues to expand upon the relationship of the individual mind and the external, objective world. Words, probably Creeley's most powerful collection of poems on this theme, presents what Robert Duncan called "the constant working of tangible substance and idea at tension."[19] In his preface to this collection, Creeley writes:

> Things continue, but my sense is that I have, at best, simply taken place with that fact. I see no progress in time or any other such situation. So it is that what I feel, in the world, is the one thing I know myself to be, for that instant. I will never know myself otherwise. (Words, "Preface")

This preceding quotation establishes Creeley's stance toward the activity of the mind—what Duncan called the "idea"—as it encounters the world—Duncan's "tangible substance."

The first line of Creeley's preface establishes his link to Williams' statement, "No ideas but in things." Creeley acknowledges his debt to Williams at the beginning of Words where he precedes his own poems by a quotation from Williams' poem, "To Daphne and Virginia," from the collection Pictures from Brueghel. What Creeley means by his statement in the first line is that he has sought to take his mental and emotional place next to the "things" (or essents, in Heideggarian terms) of this world. As such, the feelings or mind of the poet is not more or less than

the world of which he is a part. His "ideas," the activity of his mind and emotions, derive, rather, from the physical world he encounters. As William Sylvester pointed out:

> He (Creeley) does not say, 'Feelings are paramount,' or 'My feelings create the world.' He wants to get away from the notion that thinking is the world, but the world and thinking together provide the relationships that are themselves the motions of impartiality, relationships that are the ways everybody thinks.[20]

It is also in Words that Creeley demonstrates most successfully the unity of form and content. The poetry, at its best, demonstrates the way in which the mind moves, ponders, creates, and establishes relationships within the world. The length of Creeley's line becomes a depiction of the length of each thought with considered and deliberate pauses to harness or jolt the reader's awareness. The spacing and punctuation seem to be attempts at indicating a change in perception. The length of his lines usually indicates a tension within the mind as it struggles with the articulation of the feelings and ideas. The content or theme of the poetry in Words has to do with the destructive activities of the thinking mind. As Cynthia Dubin Edelberg pointed out in her critical study of Creeley's poetry:

> . . .the poems about thinking are filled with frustration and anxiety as well; but in this volume the problems associated with contemplative thought have little to do with the poet's expressed sense of inadequacy and a great deal to do with the limitations peculiar to thought itself.[21]

This "limitation" of thought is addressed by Creeley in the opening poem of the collection, "The Rhythm":

the mind in men
personal, recurring
in them again,
thinking the end

is not the end. . . .

(Words, p. 19)

In these lines Creeley is making a general statement about the human mind that refuses to accept its own finiteness and limitations. The poem works, finally, toward a recognition or resolution:

The little children
grow only to old men.
The grass dries,
the force goes.

But is met by another
returning, oh not mine,
not mine, and
in turn dies.

(Words, p. 20)

The only moment of personal, emotional interjection is offered in the lines: ". . .oh not mine,/ not mine. . . ." However, Creeley integrates this moment of recognition very skillfully by keeping the statement within the rhythmic structure of the poem. It is only through the use of the word "oh" that there is a break in the form of the verse. And this break is reintegrated within the poem by the persistent drone of the final lines: ". . .and/ in turn dies."

The limitations of the "mind" are further exposed in the poem, "Walking":

In my head I am
walking but I am not
in my head, where

is there to walk,
not thought of, is
the road itself more

than seen. I think
it might be, feel
as my feet do, and

continue, and
at last reach, slowly
one end of my intention.

(Words, p. 36)

The form of this particular poem, which is that of a run-on sentence up to the first line of the third stanza, articulates the conflict between the mind in which the poet is locked (the "head") and his proprioceptive awareness of his physical determination in the real world ("not thought of"). The poet expresses a desire to cease thinking, to "feel/ as my feet do. . ." and, therefore, reach the "end of. . .intention." It is this persistence, this "intention" of the mind that Creeley chooses to disregard, thus aligning himself with Olson and the projectivists who sought to become not observers but participants in the immediacy of the moment.

The "intentions" of the mind, as Creeley declares, lead to a type of stasis that he reveals in "The Measure":

I cannot
move backward
of forward.
I am caught
in the time
as measure.
What we think
of we think of—
of no other reason
we think than
just to think—
each for himself.

(Words, p. 45)

The use of the term "measure" in the title recalls Creeley's debt to William Carlos Williams, except for the fact that Creeley uses the term ironically. The psychic "measure" that Williams referred to in his poetics had to do with a poetic stance that incorporated both the subjective and the objective criteria. As a result, the poet entered the "open field" of experience, not confined within the stasis of self-absorption or reflection. In Creeley's poem, however, the poet is ". . .caught/ in the time/ as measure" precisely because of this aspect of the mind. The fact that the mind plays these futile games that bring about this stasis is divulged by Creeley when he presents the circular way we "think":

> What we think
> of we think of—
>
> of no other reason
> we think than
> just to think—

This pernicious nature of the mind is asserted in the beginning of the poem, "The Pattern":

> As soon as
> I speak, I
> speaks. It
>
> wants to
> be free but
> impassive lies
>
> in the direction
> of its
> words.
>
> (Words, p. 49)

The second "I" to "speak" is the overbearing ego that becomes the "it" of the third line. The slothful nature of this "Self" is illustrated by the image of inactivity: "impassive lies." In

addition, Creeley is making a comment about the paradoxical nature of the mind that "wants to/ be free" but whose nature consists of simply speaking the words instead of acting upon them. As such, "patterns" of the mind are, according to Creeley, all too predictable and, consequently, words fail to convey an active sense of reality since they merely mimic the static intentions of thought.

The mind, because it is static, prevents communion between the Self and the world, according to Creeley. In his dissection of relationships Creeley illustrates this distancing that occurs between himself and the woman who is the object of his love. Appropriately entitled "Distance," this poem demonstrates the awkwardness of the poet who seeks, in his mind, to approach the object of his love:

> But what
>
> were you, where,
> one thought, I
> was always
>
> thinking. The
> mind itself,
> impulse, of form
>
> last realized,
> nothing
> otherwise but
>
> a stumbling
> looking after, a
> picture
>
> of light through
> dust on
> an indeterminate distance
>
> (Words, pp. 69-70)

From the clarity of the image in the opening stanzas where the woman is a "form" like ". . .the warmth/ as sun/ light. . ." the mind distorts this image by its perpetual questioning: "what/ were you, where." Finally, this very awkwardness of the mind is pointed out as being: "a stumbling/ looking after," a kind of hindsight. The images of "warmth" and "sun light" that depict the woman in the opening stanza now distort into a "picture/ of light through/ dust on/ an indeterminate distance." What has once been concrete, tangible, and immediate is transformed by the mind into something distorted and ephemeral. At the poem's conclusion, the "forms" that the mind has created—the desire imposed by the ego or Self upon the actual, physical world of substance—arrange reality to suit their own needs, creating the distance:

> pushing
> the flesh aside,
> step in-
>
> to my own,
> my longing
> for them.
> (Words, p. 73)

After repeatedly pointing out the limitations of the contemplative mind Creeley, near the end of Words, presents a resolution or acceptance of the previous dilemma. In the poem "TO BOBBIE" (Words, pp. 97-98), Creeley expresses the desire to be ". . .rid of/ these confusions." Yet he acknowledges the omnipresence and pervasiveness of the mind: "In my mind, as/ ever, you occur," even though he immediately continues with a physical description of his wife in the effort to avoid cerebral speculation.

The poem's conclusion is a resolve to accept that external reality is as valid as the reality of the mind, the internal world:

> . . .The world
> is the trees, you,
>
> I cannot change it,
> the weather
> occurs, the mind
> is not its only witness.
>
> (Words, p. 98)

However, Creeley, by accepting the validity of the mind's reality as well as its limitations, also acknowledges the importance of language (of "words") as referents in the same sense that Zukofsky and Oppen referred to the use of language in their poetics. Thus, Creeley writes in "Enough":

> It is possible, in words, to speak
> of what has happened—a sense
>
> of there and here, now
> and then. It is some other
>
> way of being, prized enough,
> that it makes a common
>
> ground.
>
> (Words, p. 122)

Creeley's open stance in this poem anticipates the form and content of Pieces. He is acknowledging the distance the mind creates, yet he is affirming the very reality of the mind from which it is impossible to escape, particularly in section 6 of the poem:

> You
> there, me
>
> here, or is it
> me
>
> there, you
> here—there

or there
or here—and here.

In two
places, in two

pieces
I think
(Words, p. 126)

In section 7 Creeley moves back to the physical reality as he describes the woman's body:

Your body
is a white

softness, it has
its own

place time
after time
(Words, p. 127)

So tentative within his own physicality in the seventh section, the poet comes to a proprioceptive awareness in section 8:

I vow my life to respect it.
I will not wreck it.

I vow to yours to be
enough, enough, enough.
(Words, p. 127)

Creeley's desire to accept the physical equally with the emotional or mental demonstrates his capitulation to Olson's stance regarding "field composition." Creeley, in Words, moves to a position outside of the strict confines of the mind (so much in evidence in his earlier poems) where he can be "open" to experience that does not stem strictly or relatively from his Self. The mind and the body are ready to cohere and walk together, albeit awkwardly, as Creeley writes in "A Tally" near the close of Words:

> Within the world, this one, many quirks
> accomplished, effected, in the thought,
> 'I don't know how, I only live here,
> with the body I walk in.
>
> (Words, p. 140)

The idea of "field composition" can be best understood by an examination of Creeley's collection Pieces,[22] which illustrates the idea of open-form poetics that Arthur Ford discusses:

> A central point in understanding what Creeley finds in Olson and therefore what he thinks happens when poetry is made is the notion that time stands still in a poem, both in its creation by the poet and its recreation by the reader or listener. The poem, both men assert, is not something that proceeds through time from point to point or from image to image but is rather something composed of parts forming a whole, the whole poem being the form that the experience-on-poet demands. The line is there as a physical unit of measure, physical as breathing is physical and intimate as speaking is intimate, with the rhythmic patterns of those lines (based on the syllable) determined by the intelligence and feeling of the poet. The poet then for Creeley works upon a 'field' as defined by Olson, rather than through sequence and consequence. Olson said that the poem should proceed from perception to perception, but for Creeley the poem usually consists of one perception given in a delicate point of suspended time.[23]

The first idea that Ford presents which is pertinent to Pieces is his statement that "the poem. . .is rather something composed of parts forming a whole, the whole poem being the form that the experience-on-poet demands." Certainly the structure and the narrated experience of Pieces relate to the idea that the poet is offering "pieces" of experience and, as a result, is himself enacting a discovery about the nature of perception. Instead of each poem presenting a completed, closed unit, the poems in Pieces move in bits and units of experience. With the exception of certain poems like "The Finger" and "The Moon," the poems in Pieces

must be read together providing the conclusion that an overview of Creeley's purpose can only be gained after the whole book is assimilated.

In writing Pieces Creeley was definitely influenced by Louis Zukofsky's long, on-going poem "A" and most probably by George Oppen's short collection of poems, Discrete Series, written between 1932-1934. Creeley acknowledges his debt to Zukofsky in his dedication of Pieces to the older poet, and the idea and structure of the collection recalls Zukofsky's statement in his essay, "An Objective," that the poem should be something that occurs as ". . .the detail, not mirage of seeing, of thinking with the things as they exist, and of directing them along a line of melody."[24] It is especially apparent in Pieces that Creeley's experiences as a writer could exist as fragments or clusters of words denoting feelings or emotional states so that, literally, the reader is given "pieces" of experiences. Therefore, Creeley reveals to the reader the idea that Olson suggested in his statements on "field composition" that the poem was an on-going experience in the same manner of life as a process, an idea that Olson had arrived at after reading Alfred North Whitehead's Process and Reality.

The second point that Arthur Ford presents, the idea of ". . .the whole poem being the form that the experience-on-poet demands," becomes important precisely when understood in terms of the nature of the poet's intention in writing the poem. In poetry that is not "open" we have, as Ford states, the poet working through "sequence and consequence" all in an attempt to

demonstrate a statement of intent. However, as Creeley states regarding his own method of "field composition" in Pieces:

> . . .rather than thus write a book like Pieces in some disposition to 'get at' reality and say this-this-and-this is the point, I think far more useful to me in writing it was to let it move in daily economies of experience and let those effectually accumulate and discover what they seemed to be about, which was after all my life. That book also discovers a coherence that I couldn't have given it by intention alone.[25]

As one can gather from this statement, the only "deliberate" act becomes the crafting of the poem while the "intention" is the life-experience of the poet as this comes to be reflected in the language. This willingness to leave the Self open to experience seems to be at the very heart of "open-form" poetics. This was the psychic disposition that Creeley had arrived at after the struggles between the "mind" and the objective world in For Love and Words. Pieces becomes the full consolidation of the stance worked toward by Creeley and Olson in their letters and articulated by Olson in "Projective Verse." Creeley also feels that deliberate choice can sometimes inhibit a disposition to act humanly in given situations, while concurrently life-experience can alter the usual rational disposition one can have from one moment to the next. Therefore, as Creeley states:

> The point is that one must admit to the variables of the usual, that a life situation may, at any given moment, present. One doesn't fling oneself into a situation, but rather you use all your attention and information not just to keep yourself together, but to be as responsive to what is happening as you can be.[26]

Pieces, therefore, works toward the integration of the

subjective-objective duality attempting to pick up where Words concluded—that instance of experience where the mind and the body begin to cohere. As Cynthia Dubin Edelberg pointed out:

> In Pieces, Creeley tries to bring the analytical and the intuitive into a proper balance, the result of this fusion to be a more complete and thus more valid method of ordering experience than his previous one.[27]

In the scheme of this argument we may substitute mind for "the analytical" and body or proprioceptive awareness for "the intuitive." However, Edelberg's statement about "ordering experience" is perhaps inappropriate since, as previously shown, Creeley frowns upon any "deliberate" act. Rather, Creeley declares his desire to admit "revelation and discovery" into the act of writing in the opening of Pieces:

> As real as thinking
> wonders created
> by the possibility—
>
> forms. A period
> at the end of a sentence
> which
>
> began it was
> into a present,
> a presence
>
> saying
> something as it goes.
>
> (Pieces, p. 3.)

Admitting the full possibility of the objective world ("forms"), Creeley asserts that this reality is as valid as the constructs of the mind ("as real as thinking").

The aspect of "revelation and discovery" enters into this if we establish the connection between "present" and "presence"

in the third stanza. The literary allusion ("it was") is to Louis Zukofsky who wrote that a writer "attempts not to fathom his time amount but to sounding his mind in it."[28] This is the "present" or gift that Creeley states he received from the older poet whose continuous poem, "A," Creeley used as the model for Pieces and the volumes that were to follow. Zukofsky had taught Creeley that the poet writes one continuous poem all of his life and Creeley was able to consolidate this belief with Olson's statement that writing should be an "act of the instant" (from "Human Universe") and that the poet was the "object in field of force declaring self as force" (from The Special View of History). The influence of both Zukofsky and Olson cohere in the last two stanzas. What Creeley learned from Zukofsky about the continuous poem and about "sounding his mind" in his time becomes the "present" that informs the stance and poetics of Pieces.

The "presence," on the other hand, is the Self of the poet (Creeley), but not as a subjective force that imposes intention; rather, the "object in field of force" Olson declared in his essay. Both Zukofsky and Olson determined the historical "presence" of the poet in relation to his work. Unlike Pound who attempted to "fathom his time," Zukofsky felt that the voice of the poet remained vague, at best ("saying/ something/ as it goes") simply making a statement about its perception of the world that could be passed on and, if so construed, become a "present." Similarly, Olson, by declaring man as "object of nature" in "Human Universe," deemphasized the subjective imperative that placed man outside of

the context of the world.

Like Zukofsky and Olson, Creeley asserts that his Self (the "presence") makes a statement but doesn't acknowledge that his perception is in any sense divorced from the context of the "essents" of his life. Consequently, Creeley is deliberately vague in the last stanza in order to equate the subjective with the objective. As a result, the opening of Pieces sets the tone of "wonder" in the presence of the "possibility" while the speaker of the poem becomes not the frenetic or despairing person of For Love and Words who tries to come to terms with the "mind" that seeks to impose intentions, but rather a calmer presence who, faced with the Mystery, establishes his presence (Dasein) in a world that is constantly unfolding.

The beginning of Pieces continues in this deliberately vague manner. It is as if the poet were attempting to make the "forms" of the opening passage cohere within his mind into a familiar, apprehensible shape. Even the people who come to populate the poems are at first vague substances:

> Small facts
> of eyes, hair
> blonde, face
>
> looking like a
> flat painted
> board. How
>
> opaque as if
> a reflection
> merely, skin
>
> vague glove of
> randomly seen
> colors.
>
> (Pieces, pp. 3-4)

These passages appear as if they were an almost deliberate exercise in the Imagist technique on the part of the poet. The inadequacy of this method of presentation is demonstrated through the one-dimensional aspect of the person he begins to describe whose face is "like a/ flat painted/ board" and whose skin is a "vague glove of. . .colors."

Yet if we recall Creeley's statement that "relationships are what matter" and his belief that personal feelings are necessary in the poem, we can see the irony of the method of presentation in the opening fragments. It is as if Creeley is giving the reader the bare-bones of the poem in an attempt to demonstrate that cognition, if it begins in the mind (the subjective) or outside of it (the "world" or the objective), is incomplete since the two are necessarily interrelated. Thus:

Inside
and out

impossible
locations—

reaching in
from out-

side, out
from in-

side—as
middle:

one
hand

(Pieces, p. 4)

Reading these lines we can relate them to the paraphrase of a statement by Novalis, who believed that "The seat of the soul is where inner and outer meet." Similarly, Creeley urged such a

unity as a way of seeing. The vagueness of the opening vision coheres into a material substance: the "vague glove of/ randomly seen/ colors" becomes "one/ hand"—something with which to hold the material reality. It seems at this point that the poet awakens to a fuller sense of reality where material apprehensions can become consolidated with the ephemeral and vaguer insights.

Continuing his examination of this dual nature of reality and experience, Creeley comes to an acceptance in "A Step":

> Things
> come and go
>
> Then
> let them.
> (Pieces, p. 6)

which reminds us of this same sense of acceptance of the cyclical nature of experience in "The Rhythm."

Whereas the persistence of the mind to argue and declare itself was the basis for the built-in tension within the structure of the poems in For Love and Words, Creeley here mocks this previous urgency:

> Having to—
> what do I think
> to say now.
>
> Nothing but
> comes and goes
> in a moment.
> (Pieces, p. 6)

The insistence of the mind that thinks in terms of goals and purposes is undercut in the second stanza. The fleeting nature of experience is asserted and the acceptance of the "small facts" is underscored.

The following fragments of "A Step" illustrate Creeley's concern with the mundane aspects of existence which prompted some critics to label his work as "anti-poetic." Certainly, no poetic posturing is apparent in lines like:

> Sit. Eat
> a doughnut.
>
> Love's consistency
> favors me.

or,

> Willow, the house, an egg—
> what do they make?
>
> Hat, happy, a door—
> what more.
>
> (Pieces, p. 8)

However, what is apparent in these lines is the same sense of "presence" that we can note in William Carlos Williams' "A Red Wheelbarrow" and "Poem"—a "presence" that declares itself glad to be alive and to be a participant in the activity of "being." The poet of Pieces who finds that "love" favors him is content in that moment and seems to want no more than what life has provided him with. This is apparent even in the form of the lines ("Hat, happy, a door—/ what more") where he places "happy" (a qualitative emotion) among the physical structures ("Hat," "a door") that serve as the construct of what is, essentially, a satisfactory world.

Creeley moves from the "mundanities" of "A Step" to the rather formal structure and the tapestry of allusions of "The Finger." Even though this poem had been published on its own, it is interesting that Creeley should include it at this point in

the volume. Yet its inclusion at this point is most appropriate since it is a consolidation of the themes that were declared at the start of the volume. Since Professor Edelberg has presented a rather definitive reading of this poem, particularly in terms of the voice or "hero" in this collection, there is more value in placing this poem within the context of the previous material and the overall design of Pieces.

The beginning of "The Finger" recalls the dual nature of cognition and the dichotomy of the "inner-outer" (subject-object) from the very beginning of Pieces:

> Either in or out of
> the mind, a conception
> overrides it. So that
> that time I was a stranger,
>
> (Pieces, p. 8)

In this case the "conception" that overrides the "mind" or the poet's reason is the reality (both actual and conceptual) of the woman to whom the lover's (the poet's) plea is addressed. The poet becomes subservient to the woman, declaring that his purpose is to speak of her grace and charm, a purpose that demands not his idea or conception of her, but rather a recognition of her own unique "being":

> . . .the story I
> myself knew only the way of
> but the purpose of it
>
> had one, was not mine.
>
> (Pieces, p. 9)

Yet despite this recognition, in order to speak of her he names her and places her within a mythic context, first as "Aphrodite," goddess of love, then as "Athena," and finally as the Madonna or

Virgin:

> I saw the stones thrown
> at her. I felt a radiance transform
> my hands and my face.
> I blessed her, I was one.
>
> (Pieces, p. 10)

However, the woman who is the object of veneration is also comprised of contradictions. She is at once the beatific vision of the Earth-Mother:

> She was largely warm
> flesh heavy—and smiled
> in some deepening knowledge
>
> (Pieces, p. 11)

and also a symbol of all womanhood:

> She was young,
> she was old,
> she was small.
> She was tall with
>
> extraordinary grace. Her face
> was all distance, her eyes
> the depth of all one had thought of,
> again and again and again.
>
> (Pieces, p. 12)

Ultimately, she eludes the lover:

> To approach, to hold her,
> was not possible.
> She laughed and turned
> and the heavy folds of cloth
>
> parted.
>
> (Pieces, p. 12)

and becomes her last conceptualized transformation—Kali the destroyer, the "bitch-goddess" whose laughter has turned sinister:

> . . .The nakedness
> burned. Her heavy breath,
> her ugliness, her lust—
> but her laughing, her low

chuckling laugh, the way
she moved her hand to the
naked breast, then to
her belly, her hand with its fingers.
(Pieces, p. 12)

Finally, the recognition and resolution with the object of his love appears to the poet:

The choice is simply,
I will, as mind is a finger,
pointing, as wonder
a place to be.
(Pieces, p. 12)

And upon this recognition the poet arrives at the very conclusion that makes this poem so intimately a part of Pieces—the realization on Creeley's part that the mind is always a "finger, pointing" toward a goal, conception, or ideal, while the real (the "wonder") is wherever one truly chooses to be as a full participant in the world existing independently of mental constructs and conceptions.

The poet sees himself as a "nanny/ who juggled a world before her/ made of his mind./ This, as Creeley acknowledges, is not the real world but a distortion. He questions and disparages his impulse to conceptualize his beloved:

Was there ever
such foolishness more
than what thinks it knows
and cannot see, was there ever
more?
(Pieces, p. 13)

However, even at the end of the poem Creeley is not sure of the nature of the vision he has encountered. Stressing his previous uncertainty:

Is she that woman,
or this one. Am I the man—
and what transforms.

he raises these same questions at the poem's end with even less certainty using, this time, question marks for added emphasis:

> . . .Was the truth
> behind us, or before?
> Was it one
> or two, and who was I?
>
> (Pieces, p. 13)

Despite the uncertainty of his own Self, his ego-identity, the poet continues to "dance a jig. . .learned/ long before we were born." Yet the uncertainty that descends upon the poet doesn't lead him to despair that the previous vision of the woman as goddess/destroyer would seem to suggest. Rather, from the fragmentation of his mind brought about by the woman (the "conception" that "overrides it") comes a freedom that places the poet in immediate contact with what Keats called the "Penetralium of mystery." The poet/Creeley finds his own Negative Capability, and it is precisely through this attempt to resolve the subject-object dichotomy that "The Finger" can relate to the structure of the fragments of Pieces. The poet has successfully located himself in the "dasein" of the moment, as Creeley writes in a fragment that follows "The Finger":

> Here here
> here. Here
>
> (Pieces, p. 14)

As Creeley has asserted in interviews and essays, his own development in Pieces involves the notion of getting away from poetic creativity as a conscious craft. As such, the pattern of much of Pieces proceeds from an almost unconscious detailing of objective data followed by an attempt on the poet's part to express

rather vague feelings about the concrete details taken from his everyday life experiences. The structure of Pieces coheres precisely because of this seeming juxtaposition of the two modes of experiencing (subjective and objective). However, it is important to note that the subjective and objective descriptions coexist in close harmony with neither mode subversive to the other. It is this quality that makes the reader realize as he is reading Pieces that Creeley has provided an outline of the pattern of the creative mind that truly makes Pieces such an "emotional register" of the poet's life and experiences. Not that we need to read Pieces as "confessional"; rather, this unique collection whose form is so inextricably bound to its content is really the culmination of almost twenty years of a poetic-in-progress that began as simply theory in Olson's "Projective Verse" essay.

Throughout Pieces Creeley expresses a concern with achieving harmony not just between his Self and the external world, but also between himself as a lover and his beloved, between himself and others and, on a grander scale, he seeks to apprehend the harmony between the singular and the All (the microcosm-macrocosm). He works toward these patterns of association in "Gemini" as well as in the longer series, "Numbers." In "Gemini," Creeley, using astrology as a device, expresses a desire to achieve a unity of his Self with an "other":

> Two eyes, two hands—
> in one two are given.
>
> The words
> are messages

from another,
not understood but given.

What it says is that one
is two, the twin,

that the messenger comes
to either, that these fight

to possess, but do not
understand—that if the

moon rules, there is
'domestic harmony',—but if the blood

cry, the split so divide,
there can be no

company for the two in one.
He is alone
(Pieces, pp. 15-16)

In this fragment Creeley appears to be recognizing the nature of the Self that fragments experience and keeps unity from happening (". . .that these fight/ to possess, but do not/ understand"). Finally, the speaker who is "alone" moves back into isolation because of the nature of his acquisitive mind that seeks to "possess."

Curiously, the nature of the person who can achieve unity seems to be that of a "fool"—the figure from the Tarot deck who appears in various guises throughout Pieces:

In secret
the out's in—

the wise
surprised, all

going coming,
begun undone.

Hence the fool dances
in endless happiness.
(Pieces, p. 16)

This image of the "fool" recalls the "manny" of "The Finger" who dances for his beloved. The "secret" to unity seems to be in this type of yielding of the Self that involves an almost total disregard for the rational. Not that such a position is not fraught with danger since the picture of the "fool," if we recall the Tarot deck, depicts the figure of a young man whose face is turned toward the heavens instead of the precipice below him. Yet it is the ability to disregard the rational that makes this figure so appealing to Creeley and provides a central image for Pieces. As Creeley writes, quoting Arthur Waite's Pictorial Key to the Tarot, at the end of "Numbers":

> 'The edge which opens on the depth has no terror;
> it is as if angels were waiting to uphold him,
> if it came about that he leaped from the height.
> His countenance is full of intelligence and expectant dream.'
> (Pieces, p. 35)

Inserted between "Gemini" and "Numbers" is a long fragment that begins as "'Follow The Drinking Gourd'." The form of this section centers around the images that flow by from the outside world as the speaker is driving through the Indiana countryside and the subsequent feelings and inner, emotional responses that this objective reality triggers. As this section opens, we are presented with only vague intimations of the poet's inner state through certain images of isolation. The speaker observes "the trucks/ in front with/ the unseen drivers" and the curious names of two towns ("Stoney Lonesome. Gnaw-/ bone") where "a house/

sits back from the road." The description here is dispassionate since Creeley is deliberately replicating that state of mind where the mind is just a "presence" that observes images with objective clarity. It is only near the end of the poem that the speaker seeks to locate himself in what he calls "a universe of mine," at which point the mind that had previously only intimated loneliness now offers a plea for unity with the presence of an "other":

> Give
> me a present, your
> hand to help
>
> me understand this.
>
> (Pieces, p. 19)

The poignancy of this fragment is in the way the emotion of the poet has entered into the poem. Since the reader suspects loneliness on the poet's part from the opening lines, he is not really surprised by this plea since it has been thus anticipated. However, the subtlety of this fragment lies in Creeley's ability to weave form and content into a single dispassionate statement that makes the reader intimately aware of the juxtaposition of subject-object that creates the particular tension in this poem. The other tension that is involved in the poet's search for unity is further illustrated in the series of short fragments entitled "Numbers." The poem that serves as the transition to "Numbers" is "The Moon," which has been discussed in Chapter I of this thesis. This poem is also important because it personalized the struggle of the Self to achieve unity with the "other," which is the basis for the structure

of "Numbers."

Creeley begins the series with "One," making a statement about individuality as opposed to the unity he strives for:

> You are not
> me, nor I you.
>
> All ways.
> (Pieces, p. 22)

Yet Creeley recognizes the limited nature of such a Self and next depicts it as "something" vague and one-dimensional, devoid of personality:

> As of a stick,
> stone, some-
>
> thing so
> fixed it has
>
> a head, walks,
> talks, leads
>
> a life.
> (Pieces, p. 22)

In "Two" Creeley reflects on the mythical unity of Adam and Eve, the first people:

> When they were
> first made, all the
> earth must have
> been their reflected
> bodies, for a moment—
> a flood of seeming
> bent for a moment back
> to the water's glimmering—
> how lovely they came.
> (Pieces, pp. 22-23)

Continuing on a more mundane level, Creeley attempts to proceed beyond the singularity of his ego or Self through an attempt to achieve an empathy with the woman:

What you wanted
I felt, or felt I felt.
This was more than one.
(Pieces, p. 23)

It is interesting that Creeley uses the expression "or felt I felt" instead of "thought I felt." In the next fragment he explains the reason for the omission of "thought," which he calls a point of consciousness that is not more than:

a word making up
this world of more
or less than it is.
(Pieces, p. 23)

Here, Creeley is describing the limitations of the "mind" that imposes intention and consequently distorts the nature of reality. Even to know the woman he will:

. . .make you
mine, in the mind,
to know you.
(Pieces, p. 23)

This is a knowledge that is of the mind, not of the feelings. This seeming capitulation to the limitations of the mind reminds us of the resolution in "The Finger":

The choice is simply
I will—as mind is a finger,
pointing, as wonder
a place to be

a resolution that the speaker has yet to discover in "Numbers."

"Three" expands the relationship of the man and woman to include a child. Yet what had been potential harmony in "Two" between two individuals now becomes a kind of struggle or taking of sides:

When either this
or that becomes
choice, this fact

of things enters.
What had been
agreed now

alters to
two and one,
all ways.
(Pieces, p. 24)

The "triangle. . .of people" that should be the happiest of occasions becomes instead a:

lonely occasion I
think—the
circle begins
here, intangible
yet a birth.
(Pieces, pp. 24-25)

Birth, so Creeley feels, is the beginning of the circle or karmic wheel. It is the beginning of the struggle of the Self and the mind as they attempt to deal with the external world of objective reality. It is also the beginning of the search for unity that Creeley seems to intimate is, at times, the most futile of endeavours. The "circle" here is a sharp contrast to the image of the "snake-tail in mouth" of "Gemini" where the cycle of experience is without beginning or end since things cohere in the here and now, as Creeley writes in that section:

—it
it—
(Pieces, p. 17)

However, at this point in "Numbers," the struggle to cohere still eludes the speaker.

"Four" depicts the speaker's desire for security in the world of the known among the mundane facts of things:

This number for me
is comfort, a secure
fact of things. The

table stands on
all fours. The dog
walks comfortably,

and two by two
is not an army
but friends who love
one another.
(Pieces, p. 25)

Similarly, "Five" represents a whimsical time for the speaker as he recalls the innocence of his childhood: "A way to draw stars" (Pieces, p. 27).

"Six" has the speaker thinking again of images of unity, first in religious terms of a god who:

on the sixth
day had finished
all creation—

hence holy—
(Pieces, p. 27).

and then in sexual terms where the two numbers (2) and (3) represent the male and female sexual organs.

"Seven" begins on a disquieting note and hints at some resolution regarding unity on the speaker's part. First, "seven" represents the clichés and routines that the mind is subject to:

. . .—seven
days in the week, seven
years for the itch of
unequivocal involvement.
(Pieces, p. 28)

Here Creeley is pointing out the drawbacks of continuity and responsibility, first represented by the routine of the working week ("seven days in the week") and then through the potentially stifling involvement of marriage and the cliché of the "seven year itch" that makes people seek out an "unequivocal involvement" from

responsibility.

Next, Creeley recalls his birth at "seven in the morning" and then reminisces about his father who had died when Creeley was a young boy. This linking of birth to death promotes a type of despair as the speaker presents his thinking in this linear fashion where birth inevitably leads to death. However, as a deliberate negation to this approach, Creeley introduces as a balance between these two "despairing" sections a plea for unity and recognition of the here and now:

Look
at
the
light
of
this
hour.
(Pieces, p. 28)

His division of this sentence into 7 separate lines makes the reader linger over the individual words before focusing them into the harmony of one sentence and one perception. It is exactly this that the speaker desires to do instead of proceeding in the linear fashion of his previous line of thinking. Thus, the speaker recognizes the futility of counting and thinking in such a way at the end of "Seven":

Are all
numbers one?
Is counting forever
beginning again.
(Pieces, p. 27)

"Eight" and "Nine" are interlinked since eight months is a time to "be patient" for the birth that occurs in "Nine":

The nine months
of waiting that discover
life or death—

another life or death—
not yours, not
mine, as we watch.
(Pieces, p. 32)

At the moment of birth the code of mystery that the speaker has sought to crack remains obscure:

What law
or
mystery

is involved
protects

itself
(Pieces, p. 33)

But "Nine" does include a recognition on the speaker's part of "another" presence that is "not yours, not/ mine" but something independent of individual conception.

Finally, in "Zero" Creeley asks a riddle about existence that sounds very much like a Zen koan:

What
by being not
is—is not
by being.
(Pieces, p. 34)

This is a reiteration of the question he addresses to the "other" at the beginning of "Zero":

Where are you—who
by not being here
are here, but here
by not being here?
(Pieces, p. 33)

But reality, Creeley asserts, is complicated by the mind and reflections on the nature of "zero" or nothingness are, finally, for

Creeley a futile exercise:

> There is no trick to reality—
> a mind
> makes it, any
> mind.
> (Pieces, p. 33)

Anyone is capable of creating a philosophical concept or construct of reality, Creeley feels. At the end of "Numbers," what had started as an exercise in achieving coherence or unity through ordering reality (the act of counting on the poet's part) ironically ceases as the speaker recognizes that he is back at the beginning or "zero." Thus "Numbers" becomes a statement for the realization of the relativity of experience.

As Creeley writes in the fragments that follow "Numbers":

> Truth is a scrawl,
> all told
> in all
> (Pieces, p. 36)

The recognition of the relativity of experience underscores the "open" stance of the poet wherein his writings carry no didactic meaning:

> Never write
> to say more
> than saying
> something.
>
> ---
>
> Words
> are
> pleasure.
> All
> words.
> (Pieces, pp. 36-37)

It is this desire to be open to any and all experience and not to make it appear as if it were absolute that is the resolution in "Numbers." While "Numbers" began as an attempt to establish a

unity between the poet and the "world," the unity that becomes apparent is within the poet's Self which comes to accept the relative nature of experience. Keeping in mind the previously delineated image of the "fool," we can note that the speaker has abandoned the necessity to seek rational formulations by the end of this series.

The documentation of events that follows for a large part of Pieces is presented as a journey that the speaker takes. Creeley begins by relating the loneliness the speaker feels in a hotel room in "Chicago" that he sees as "drab, drab, drab" followed by the speaker's reflection on his limitations as he sees himself (as a "continual sense of small") in New York City ("NYC"). In "Place," he thinks of his wife "asleep" as he notes his own discomfort and loneliness. Yet phoning her she becomes ". . .instant/ reality on the other/end of this so-called line," and he seems to realize after his seemingly futile conversation the inadequacy of the words he has spoken since they were simply the register of his intentions:

> Late, the words, late
> the form of them, al-
>
> ready past what they were
> fit for, one and two and three.
>
> (Pieces, p. 43)

Again, the speaker is attempting to center himself in the reality that extends beyond the realm of speculative and determinative thinking. He seems to realize that his beloved is "instant reality" for him and, as such, is still a product of his intention.

The next series of encounters Creeley documents is under

the heading of "Echo." This is a most appropriate title for the fragments since the purpose of the poems is to illustrate the repetitive nature of the mind as it is always obsessed by the events of the past instead of present to the demands of the here and now:

> Nowhere one
> goes will
> one ever
> be away
> enough from
> wherever
> one was.
>
> (Pieces, p. 50)

The next fragment has the speaker reflecting on the positive events of his youth, which lead to a potential resolution:

> Falling-in windows—
> the greenhouse back of
> Curley's house. The
> Curley's were so good
> to me, their mother
> held me on her lap.
>
> . . .
>
> No clouds out the window
> flat faint sky of faded blue.
> The sun makes spring now,
>
> . . .
>
> a renewal possibly of like energy,
> something forgotten almost remembered,
> echoes in my mind like the grass.
>
> (Pieces, pp. 50-51)

The opening image of the "greenhouse" serves as the central image of rebirth and renewal in this fragment. Thinking back on his happy youth (his "green" time) with the "Curleys," the speaker, moving back into his present day reality in the second half of the fragment, sees the "sun" that "makes spring now," which becomes the

potential for "a renewal" on his part. The "something forgotten almost remembered" that echoes in the speaker's mind "like grass" becomes an intuitive understanding that is deeper than the "echoes" of memories that were previously formulated by the thinking mind. That Creeley writes intuitive understanding "echoes in my mind like the grass" is important because he uses the image of the grass (his "green" time) to illustrate the more natural direction his thoughts have taken since he has attempted to abandon a rational focus. Like the new grass of the spring, his new understanding contains the possibility of "a renewal."

The following fragments of "Echo" present the speaker returning to the woman who is the object of his love and the consequent rejection of the speaker by the woman promotes a further recognition on his part:

> Your opaqueness, at moments,
> would be the mirror. Your
> face closed as a door—
>
> that insists on nothing
> but not to be entered—
> wanting simply to be left alone.
>
> I slept, it seemed, the moment
> I lay down in the bed, even,
> it might have been, impatient
>
> to be out of it, gone away,
> to what densities can be there
> in a night's sleep, day by day.
>
> But, all in the mind it comes
> and goes. My own life is given
> me back again, something forgotten.

(Pieces, p. 51)

It is interesting that the vision of the woman in this fragment is presented as "opaque"—a contrast to the figure who "shone" in

"The Finger." The woman rejects the speaker—her "face closed as a door. . .wanting simply to be left alone"—while he seeks to obliterate himself in the "densities" of "a night's sleep." Yet he recognizes that his conceptions of and intentions upon the woman are "all in the mind."

Thus, from rejection comes a maturity of recognition and acceptance: "My own life is given/ me back again, something forgotten." The life that he had previously surrendered all too willingly to the woman is now returned to him. The desire to yield his Self totally to the "other" is now recognized as a false action that seems to have been the easy way out. A wisdom that is the outcome of painful recognition seems to be the resolution of this series where a sense of Self is returned to the speaker so that others are not merely "echoes" of his desires and intentions. The speaker seems to recognize the cause of the distances that have been created between the woman and himself which was the result of the activity of the speaker's mind that resulted in this feeling of separateness:

> Thinking—a tacit, tactile distance between us at this moment—much as if we had lives in 'different world'—which, I suppose, would be the case despite all closeness otherwise, i.e., almost as if the moment were 'thinking', and not literally taking, finding place in something we both had occasion in, that this fact of things becomes a separation.
> (Pieces, p. 52)

The fragments in Pieces entitled "Mazatlan: Sea" lead naturally into the concluding section, "Here." As the speaker observes the movement of the water ("an oscil-/ lation, endlessly in-/ stinct movement") in the second fragment of this section, the

parallels between the repetitive movement of the tide and the repetitious insistence of the "mind" are suggested. As the speaker is observing the motion of the sea where the tide washes over the same piece of land yet leaves each time a new and different impression, he feels this as a natural need for renewal and a required break from the repetitive patterns of his subjective "mind." Like the movement of the tide, he thinks of the possibility of renewal in sleep that "washes away."

Then he thinks of Louis Zukofsky's "objective lens" or "eye" that served as the metaphor for Zukofsky's Objectivism:

> Want to get the sense of 'I' into Zukofsky's 'eye'—
> a locus of experience, not a presumption of expected value.
> (Pieces, p. 68)

The "presumption of expected value" refers to the ego or "I" that is the quality of the subjective "mind" that Creeley desires to lose at this point. Rather, he sees the proper use and inclusion of the Self only if it is a "locus of experience," which is the same position Olson defined in "Human Universe" when he stated that man must see himself not <u>above</u> nature, but rather as a <u>function</u> of nature. This recognition is followed by an urging on the speaker's part to begin to perceive through his new vision of the Self:

> Here now—
> begin!
> (Pieces, p. 68)

Attempting to be open to the immediacy of the here and now, the speaker in "Four" still seems to be caught in the grip of the past and the repetitive patterns of the other subjective "mind":

Here is all there is,
but there seems so
insistently across the way.
(Pieces, p. 71)

He sees how this persistent concern with the past extends to relationships as he observes his wife sitting across from him at the table:

Across the
table,
years.
(Pieces, p. 71)

The "years" refers to their time spent together and is also a sad reminder to the speaker of how he has built a conception of her in the present based on their interaction in the past. It is this sense of the past as a Joycean nightmare from which he is seeking to awake that the speaker tries to resolve in the concluding fragments of "Here."

In the opening fragments of "Here," the speaker asserts the position that he has tried to assume which is that of keeping himself prepared for "revelation and discovery" as they may come to him instead of operating through goals and intentions:

I didn't know what I could do.
I have never known it
but in doing found it
as best I could.
(Pieces, p. 72)

As the speaker moves to consider his relationship with his wife, we can see that he is attempting to arrive at a proprioceptive awakening:

Here, here, the body
screaming its orders
learns of its own.
(Pieces, p. 73)

Realizing that this awakening cannot come about through the "mind" that creates intentions, the speaker seeks to break away from his self-conscious grapplings:

> Such strangeness of mind I know
> I cannot find there more
> than what I know.
>
> I am tired of purposes,
> intent that leads itself
> back to its own belief.
>
> (Pieces, p. 78)

The speaker comes to the realization of his physical "dasein" and sees that his proprioceptive awareness must take precedence over his desire to conceptualize things in his mind:

> The body will not go
> apart from itself to be
> another possibility.
> It lives where it finds home.
>
> Thinking to alter all
> I looked first to myself,
> but have learned the foolishness
> that wants an altered form.
>
> Here now I am at best,
> or what I think I am
> must follow as the rest
> and live the best it can.
>
> (Pieces, p. 79)

The final fragment of "Here" ends with a poem in the lyric mode which is the form that Creeley uses beginning with "The Finger" each time there is the mention of the "woman":

> When he and I,
> after drinking and
> talking, approached
> the goddess or woman
>
> become her, and by my
> insistence entered
> her, and in the ease
> and delight of the

meeting I was given that
sight gave me myself,
this was the mystery
I had come to—all

manner of men, a
throng, and bodies of
women, writhing, and
a great though seemingly

silent sound—and when
I left the room to them,
I felt, as though hearing
laughter, my own heart lighten.

(Pieces, p. 81)

The transformation that occurs within the speaker of this fragment is reminiscent of the transformation in "The Finger" where the speaker is charged by the "radiance" of the "goddess." The "mystery" he has come to is twofold. In one respect, it is the "woman" or Muse who accepts him since as he leaves he hears "laughter," which reminds us of the laughter of the woman in "The Finger" who jeers the "manny who jiggled a world before her/ made of his mind." However, more important, he has been given back his proper Self (". . .I was given that/ sight gave me myself"), his intuitive understanding independent of the "pointing finger" of the mind.

This intuitive, proprioceptive understanding brings us back to the Allen Ginsberg poem Creeley quotes at the very beginning of Pieces:

yes, yes,
that's what
I wanted,
I always wanted,
I always wanted,
to return
to the body
where I was born.

By the end of Pieces the speaker has come to an understanding and wisdom that can prompt him to urge the reader toward a similar recognition of the Self in the here and now, questions that Pieces makes us ask not just about the speaker of the poem, but about the whole complex of thinking, feeling, and experiencing:

> what do you do,
> what do you say,
> what do you think,
> what do you know.
>
> (Pieces, p. 81)

Yet recognition doesn't come to the speaker as a blinding, instantaneous "enlightenment." Rather, it is a constant series of observations, perceptions, and reflections which is precisely the form of Pieces. "Truth," as Creeley had written previously, "is a scrawl/ all told/ in all" and comes to one "piece" by "piece" as one lives his life. It is recognition that is relative to the moment and relative to the nature of the person who is plotting the myriad aspects of the Self as it unfolds. As Creeley, thinking of Olson's statement, observes in Pieces as a kind of post scriptum to the revelation and discovery in the poem: "'we are/ as we find out we are.'"

Creeley is certainly not in accord with Eliot's notion that the artist's progress is measured by how well he transcends personality and private emotion; rather, the "progress" that is documented in Pieces is precisely that of the poet's emotions as they cohere into a unified personality. The resolutions and recognitions in Pieces is this coming to terms with the fragments of feelings, perceptions, and events that comprise the personality

that Creeley sees as relative to his singular life experience that he would say, thinking of Olson, that "any man is fact of."[29]

Pieces is really the transitional work on Creeley's part that opened up for him this possibility of writing the continuous poem that could serve as the audit and psychic register of his life. The collections of poems that follow (A Day Book, Away, Hello, and Later) all continue the technique of Pieces as well as forward the stance Creeley first espouses in this collection that the poet must be "open" to all levels of experience from his quotidian inspired life. As Creeley states in an interview:

> . . .I think the key book is Pieces, that really is where the decisive change occurs, where the concept of poems as set instances of articulate statement yields to a sense of continuity. I was fascinated by my friends' ability to continue, and I realized that I didn't have a thematic proposal for that situation. I'd written a novel but that seemed to me something else and I'd seen Duncan work with Passages and Allen with various texts of his, or Olson's Maximus Poems or Zukofsky's A or whatnot, and I wondered what kind of modality would really give me something that could also in a sense continue as a situation of writing, that wouldn't each time contain itself in a singular statement, so I'd really just write it as a common audit of days.[30]

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

[1] Robert Creeley, A Quick Graph (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1970), p. 42.

[2] Ibid., p. 46.

[3] Ibid., pp. 49-50.

[4] Ibid., pp. 50-51.

[5] George F. Butterick, ed., Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence, Vol. II (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 71.

[6] Ibid., p. 94.

[7] Warren Tallman, Three Essays on Creeley (Toronto, Canada: The Coach House Press, 1973), p. 15.

[8] Creeley, A Quick Graph, p. 62.

[9] Robert Creeley, Was That A Real Poem Or Did You Just Make It Up Yourself (Santa Barbara, California: Black Sparrow Press, 1976), p. 3.

[10] Creeley, A Quick Graph, p. 157.

[11] Ibid., p. 175.

[12] Butterick, Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence, Vol. II, pp. 116-117.

[13] Ibid., p. 117.

[14] Ann Mandel, Measures: Robert Creeley's Poetry (Toronto, Canada: The Coach House Press, 1974), pp. 16-17.

[15] Butterick, Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence, Vol. I, p. 96.

[16] Creeley, A Quick Graph, p. 55.

[17] Robert Creeley, For Love: Poems 1950-1960 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 28. All subsequent page references to this edition are given in parentheses after the quotations as they appear in the text. When necessary to identify this collection, the following abbreviation will be used: For Love.

[18] Robert Creeley, Words (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967). All subsequent page references to this edition are given in parentheses after the quotations as they appear in the text. When necessary to identify this collection, the following abbreviation will be used: Words.

[19] Robert Duncan, "After For Love" in Boundary 2, Vol. VI, No. 3; VII, No. 1 (Spring/Fall, 1978), p. 237.

[20] William Sylvester, "Robert Creeley's Poetics: I know that I hear you" in Boundary 2, Vol. VI, No. 3; VII, No. 1 (Spring/Fall, 1978), p. 199.

[21] Cynthia Dubin Edelberg, Robert Creeley's Poetry: A Critical Introduction (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), p. 55.

[22] Robert Creeley, Pieces (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969). All subsequent page references to this edition are given in parentheses after the quotations as they appear in the text. When necessary to identify this collection, the following abbreviation will be used: Pieces.

[23] Arthur L. Ford, Robert Creeley (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), p. 32.

[24] Louis Zukofsky, Prepositions (London: Rapp and Carroll, 1967), p. 20.

[25] Zsolt S. Alapi, ed., "Interview with Robert Creeley" in Atropos, Vol. I, No. 1 (Spring, 1978), p. 27.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Edelberg, Robert Creeley's Poetry, p. 85.

[28] Louis Zukofsky, Ferdinand (London: Grossman Publishers, 1968), p. 9.

[29] Alapi, "Interview with Robert Creeley," p. 26.

[30] Ekbert Faas, Towards A New American Poetics: Essays and Interviews (Santa Barbara, California: Black Sparrow Press, 1978), p. 186.

CHAPTER V

THE RECENT POETRY

The unity Creeley achieves between form and content in Pieces is the result of his desire to have his consciousness cohere with the world around him. Even though some of the fragments in Pieces are extremely short, they are as faithful to the original experience (whether it is negative or positive) as Creeley could make them. Throughout Pieces, we are presented with experiences as they appear to the poet even though some of them may appear to be a series of false starts; however, it is exactly this sense of testing his consciousness that is at the very core of this volume. Maintaining the aspect of the relativity of experience, Creeley demonstrates in Pieces both a self-consciousness as well as a fragmented consciousness through the diversity of and the disparity between the "pieces" he records.

Central to Pieces is Creeley's vision that attempts to accept the relativity of the objective world and, even more importantly, the relativity of his subjective Self. Thus, we find in a fragment like:

> Having to—
> what do I think
> to say now.
>
> Nothing but
> comes and goes
> in a moment.
>
> (Pieces, p. 6)

the false start and fragmented consciousness in the first stanza followed by a resolution and acceptance. In the phrase "Having

to—" we are presented with the "mind" that operates through the assumptions of necessity whereby the Self perpetuates itself because of the need to always come up with another thought or explanation of reality (the "now"). The poet's fragmented consciousness is apparent in the choppy rhythms of this stanza as is a self-consciousness on his part wherein he seems to step back and arrive at a recognition about the pernicious nature of his Self.

In the second stanza, however, there is recognition of the futility of such an endeavour as well as an acceptance of the limitations of thought that he sees as something that "comes and goes/ in a moment." Therefore, in the short, serialized form of much of the poetry in Pieces, Creeley discovered a context in which both his materials and his vision could be organized and directed. The vision or stance in Pieces, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is centered around the poet's desire to integrate his Self with the "world"—to accept his everyday life as precious and to break out of the trap that thinking and rationalizing bring about. For central to the vision of Pieces is Creeley's belief that the "mind" is what promotes fragmentation, and the poetry of Pieces records both these fragments and the moments when these fragments cohere into a unity.

We find in the poetry of A Day Book, Hello, Away, and Later Creeley's continuing attempt to break away from the abstractions of thinking and to arrive at a greater awareness and acceptance of his "literal" condition in the world. Thematically, then, Creeley's more recent poems continue to record his experiences,

emotions, and fluctuating feelings. Also, the idea of the continuous poem that he began to realize in Pieces is continued in these volumes. Interestingly, both A Day Book and Hello were originally part of Creeley's journals and diaries that he kept during specific instances of travel and changes in his life. However, even though the events are diverse, there is the essential unity that Creeley learned from Zukofsky must be maintained in the continuous poem. This unity is achieved through the vision on Creeley's part that brings the disparate fragments into focus through the desire to achieve unity between subject and object. In this way, Creeley's recent poetry is truly "open" in the same sense that Pieces revealed both the negative and positive aspects of the Self through its series of false starts and more unified beginnings.

It is precisely Creeley's reverence for the reality of objects which he sees as "real as thinking" that creates both the conflict and the resolution in the recent poems. The conflict, of course, is his depiction of fragmentation as the Self attempts to distort the objective world according to its own prescription. However, the desire to escape from abstraction is of equal importance to the vision of the poetry, and it is this effort to achieve a resolution and to remain "open" to the world outside of the Self, as well as the poet's intention to realize himself as part of this world, that are depicted in the poems that will be discussed.

PART I: A DAY BOOK

In an early statement that appeared in his introduction to The New Writing in the USA, Creeley anticipated the criticism that would be leveled at the open-form technique he developed in Pieces and continues to promote in his present writings. Referring specifically to the works of William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac, Creeley pointed out that critics were criticizing the "loss of coherence" in contemporary writing:

> Not only have the earlier senses of 'form' been rejected, but equally 'subject' as a conceptual focus or order has given place to the literal activity of the writing itself.[1]

Creeley disagreed with the supposition that literature should be a formal exercise in terms of subject, diction, and even organization that differed greatly from a person's everyday life. As he wrote:

> That understanding most useful to writing as an art is, for me, the attempt to sound in the nature of the language those particulars of time and place of which one is a given instance, equally present.[2]

The "literal activity of the writing itself" that Creeley refers to relates to his belief that writing is an act that corresponds to one's situation in the world ("those particulars of time and place of which one is a given instance"). Thus the activity of writing becomes a testament, Creeley feels, to one's "psychic" life which, in retrospect, provides a locus to both the poet and the reader of the writer's intimate or interior state of being a person in the present world. In Creeley's A Day Book,[3]

he continues this mode of expression begun in Pieces of using language as "revelation and discovery" to serve as an experiential counter or summary of a specific time in his life.

The test of the coherence within A Day Book must begin with an acceptance or rejection on the part of the reader of Creeley's aesthetics and concerns. As Cynthia Edelberg points out, Creeley felt that the form of A Day Book and the sequences of the poems, "In London," were based on a workable mode wherein:

> . . .the rhythm of life as it was actually lived, as he recorded it on impulse in his journal, would provide the organizing principle for the sequence.[4]

Creeley follows Olson's own ideas on "field composition" so that the form of A Day Book is an attempt to approximate the immediacy of the poet's reactions and impulses as they occur. His aesthetics also recall the manner of spontaneous composition advocated by Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. Creeley discussed in an interview with this writer the necessity for practicing to be literally "ready" for the impulse to write when it finally declared itself, for being "in the activity" of writing means, for Creeley, to:

> . . .feel no sense of awkwardness. You feel extraordinarily graceful and you feel that the words are coming to be said with the least confusion. And its only afterward that you have possibly any doubts at all. You are in a sense just 'doing it'.[5]

Consequently, Creeley does not engage in the revision of his writing because, as he states, "going back over the material tends to diminish what energy is present during the moment the poem happens. You tend to get makeshift."[6] What is most inter-

esting and, at times, the most frustrating about A Day Book is the format in which it appears. The first part of the book appears in the form of an unpaginated journal. The second part, also unpaginated, the sequence of poems "In London," records Creeley's trip and impressions of various places he visited in Europe and the West Indies.

Central to the content of the journal entries in A Day Book is Creeley's concern with his mortality, the relationship with his wife Bobbie, and his desire to view and understand his actions objectively. As the journal opens, we are told that the speaker (he) ". . .is waking to two particulars" (A.D.B.). As we read on, we discover that these "two particulars" become the ways he views himself as participant in his own life and as the estranged observer who wryly comments on his own desires. One of these desires is to understand the relationship he has with his wife which he depicts during an instance of sexual encounter between a friend, his wife, and himself:

> What had he been thinking? Simply that, sitting at the table in the kitchen with the friend, literally, the other man, it was inextricably time to know a fact. In his own response to her, or hers to him, they were so entangled in their own feelings, and if she became object to him, then by what he had withdrawn from her, so as to know her more clearly. (A.D.B.)

During these moments of seemingly detached observation, Creeley writes his journal from the third person point-of-view. At other times, the journal is written in the first person to "explain myself, to myself," as he writes. Thus, he is, once again, dealing with the complexity of seeing himself as both subject

and object. Interestingly, the moment when coherence is achieved by the "I" and the "he" is during Creeley's reflections on taking mescaline, which he sees as:

> . . .the finite system of the form of human-body life, i.e., that that phase, call it, of energy qua form is of no permanent order whatsoever, in the single instance, however much the species' form is continued genetically, etc. . . .That the 'I' can accept its impermanent form and yet realize the energy-field, call it, in which it is one of many, also one. (A.D.B.)

This prose entry, like many of the other entries, finds a correspondence in the poetry of "In London." Creeley begins these specific reflections on his mortality (a theme central to both the journals and the poetry) by commencing in fear and uncertainty:

> We'll die
> soon enough
> and be dead—
>
> whence the whole
> system
> will fade from my head—
>
> 'but why the
> tort-
> ure. . .' as if
>
> another circumstance
> were forever
> at hand.

From this point, he proceeds to a more positive view that is reminiscent of his mescaline resolution of the journal entries:

> Thinking of dying
> à la Huxley on
> acid so that
> the beatific smile his
> wife reported
> was effect possibly

of the splendor of
all possible experience?
Or else, possibly,
the brain cells,
the whole organism,
exploding, im-
ploding, upon
itself, a galaxy
of light, energy,
forever more.

Die. Dead,
come alive.
(A.D.B.)

What Creeley calls "the whole/ system" in the first part of the poem is the "finite system" of the Self. Yet in the second half of the poem, this "impermanent form" is what can contain within it "all possible experience" that can continue to exist "forever more." This quasi-mystical stance may strike the reader as unusual, especially if he realizes the absence of any such vision in Creeley's earlier poetry. However, we can already note throughout Pieces a movement on Creeley's part toward such a position. Sepcifically, we can note the mystical qualities associated with the "woman" in a poem like "The Finger" and the very last fragment of "Here," where the female figure is equated to a "goddess" (Pieces, p. 81).

In "The Message," Creeley continues his speculations on mortality, here presenting death as a fact outside of his expressed hope for a transcendental possibility as in the previous poem:

He was wise,
they said,
in being dead.
Nothing more could be said—

But that incredible
idealism, the blur
of the language, how
it says nothing.

Nothing more than that
will do, all
people are
susceptible after all
(A.D.B.)

The title of this poem contains dual connotations. First, the "message" is the eulogy for a dead person that the poet overhears which is full of "incredible idealism" and is a "blur/ of the language" that the preacher or minister says signifying really "nothing." Obviously, Creeley is talking about how it is impossible ever to capture the mystery of death through the pompous declarations of words and the vain talk of an afterlife (the "incredible idealism"). Also, to consider the double meaning implied within the title, the other "message" implied by the poem is the recognition the poet arrives at that "all/ people are/ susceptible after all." Again, the meaning of this line is twofold. First, everyone is "susceptible" to death and therefore needs the reassurance of some hope or promise of an afterlife. Ironically, the opening of the poem ("He was wise,/ they said,/ in being dead") also takes an added significance in the light of the ambiguity that has been demonstrated. On the one hand, "being dead" means an escape from the problems of living; hence, "He was wise." However, this line is also a play on the notion that the dead are now "wise" since they have penetrated into the mystery that we, the living, fear.

This purposeful ambiguity on Creeley's part is there to

demonstrate to the reader that the supposed "resolution" of the problem of dying in the Huxley passage and the journal entry of the mescaline experience was merely a moment in the poet's life when the vision of accepting death as an entry into the "veritable multiplicity" (in the poem "Dying") meant a momentary resolution of the conflict. As the passage of perceptions in A Day Book declares, the poet's perceptions change as they move "instanter on another." Creeley's precise achievement in the form of A Day Book is in the fact that he offers no absolute truths or resolutions to the conflict of the dualities.

Charles Olson's statement that "we are as we find out we are" applies to the revelation of the poet's Self in Creeley's collection. If we understand that A Day Book is a minute scanning of Creeley's feelings on a day-to-day basis, then we must also accept that he is both someone who offers and seeks resolutions to his mortality. As such, a balance is achieved between his faith that seems to spring from a spontaneous intuition, and the cynicism and limitations of his mind that cannot, due to its finiteness, come to grips with the infinite. It is this balance that makes A Day Book a testament to the poet who has placed himself into an "open-field" of discovery. For as the "traveler" of the poems reminds himself, the nature of the revelation in the writing is a coming to terms with the here and now:

> You will never be here
> again, you will never
>
> see again what you now see—
>
> (A.D.B.)

The coherence that the speaker is after is sometimes achieved in the journal entries as well as in the poems. But the nature of the "mind" that has been Creeley's concern in his previous poetry is also examined once again and dissected, as in the poem "Two" where he thinks of a possible harmony between body and mind:

> The body sometimes
> followed,
> sometimes led.
>
> There is
> or was
> no separation
>
> ever, save only
> in the head
> that knows all.
>
> (A.D.B.)

The separation that occurs "in the head" extends to the relationship between himself and his wife. In the poem "'Do you think . . .'," Creeley exposes the nature of this "mind" that questions, compares, and creates "separation":

> Do you think that if
> two people are in love with one another
> one or the other has got to be
> less in love than the other at
> some point in the otherwise happy relationship.
>
> (A.D.B.)

The nature of the questions is such that they are deliberately meant to sound absurd in this poem since what Creeley is after is plotting the habits of the "mind" that is never satisfied with being in the present moment.

In "The Act of Love," Creeley deliberately uses natural imagery, as opposed to the dry rhetoric of the previous poem, in

order to demonstrate a unity and coherence within himself as he attempts to express his love through the medium of words. In this poem he sees the act of loving another person as:

> . . .a meaning self-
> sufficient, dry
>
> at times as sand,
> or else the trees,
> dripping with
>
> rain.
> (A.D.B.)

The contrast of the two images in this passage is interesting. Creeley is presenting, it seems, two metaphors for two different kinds of love. On the one hand, he presents the spiritual love that is "dry/ at times as sand," while on the other hand, he compares this with the sensual/ sexual love presented through images of growth and fertility ("the trees,/ dripping with/ rain"). Both of these seemingly disparate states are united near the end of the poem where Creeley demonstrates that the complexity of love is that it is both physical encounter and the vague "feelings" that arise as emotions, and then occur within the mind:

> all these
> senses do
> commingle, so
>
> that in your very
> arms I still
> can think of you.
> (A.D.B.)

Most important to note here is that the "thinking" that is implied in this passage has nothing to do with the separation that was suggested in the previous poems. This is a perception founded upon an intuitive understanding that is similar to the perception

of the Huxley passages on dying. Even within the formal construction of the poems, the passages that approach this intuitive awareness are more lyrical and less self-conscious than the others that dissect the workings of the "mind."

Yet despite this moment of recognition, the mood of the poetry that immediately follows swings back to doubts and questions about the poet's mortality. In "Time," Creeley reflects on the past, the passage of his own life, and the finiteness of his own existence:

> My time
>
> one thinks,
> is drawing to
> some close. This
>
> feeling comes
> and goes.
> (A.D.B.)

Similarly, in the poem "Moment," he cannot make up his mind whether to "use" time or to "kill" it since it seems to him that existence is futile since it only ends in death:

> One's come now to the graveyard,
> where the bones of the dead are.
>
> All roads have come
> here, truly common—
>
> except the body is moved,
> still, to some other use.
> (A.D.B.)

The seeming despair of this perception is alleviated by the last two lines. Instead of sinking into futility, Creeley comes to two conclusions about mortality. The first is that death is "truly common" to all people and, consequently, this is something that we

can all share as part of our human condition. As such, this is another definition of our "veritable multiplicity." In addition, the fact that "the body is moved,/ still, to some other use" implies that we do go on, continuing to live dictated by our physical determination. This can also mean the same thing Creeley implies in an earlier poem, "The Rhythm," that we are part of a regenerative cycle from which life can spring. The "other use" of the body may be that of compost after death, but the continuum of the life-process is suggested in the deliberate ambiguity of these passages that seemingly stem from despair.

This pantheistic notion is further developed in the poem "People," where Creeley thinks back on his magical conception of the world when he was a child—an idea that he wants to believe in as an adult to give him some hope:

> I'll never die or else will
> be the myriad people all
> were always and must be—
>
> in a flower, in a
> hand, in some
> passing wind.
> (A.D.B.)

However, much more than a testament to a pantheistic faith or the hope for a future incarnation, this poem is really a comparison of the despair and awkwardness of adulthood with the more spontaneous mind of the child that Creeley misses in himself:

> Now grown large, I
> sometimes stumble, walk
> with no knowledge of
> what's under foot.
> (A.D.B.)

What is "under foot" are not just the metaphoric "little people"

who live in the grass, stones, and flowers, but it implies a first-hand knowledge of the "real" that is outside of the conceptions of the mind—an intuitive understanding.

As Creeley states in the poem "Echo"—"Here, here,/ the only form/ I've known"—his desire to cohere within the world where he is the traveler is repeated throughout the poems of "In London" as this insistent echo. However, this "echo" does not stem from his disposition to rationalize; rather, it seems to stem from the depth of an intuitive understanding which serves as the touchstone throughout the sequences of the journal entries and the poems. The harmony he finds in the world with friends and family pinpoints his desire to affirm the life that has been given him to live.

In the poem "For Benny and Sabina," he writes:

All

one's life has
come to this, all
is here.
(A.D.B.)

as a celebration of a peace and happiness that coexists with his fear of death and the awareness of his mortality in some of the previous poems. In the poem, "'For Some Weeks'," written to his daughter Kristen, Creeley urges her near the end to "bless the world/ you're given." Similarly, in "'Bolinas and Me'," he sees his return to his home as a return to a "holy place" where there is a "plenitude of all." This poem appears as if it were almost a dream sequence as Creeley plots his coming to awareness of his place in the world:

I am

slowly going, coming home. Let
go, let go of it. Walking

and walking, dream of those
voices, people again, not

quite audible though I can
see them, colors, forms,

a chatter just back of the ear,
moving toward them, the edge

of the woods. Again and
again and again, how

insistent, this blood one
thinks of as in

the body, these hands,
this face. Bolinas sits on the ground

by the sea, sky
overhead.
(A.D.B.)

When Creleey writes "let go of it," he is urging himself to give up his rational preoccupation and to yield to the possibilities that his condition in the world can bring him to. The personification in the last three lines of this poem is Creeley's attempt to show that his Self has become an impersonal thing that can now blend with the "place"—Bolinas. As we reflect on this intuitive "awakening" near the end of A Day Book, we must remember the very beginning of the journal entry where the speaker is "waking to two particulars." While the first of his preoccupations was with mortality and the disassociation of his subjective Self from the reality of himself as object in the world, the second particular he arrives at near the end of this collection is the same one he insists upon in Pieces—to "return to the body

where I was born."

This "at the skin," intuitive awareness of himself as not just a thinking being, but as also finite and physical reflects the cyclical form of this volume where all roads lead back to the Self, yet also open out from it. As Creeley writes in the final poem of this volume, a graduation tribute for his daughter Sarah:

> We live in a circle,
> older or younger,
> we go round
> and around on this earth.
>
> I was trying to remember
> what it
> was like
> at your age.
> (A.D.B.)

Appropriately, the ending of this poem as well as of the volume is open-ended because of the ambiguity between harmony and separateness that is implied in the last two stanzas. As he asserts, all people go "round and around on this earth," suggesting that we share a similar condition and a special unity. However, he is also trying to identify with his daughter's youth—a condition that is an almost whimsical reminder of the passage of his own life and his mortality. Finally, A Day Book is a testament to and an affirmation of life because of the poet's desire to move beyond the closed nature of his rational predisposition to an intuitive and open response to the "interplay of settled and unsettled feelings and ideas"[7] that he believes is the condition of our humanness.

PART II: HELLO

Creeley continues in the format of A Day Book in Hello, a verse journal written in 1976 that records his tour of Southeast Asia, New Zealand, and Australia. Giving his reasons for making this journey, Creeley writes in his afterward:

> . . .I went because I wanted to—to look, to see, even so briefly, how people in those parts of the world made a reality, to talk about being American, of the past war, of power, of usual life in this country, of my fellow and sister poets, of my neighbors on Fargo Street in Buffalo, New York. I wanted, at last, to be human, however simplistic that wish.[8]

While trying to understand his "humanness," Creeley finds a new definition of a different correspondence for the "veritable multiplicity" he seeks in the body of his most recent writing. He writes:

> I found that other cultural patterns, be they Samoan, Chinese, Malaysian, or Filipino, could not easily think of one as singular, and such familiar concepts as the 'nuclear family' or 'alienation' had literally to be translated for them. Whereas our habit of social value constantly promotes an isolation—the house in the country, the children in good schools—theirs, of necessity, finds center and strength in the collective, unless it has been perverted by Western exploitation and greed.[9]

Hello begins with Creeley's reflections on the world as it passes by him viewed from the window of an airplane. His speculations on the sense and meaning of the world external to his Self are expressed through the personification of the natural landscape in an attempt to illustrate how his "singular" mind operates to establish correspondence. In passages like:

What do you
think those hills
are going to do now?
(Hello, p. 2)

and

Trees want
to be still?
Winds
won't let them?
(Hello, p. 2)

he is interestingly combining his own sense of dreamy wonder with a deeper rooted desire to find some response from and coherence in the natural world. While "hills" as active beings and "trees" possessing desire is exaggerated personification, it is precisely this whimsical desire to understand the condition of objects and the relation of them to the conditions of his own life that the journal entries attempt to depict.

As an observer through the window of an airplane, he has trouble transcending the insistence of his own particular mind to embrace a reality external to himself. Yet he does desire to "get out of himself" in this collection, but the fear, hesitation, and tension of doing so are always apparent. Thus the irony is apparent in the poem "Catching Cold" where he describes his feelings of being debilitated:

I want to lay down
and die—
someday—but
not now.
(Hello, p. 6)

Similarly, he expresses a fear of death in "Soup":

I know what you mean,
now 'down under' here,
that each life's
got its own condition

to find,
to get on with.
I suppose it's
letting go, finally,

that spooks me.
And of course my arms
are full as usual.
I'm the only one I know.

(Hello, p. 10)

There is a kind of resignation in these passages to being alone in the world, and even after seemingly accepting that New Zealand might be where he will die, Creeley makes a joke about being "consumed" in the last stanza that implies a desire on his part to share his life with another:

Say that all the ways
are one—consumatum est—
like some soup
I'd love to eat with you.

(Hello, p. 11)

The fact that the last two lines are interrogative is important because Creeley wants to demonstrate that these nagging doubts are never far from one's mind despite the apparent harmony illustrated previously. It is primarily the problem that arises when one is attempting to define the world instead of simply living in it that Creeley grapples with as he records his impressions. He writes:

If the world's one's
own experience of it,

then why walk around
in it, or think of it.

More would be more
than one could know

alone, more than myself's
small senses, of it.

(Hello, p. 18)

What Creeley means by "myself's small senses" are the limitations that an egocentric predisposition to define the world places upon experience. His desire is to know the world beyond his Self and to become part of a greater "multiplicity."

The poem, "Window," is an excellent example of Creeley's attempt to define this subject-object dichotomy:

> Aching sense
> of being
>
> person-body in-
> side, out—
>
> the houses, sky,
> the colors, sounds.
>
> (Hello, p. 27)

A window is a perfect metaphor for the way Creeley as observer views the world. To look at the outside world (external, objective reality) through a window is to view it as isolated because of one's own internal reality and separateness as a "person-body" from the rhythm of the world outside of one's own sensibility. The "aching sense" Creeley is describing seems to be the desire to turn one's Self "in-/ side, out" so that it would be possible to directly experience the world in a proprioceptive sense. It is this reaching out from the confines of the Self that the poet is after.

In the fragments entitled "Men" written during his short stay in Singapore, Creeley reflects first upon his loneliness at finding himself alone in a strange place: "scared without someone to be/ with me. These empty days" (Hello, p. 29). His broodings then move to reflections and reminiscences of his past when

he was "a kid in Burma" during World War II working as an ambulance driver "hauling the dead and dying/ along those impossible roads" (Hello, p. 29). These musings end on a note of wonder that seems to include Creeley's confusion about locating himself in the world: "So where am I now" (Hello, p. 29). This fragment is followed by an ironic resolution that one must trust to the "benign" continuity of life:

> Patience gets
> you the next place.
>
> So they say.
> (Hello, p. 30)

even though this is immediately offset by the images that follow where Creeley depicts himself as a victim of Time where his life is measured out in moments like "Some huge clock. . .going/ around and around" (Hello, p. 30).

Yet from the moment of disillusionment and potential despair comes an acceptance in the fragment entitled "Manila" that "life goes on living," and Creeley sees himself no longer as isolate but as part of a "myriad people on this final/ island of the ultimate world" (Hello, p. 33). Based on this recognition of himself as part of the "veritable multiplicity," the poet reminds himself to transcend his own solipsism:

> Each time sick loss
> feeling starts to hit me,
> think of more than that,
> more than 'I' thought of.
> (Hello, p. 33)

This recognition that he takes his place alongside the objects of nature, as Olson would have it, is reflected through the irony of

the "Manila" fragments where Creeley juxtaposes the mind and how it seeks to distort reality with the cycles and rhythms of nature that remain unchanged despite man's attempt to alter them:

> You can tilt the world
> by looking at it sideways—
>
> or you can put it up-
> side down by standing on
>
> your head—and underneath,
> or on end, or this way,
>
> or that, the waves come in
> and grass grows.
>
> (Hello, pp. 33-34)

As in his earlier poetry of Pieces, Creeley is depicting the struggle to establish an equal correspondence between the Self and the world.

In "Cebu" Creeley continues in this same vein to present his contentment with the world that he is living in as well as with the condition of his Self in relation to it:

> One doesn't
> finally want it all forever,
>
> not stopped there, in abstract
> time. Whatever, it's got to
>
> be yielded, let go of, it can't
> live any longer than it has to.
>
> Being human, at times I
> get scared, of dying, growing
>
> old, and think my body's
> possibly the exception to all
>
> that I know has to happen.
> It isn't, and some of those
>
> bananas are already rotten,
> and no doubt there are vacant

falling-down houses, and boats
with holes in their bottoms

no one any longer cares about.
That's all right, and I can

dig it, yield to it, let what
world I do have be the world.

(Hello, pp. 36-37)

What is the most interesting thing about this fragment is not only the manner in which Creeley asserts and accepts his mortality and the mutability of all life, but also the way in which abstract reflections begin through an apprehension of concrete reality. What obviously strikes Creeley as he views the living conditions of the poor on his way back from the airport is the fact that they persist despite the precarious conditions of their lives.

It is this very quality that he transforms into verse since his conception of the dwellings of the poor as places "that could all be gone in a flash,/ or molder more slowly/ back into humus" (Hello, p. 36) makes him think about mutability and his own death that will also eventually lead him "back into humus." Even though this poem began as a vivid depiction of concrete reality, it is interesting to note how Creeley demonstrates the manner in which the "mind" takes over as it ponders on the abstract notions of death and mortality. Whereas the opening of the poem was purely descriptive, it now moves toward an abstract animation of physical sights due to the "mind" that now sees bananas as "already rotten," "vacant falling-down houses," and boats that are abandoned "with holes in their bottoms." However, it is important to note that just as he accepts his mortality, that he can "dig it,

yield to it" and end up "finally loving everything I know," Creeley does not overwhelm the concrete reality of the world he is describing by the use of excessive abstractions. Rather, he is taking his place alongside the objects of nature, as Olson stated the poet must do. Also, the synthesis of the Imagist technique of presentation with the projectivist stance of letting the Self figure equally is apparent here. At no point does this poem move away from the physical reality of the world into the abstract realm of thought. Instead, Creeley's admonition to "keep the physical/literal" (Hello, p. 44) is observed in this poem since he sees himself as being happy with the facts of "green walls" and "the lights on"—his physical surroundings and condition in the world.

The "human truth" that Creeley rediscovers is, once again, that one must be present in the world. He seems to feel that his "home" can be anyplace where he can be happy in the world in the company of people as part of the "multiplicity":

> If one's still
> of many,
> then one's not alone—
>
> If one lives
> with people,
> then one has a home.
>
> (Hello, p. 66)

However, the relationship that Creeley advocates is not just between the Self and others but, more importantly, Hello is a journal of the Self as it attempts correspondence and relation of any kind. As in much of Creeley's early poetry, there is a struggle that is going on through various levels of experience. The positive resolve that is first apparent in Pieces and continued in

A Day Book seems to find a fitting form in the journal style of writing throughout Creeley's most recent work. It is interesting that Creeley, who sees the act of writing as an immediate act, does not terminate any of his collections in any definitive way. Not only is there a sense of continuity and a continuing sense of ambiguity of hopes and feelings in the concluding fragments of Hello:

> You can see her face,
> hear her voice,
> hope it's happy.
>
> (Hello, p. 84)

but there is a definite sense that the writing will continue in the same manner that it has up to this point—not as a closed, self-contained form, but as an open process of revelation and discovery.

PART III: AWAY

Creeley's collection of poems, AWAY,[10] was published the same year as Hello even though the poems in AWAY were written somewhat earlier. This collection documents the poet's continuing struggle to maintain the relationship with his wife, Bobbie, that was to end soon after in separation and divorce. As usual, AWAY depicts a literal situation of the poet thinking about his wife who is distant from him both literally and figuratively. From the sentimental opening poem, "Away," Creeley continues to

record his feelings and observations in a format similar to the journal entries of A Day Book and Hello. As a result, AWAY, like the previous two collections, is a minute "scanning" of his quotidian experiences.

Creeley depicts the routine and the monotony of his daily activities in the poem "Every Day":

> Every morning there is
> a day. Every day
> there is a day.
>
> Waking up in a bed
> with a window with light,
> with a place in mind,
>
> to piss, to eat,
> to think of something,
> to forget it all.
>
> (AWAY, p. 14)

Yet what unifies all of these impressions is the fact that he is once again a separate being, distanced from his love. As such, he seeks to come to some recognition or sense of himself, as in the poem "Sound":

> Hearing a car pass—
> that insistent distance
> from here to there,
> sitting here.
>
> Sunlight
> shines through the green leaves,
> patterns of light and dark,
> shimmering.
>
> But so quiet
> now the car's gone,
> sounds of myself smoking,
> my hand writing.
>
> (AWAY, p. 16)

Even though the "theme" of the poems has changed in this collection from that of A Day Book and Hello, Creeley's concern

with the presentation of subjective and objective reality is still paramount. In "Sound," subjective speculation begins the moment that the speaker hears the car pass, which then turns into a reflection on the "insistent distance" between "here to there"—himself and his wife who has left. The second stanza returns to purely objective description as the poet's mind moves to observe the patterns of nature. However, the third stanza combines the subjective with the objective as Creeley is aware of the sound of himself smoking and writing, yet is able to maintain that sense of detachment where there is no longer any disparity between his Self and his surroundings.

Consequently, many of the fragments in AWAY read like some dialogue between his subjective Self and this other detached "self" that Creeley sometimes addresses as "you." In "Here" Creeley uses this form of address in the opening fragment:

> No one
> else in the room
> except you.

Yet loneliness is not necessarily implied in these lines, but rather only a special, acute awareness of his condition. This detached state is that of an almost objective awareness where his subjective Self becomes:

> Mind's a form
> of taking
> it all.

just as his literal world is seen and personified to be a type of sentient "being" that seems to exist independently of his Self:

And the room
opens
and closes
(AWAY, p. 17)

Even though there is not the same sense of continuity that exists in the journals of A Day Book and Hello, AWAY still provides Creeley with the opportunity to present his emotional impressions of events that happen in his life during a specific period of time. Although AWAY is thematically built around the relationship with his wife, Bobbie, two poems, "For My Mother: Genevieve Jules Creeley" and "The Plan is the Body," stand apart as poems almost separate from the rest of the collection in much the same way that "The Finger" can be read on its own independently of the rest of Pieces.

The poem "For My Mother" appeared originally as part of an essay entitled The Creative that was printed as a separate Black Sparrow monograph in 1973, three years before AWAY was published. In this essay Creeley points out the discrepancy between the two "selves" that have been previously mentioned:

> But the I, as Wittgenstein puts it, is what is 'deeply mysterious'. In a world of objects, mes, this is the one manifestation of existence that cannot so see itself as literal thing. It is my experience that what I feel to be creative has location in this place of personal identity.[11]

This quotation is especially pertinent to the collection AWAY as well as to the poem "For My Mother" since Creeley's "personal identity" is the locus of all perceptions and feelings throughout the poems. In "For My Mother" Creeley is witnessing his mother's literal death, yet the last three stanzas of the poem

focus more upon his feelings about the event than the literal event itself:

> Your head
> shuddered,
> it seemed, your
>
> eyes wanted
> I thought
> to see
>
> who it was.
> I am here,
> and will follow.
>
> (AWAY, p. 27)

The use of phrases like "it seemed" and "I thought" obviously point to the desire on the poet's part to infuse the moment of her death with significance, while the last two lines are a recognition of his mortality. However, this poem is more than just subjective speculation on Creeley's part not simply because of the emotions of longing, bitter-sweet tenderness, and sorrow that are expressed, but also because the poet attempts to move outside of his Self to present a sincere, undistorted rendering of his mother's death. Despite the fact that this poem is profoundly moving, the nature of the recognition at the end of the poem, while an obvious statement of "personal identity," is also a dual vision that is both subjective and objective—that of his mother's suffering and release as well as a statement of his feelings about this. What makes this poem "creative," especially in terms of Creeley's definition of this term, is that the poet is what Olson called both the "instrument" and the "definition" of discovery.

The other poem, "The Plan is the Body," while it can be read on its own independently of the collection, does make a state-

ment about Creeley's proprioceptive concerns. The line "the plan is the body" is used as a constant refrain in this poem that the poet always returns to. As such, it becomes the necessary balance to the subjective "mind" that Creeley is opposing to the "body" that incorporates a physical awareness of being. Throughout this poem the reader is made to hear the insistence of the "mind" as it seeks to create subjective distortions:

> Me, me, remember, me
> here, me wants to, me
> am thinking of you.
> The plan is the body.
>
> Who can read it.
> Plan is the body. The mind
> is the plan. I—
> speaking. The memory
>
> gathers like memory, plan,
> I thought to remember,
> thinking again, thinking.
> The mind is the plan of the mind.
>
> (AWAY, p. 33)

Just when we feel that the insistence of the subjective Self seems to have taken over in stanza seven ("Me, me, remember, me"), there is a recognition that this has come about through a process of distortion since it is only the "I-/ speaking." This recognition is further underlined in the last line of the second-to-last stanza when Creeley writes: "The mind is the plan of the mind," which has now been altered from the assertion in the previous stanza ("The mind is the plan"), which was a solipsistic resolution. Instead, the recognition that "The mind is the plan of the mind" illustrates the pernicious nature of thinking that always leads back to itself. The last stanza of the poem, the

reiteration of the basic refrain, thus becomes the same recognition apparent in Pieces that began with a quote from Allen Ginsberg's "Song"—an insistence to "return to the body" or to a less subjective apprehension of the world.

It then becomes apparent that Creeley's purpose (as opposed to intention) in writing a collection of poems like AWAY was also to examine his feelings and to reflect on his desires and fears in addition to reaching out and communicating through language. Creeley asserts this in the poem "Than I":

> I'm telling you a
> story to let myself
> think about it. All
>
> day I've been
> here, and yesterday.
> The months, years,
>
> enclose me as
> this thing with arms
> and legs. And if
>
> it is time
> to talk about it,
> who knows better
>
> than I?
> (AWAY, p. 40)

It is apparent that while this poem is written to his wife (the "you" in the first line), it is also an attempt on Creeley's part to come to terms with the memories he has of her that are like some "thing with arms and legs" that threatens to stifle him. This "thing," then, can be taken to be the "mind" in the previously discussed poem and, as such, further demonstrates his attempt to make sense of his own life and feelings.

Even though many of the poems verge on excessive sentimentality and, at times, self-pity, what keeps AWAY from being a maudlin, personal statement is the honesty and self-criticism that are apparent throughout. Thus, fragments that sound almost like pathetic, childlike ramblings,

> I'd climb into
> your body
> if I could, cover
>
> myself up entirely
> in your generous
> darkening body,
>
> steal away all
> senses, sleep
> in the hole.
>
> (AWAY, p. 54)

are saved because of the sobriety of the fragment:

> Stay here. Where I am,
> is alone here, on the sand.
> Water out in front of me
>
> crashes on.
>
> (AWAY, p. 55)

which brings him back to a sense of reality with an almost brutal force that is like the waves crashing onto the shore.

At no point does this volume become excessively sentimental. Perhaps the reason for this can be extracted from the ambiguity of the following fragment:

> I'll never get it right enough,
> will never stop trying.
>
> (AWAY, p. 56)

The sense of inadequacy that is expressed in these two lines is at the heart of Creeley's poetry. Like the awkward "manny" of "The Finger," we are drawn to the honesty of this admission.

What he can never get "right enough" are purpose, order, and coherence in his life. Yet the ambiguity the reader is drawn to is the almost heroic stance of the second line where he maintains he "will never stop trying." This is faith of the same type that Williams discussed in "The Basis of Faith in Art," and we are thereby left to respect Creeley's vulnerability and humanness despite his quirks and foibles. Therefore, we can simultaneously respect and condemn his reflections on the nature of the relationship he has with his wife:

> If I wanted
> to know myself,
> I'd look at you.
>
> When I loved
> what I was,
> it was that reflection.
>
> (AWAY, p. 57)

Perhaps the finest poem in AWAY is "Sitting Here," which incorporates Creeley's desire to unify the subjective with the objective and external reality with his "mind" or Self. The opening of the poem,

> Roof's peak is eye,
> sky's grey, tree's
> a stack of lines,
>
> wires across it. This
> is window, this is
> sitting at the table,
>
> thinking of you,
> far away,
> whose face is
>
> by the mirror on the bureau.
>
> (AWAY, p. 70)

shows how feelings, abstractions, and thoughts begin with concrete

images of the physical world. In the first two stanzas the only intimation we have of a Self or "personality" is the "eye" that gazes about objectively and takes in the world. Subjectivity only enters into this poem through the line "thinking of you," which now provides a focus for the poet's address.

This poem becomes a thematic continuation based upon the title of the volume. Not only is his wife "away" from him literally, but his daughter is now grown up and has also "left" him. He therefore wants to regain that first sense of her as the child who issued from him and who depended upon him:

> Be me again
> being born, be the little
>
> wise one walks
> quietly by, in the sun,
> smiles silently,
>
> grows taller and taller.
>
> (AWAY, p. 71)

What the speaker seems unable to understand is the passage of the years and the fact that nothing in this life endures or is permanent:

> Because all these things
> passing, changing,
>
> all the things
> coming and going
> inside, outside—
>
> I can't hold them,
> I want to but
> keep on losing them.
>
> (AWAY, p. 71)

The sense he wants to recapture is an apprehension of the world that he felt through the innocence of his daughter when she

was a child, that "world is wonder." On the one hand, the recognition that comes to the speaker is of the bitter passage of time: "whatever/ we were has gone." Yet this poem is also about the way in which his own mind has created correspondences to the memories evoked by his trip to the attic. It is from this attic that the "action" of the poem begins as Creeley (the "eye" of the first stanza) stares out over the rooftops, sees his daughter's picture, and begins to reflect on her lost youth and his present feelings of loneliness.

Because the "action" of this poem takes place in the author's "mind," it would be easy to dismiss it as a sentimental exposition. However, despite the poignancy of his observations that reflects an honesty of feeling, this poem also works on another level. Just as Fenollosa suggests, the abstractions begin from an apprehension of concrete reality, and it is to this reality that we are brought back at the poem's conclusion:

> As if that touch of you
> had, unknowing,
> turned me around again
>
> truly to face you.
> and your face is wet,
> blurred, with tears—
>
> or is it simply years later,
> sitting here, and whatever
> we were has gone.
>
> (AWAY, p. 72)

The "touch" to which Creeley refers is a remembered moment of taking his child's hand to offer her comfort. Though he is "turned. . .around again" to "truly" face her, it is still, at first, in memory only. However, the recognition comes in the last

stanza that it was all imagined, and the poet is returned to his present state of lonely reflection. Therefore, just as he comes to terms with his memories, he also recognizes them as something in the past as he is brought back to the reality of the present.

It is precisely this refusal to be sentimental even though a wealth of emotion is expressed that makes this poem such a wonderful insight. Also, this poem, as the others in this collection and in previous ones, is truly projective and open because it depicts a movement in the perceptions of the poet. This movement is never confined to the stasis of the mind, but moves out from the Self only to return to it again, but with a new vision. Thus, the poet who was an "eye" at the beginning of the poem is now changed, having gained at least a modicum of wisdom and self-knowledge. Finally, at the end of this collection Creeley resolves to let his wife define her own life instead of him doing it for her:

> Let her
> sing it
> for herself.
>
> (AWAY, p. 78)

Just as his mind has attempted to take him "away" from the reality of his life, this resolve to accept the reality of his circumstances is asserted in a part of the concluding fragment:

> Be welcome
> to it.
>
> (AWAY, p. 77)

PART IV: Later

Later,[12] Creeley's most recent collection of poetry, continues with the poet's reflections on death, aging, and his memories of his youth. As in AWAY, Creeley walks a fine line between sentimentality and emotional poignancy, and the tautness of the verse and his refusal to indulge in excessively maudlin subjectivity make this volume one of the most powerful of Creeley's recent writings. The first poem of this collection, "Myself," locates the speaker in time as a perplexed, aging man who seeks to unravel the mystery of existence and establish coherence within his life.

"Myself" opens with a note of acceptance of his condition, yet the desire to understand the confusion of his life is still paramount:

> What, younger, felt
> was possible, now knows
> is not—but still
> not changed enough—
>
> Walked by the sea
> unchanged in memory—
> evenings, as clouds
> on the far-off rim
>
> of water float,
> pictures of time,
> smoke, faintness—
> still the dream.
>
> (Later, p. 3)

While the "action" of this poem seems to begin in the speaker's mind, it is also apparent that his literal situation—that of walking by the sea—is equally important. As in many of his

earlier poems, the sea, symbol of life, continuity, and the perpetual changing rhythms of life, figures prominently. The perceptions of this poem have a movement not unlike the pull of the water as it meets the shore; first, the speaker returns to his youth and compares it with his present state of mind, finding the latter "still/ not changed enough."

Next, he reflects on his literal situation, walking by the sea, which seems to him to be "unchanged in memory"; yet as he observes the horizon letting his mind take him like the return of the tide to "pictures of time,/ smoke, faintness," the "dream," or his idealistic concerns retained from his youth that he could understand the world he lives in, still remain with him. Although he acknowledges that he has grown older, he continues to ask the gnawing questions of his youth:

> I want, if older,
> still to know
> why, human, men
> and women are
>
> so torn, so lost,
> why hopes cannot
> find better world
> than this.
>
> (Later, p. 3)

The emphasis on change is significant in this poem since it is recurrent throughout the entire volume. Creeley seems to be acknowledging both the persistence of the Self that remains also "unchanged in memory" as well as lamenting the very fact that he has, through the passage of the years, "not changed enough." However, there is, significantly, an acceptance of himself as an individual with a predilection for self-reflection which, while painful and

sometimes lamentable, is something that the speaker admits and resolves to live with. In the poem "This World," the speaker, while watching the waves by the sea, attempts to lose himself in nature:

> I could watch
> these glittering
> waves forever,
>
> follow their sound
> deep into mind
> and echoes—
> let light
>
> as air
> be relief.
>
> (Later, p. 4)

The "relief" he is seeking is from perpetual thinking—the persistence of memory and the confines of the "mind." The unfeeling force of nature seems to force him toward a recognition of his physical being:

> The wind
> pulls at face
>
> and hands,
> grows cold.

and stills his mind:

> What
> can one think—
> the beach
>
> is myriad stone.
>
> (Later, p. 4)

Finally, there is a recognition of the insignificance of his life that is neither sad nor bitter that comes at the end of the poem:

> What
> matters as one
> in this world?
>
> (Later, p. 5)

Significantly, this desire to lose himself in nature refers back to the Romantic stance of Shelley who is quoted in the previous poem, "Myself." However, it is important to note that Creeley's dispassionate manner of address distances him from such a Romantic predisposition.

Thus, his view of himself as:

> Older man at
> water's edge, brown
> pants rolled up,
> white legs, and hair.
>
> (Later, p. 9)

is certainly a rather unheroic view of himself, as is the picture he draws of the cycle of existence in "Flaubert's Early Prose":

> He is a very interesting man,
> this intensively sensitive person,
> but he has to die somehow—
>
> so he goes by himself to the beach,
> and sits down and thinks,
> looking at the water to be found there,
>
> 'Why was I born? Why
> am I living?'—like
> an old song, cheri—
> and then he dies.
>
> (Later, p. 11)

Obviously, Creeley is describing himself in this poem, yet there is a note of sarcasm throughout these lines. The reminder that he, an "intensively sensitive person," has to "die somehow" is an obvious attempt on Creeley's part to demystify the myth the Self perpetuates that it is "special" and, consequently, immortal. Like the other "common" men in the beginning of the poem who also die either being "hit by a truck," or by "a boulder/ pushed down onto him," the "interesting" and "sensitive" poet who asks the

overwhelming questions about being ("Why was I born? Why/ am I living?") is not more privileged, and also dies. That Creeley sees these questions of being as "an old song" is significant because he seems to suggest that this persistent questioning can become a dead end since there are no answers one can ever be sure of. Therefore, the speaker questions the nature of the "mind" that does the questioning, viewing it sardonically as something as insignificant as the lives he has dismissed in the previous lines of this poem.

The other preoccupation in this volume, in addition to his mortality, is finding meaning through love and relationships. In "Place" Creeley starts off by depicting his loneliness and consequent desire to embrace love in order to give his life significance:

> I feel faint here,
> too far off, too
> enclosed in myself,
> can't make love a way out
>
> I need the oldtime density,
> the dirt, the cold,
> the noise through the floor—
> my love in company.
>
> (Later, p. 13)

The sense of being "enclosed" is brought about by the "mind" that creates the distances. Thus the "dear company" he seeks in the poem, "For Pen," is a loving relationship where he will feel important while being part of the world:

> I want the world
> I did always,
> small pieces
> and clear acknowledgments.

I want to be useful
to someone, I think,
always—if not many,
then one.
(Later, p. 17)

Yet his views of love have changed in this volume from the insistent sexual longing of Pieces, A Day Book, and "In London." Now seeing himself as "wrinkled" and "grey," the poet who sees the pictures of "women, naked" while walking along the beach in "Erotica" is reminded of his adolescence, which awakens within him a longing to feel as a youth:

Shall I throw
myself down
upon it,

this ground
rolls and twists
these pictures

I want still
to see.
(Later, p. 20)

Even though this desire and longing persist, he seems to have come to some recognition of a maturity as well as to a recognition of his situation. In "After" he resolves to embrace a vision that will be of the condition of himself as an aging person in the present world:

I'll not write again
things a young man
thinks, not the work
of that feeling.

There is no world
except felt, no
one there but
must be here also.
(Later, p. 16)

To realize his condition in the world means a return to an awareness of his mortality. Therefore, near the conclusion of the first part of Later, Creeley writes:

> Well, walk on. . .We'll be gone
> soon enough. I'll have got
> all I wanted—your time and your love
> and yourself—like, poco a poco.
>
> That sea never cared about us.
> Nor those rocks nor those hills.
> nor the far-off mountains still
> white with snow. The sun
>
> came with springtime—la
> primavera, they'll say, when
> we've gone. But we came.
> We've been here.
>
> (Later, p. 41)

This testament to having left a mark upon the world (even though this is alternately mocked in a poem like "Flaubert's Early Prose") is repeated in "Sparrow," the second-to-last poem of the first part of this collection:

> Last time we'll see them,
> hear their feisty greeting
>
> to the day's first light,
> the coming of each night.
>
> (Later, p. 42)

The "first greeting" of the sparrows serves as a metaphor for Creeley's own poetry that, like the song of the birds that greet "day's first light" (Life) as well as "the coming of each night" (Death), is a statement of a similarly "feisty" courage to create a song from despair. As such, we can recall Creeley's earlier poem, "The Dishonest Mailmen,"[13] where he wrote:

> The poem supreme, addressed to
> emptiness—this is the courage
>
> necessary.

except that the "artistic pursuit of the void"[14] apparent in the above lines and in a previously discussed poem like "The Finger"[15] has now altered. Rather, the vision Creeley presents in Later is one that is opposed to the self-abnegation of his earlier poetry. Instead, Later celebrates the small victories of his life—persistence, continuity, and the courage to "sing" in spite of his "doom," as is also evident in the poem, "End":

> let the world stay
>
> open to me
> day after day,
>
> words to say,
> things to be.
>
> (Later, p. 43)

It is especially apparent in the last two lines of this poem that Creeley is attempting to integrate the "mind" with the world. Unlike in "The Dishonest Mailmen" where the "mind" or Self sought to approach and become the void, the progression of ideas from Pieces to Later indicates this desire on the poet's part to acknowledge the coexistence of subject-object, Self and world, and "words" and "things."

The ambiguity of feelings expressed in Later varies in terms of the harmony between his "mind" and the world. At times, the poems express a satisfaction and complacency with his life in the world, as in the poem, "For Pen":

> Last day of year,
> sky's a light
>
> open grey, blue
> spaces appear
>
> in lateral tiers.
> Snow's fallen,

will again. Morning
sounds hum, inside,

outside, roosters squawk,
dogs bark, birds squeek.

—'Be happy with me'.
(Later, p. 64.)

The beginning line of this poem, while it can be viewed in terms of a finality since he talks about the last day of the year, should be read here as an expression of hope for a new beginning since the New Year will be ushered in; hence, new possibilities. The poet expresses contentment hearing the sounds of the day both "inside" and "outside"; as such, there is an expressed harmony between his inner life and the world outside of his Self. The final line of the poem—"Be happy with me"—then seems to be spoken by the "roosters," "dogs," and "birds," which is an attempt on Creeley's part to deliberately anthropomorphize nature to demonstrate that, when content, the "mind" is ready to accept a oneness with all things.

This feeling of oneness, however, when it is seen as nothing more than an egocentric conceit is alternately mocked in the poem, "For Rene Ricard":

For me—and possibly
for only me—a bird
sits in a lousy tree,

and sings and sings
all goddam day,
and what I do

is write it down,
in words
they call them:

him, and it, and her,
some story this
will sometimes tell

or not. The bird
can't care, the
tree can hardly hold it up—

and me is least of all
its worry. What then
is this life all about.

(Later, pp. 81-82)

The poetic conceit of viewing the Self as something special is deemphasized by Creeley even in the language he uses throughout the opening segments. Words like "lousy" and "goddam" as modifiers for the natural world serve to promote the feeling of dissatisfaction on Creeley's part toward his "role" as poet. The last part of this fragment:

the bird
can't care, the
tree can hardly hold it up—

and me is least of all
its worry.

is a frank sentiment that is counter to the self-conceit of a Romantic disposition that Creeley feels creates a false sense of security.

However, as in the poem "For Pen," happiness comes to the poet through human relationships. While the line "Be happy with me" may be read as an attempt by the poet to animate the inanimate world, it is, ultimately, Creeley's own voice that states this as a plea for meaning and communion in an incomprehensible world. Thus the answer to what life is "all about" in the latter poem is both meaningless ("garbage/ dumped in street") and what,

for Creeley, is the only thing that seems to provide coherence and worth to his own life: "a friend's quick care," and "a necessary love"—highlights of human relationships that, despite one's mortality ("a physical heart/ which goes or stops"), somehow endure.

The answer to the complexity of existence is, as Creeley suggests in "For Rene Ricard," "simple." This simplicity that Creeley seems to strive for is his attempt to go beyond the dissection of meaning and relationships that the complex "mind" creates. Rather, simplicity is something positive and genuinely felt, not analysed:

> How sentimental,
> heartfelt, this life becomes
> when you try to think of it,
> say it in simple words—
>
> (Later, p. 99)

Here, "sentimental" is used as an expression synonymous with feeling. Interestingly, this feeling is recorded as simply as possible with no attempt to give such an initial impression any symbolic overtones, as in a poem like "Morning (8:10 AM)":

> In sun's
> slow rising
> this morning
>
> antenna tower
> catches
> the first light,
>
> shines
> for an instant
> silver
>
> white,
> separate
> from the houses,

the trees,
old woman walking
on street out front.
(Later, p. 108)

The sense of presence evoked in this poem by the direct, impressionistic way of writing recalls the early Imagist poetry of Pound, Williams, and Oppen.

However, Creeley examines this objective position and wonders if, by being strictly objective and only observing life, one is actually living:

if a life lives more
than just looking,
knowing nothing more.
(Later, p. 11)

Similarly, he realizes that language, while it has been his medium to join the separate realities of the Self and the world, cannot always reconcile this dichotomy, no matter how objective or "true to life" it attempts to stay:

There are no words I know
tell where to go and how,
or how to get back again
from wherever one's been.

They don't keep directions
as tacit information.
Years of doing this and that
stay in them, yet apart.
(Later, p. 116)

Hence the "courage necessary," despite the fact that Creeley sees it sometimes as an "absurd" desire, is to maintain a stance toward the world that Olson proposed in "Human Universe":

Do you dare to
live in the world,
this world,
equal with all—
(Later, p. 118)

Finally, Later ends as the testament of an individual who is willing to come to an acceptance of his limitations and circumstances in the world. Yet the question remains as to why the poet makes such a testament, and Creeley attempts to provide an answer at the conclusion of this collection:

> All who know me
> say, why this man's
> persistent pain, the scarifying
> openness he makes do with?
>
> Agh! brother spirit,
> what do they know
> of whatever is the instant
> cannot wait a minute—
>
> will find heaven in hell,
> will be there again even now,
> and will tell of itself
> all, all the world.
>
> (Later, p. 121)

The "scarifying openness" that is mentioned here is the same "vicious self-exposure" that Creeley makes mention of in an earlier poem, "The Name." Yet what redeems the pain and suffering that is the result of being so "open" to the truth of his Self and the impersonal truth of the world is precisely what gives meaning to his life and provides the moment of revelation.

It is thus appropriate that this poem is entitled "Prayer to Hermes" because Creeley sees himself as being in the company of this messenger of the gods. The "message" that he seeks to communicate is an affirmation of life in the momentariness of existence—"whatever is the instant." This affirmation is stressed by the thrice repeated use of the italicized "will" in the last stanza and recalls the conclusion of the title poem, "Later,"

where the "will" becomes a "willingness" to be open to life and to find wonder in the smallest parcel of existence. As such, the conclusion of "Later" sums up the idea of this whole collection as well as affirming Creeley's concern throughout his life as a poet to offer a testament of himself as an active, feeling being in the ever-changing now:

> In testament
> to a willingness
>
> to live, I
> Robert Creeley,
>
> being of sound body
> and mind, admit
>
> to other preoccupations—
> with the future, with
>
> the past. But now—
> but now the wonder of life is
>
> that it is at all,
> this sticky sentimental
>
> warm enclosure,
> feels place in the physical
>
> with others,
> lets mind wander
>
> to wondering thought,
> then lets go of itself,
>
> finds a home
> on earth.
>
> (Later, pp. 78-79)

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

[1] Robert Creeley, "Introduction to The New Writing in the USA" in The Poetics of the New American Poetry, edited by Donald Allen and Warren Tallman (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1973), p. 259.

[2] Ibid., p. 263.

[3] Robert Creeley, A Day Book (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972). All subsequent page references to this edition cannot be provided since this volume is unpaginated. When necessary to identify this collection, the following abbreviation will be used: A.D.B.

[4] Cynthia Dubin Edelberg, Robert Creeley's Poetry: A Critical Introduction (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), p. 143.

[5] Zsolt S. Alapi, ed., "Interview with Robert Creeley" in Atropos, Vol. I, No. 1 (Spring, 1978), p. 28.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Edelberg, Robert Creeley's Poetry, p. 157.

[8] Robert Creeley, Hello (New York: New Directions, 1976), p. 85. All subsequent page references to this edition are given in parentheses after the quotations as they appear in the text. When necessary to identify this collection, the following abbreviation will be used: Hello.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Robert Creeley, AWAY (Santa Barbara, California: Black Sparrow Press, 1976). All subsequent page references to this edition are given in parentheses after the quotations as they appear in the text. When necessary to identify this collection, the following abbreviation will be used: AWAY.

[11] Robert Creeley, The Creative (Los Angeles, California: Black Sparrow Press, 1973), p. 1.

[12] Robert Creeley, Later (New York: New Directions, 1978). All subsequent page references to this edition are given in parentheses after the quotations as they appear in the text. When necessary to identify this collection, the following abbreviation will be used: Later.

[13] Robert Creeley, For Love (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 29.

[14] Ekbert Fass, Towards A New American Poetics: Essays and Interviews (Santa Barbara, California: Black Sparrow Press, 1978), p. 155.

[15] For discussion of this poem, see Chapter I of this thesis.

CONCLUSION

Creeley's most recent collection, Mirrors,[1] published in 1981, consists of highly lyrical and sentimental pieces like "Song," "Greeting Card," "Oh Love," "Human Song," and, most interestingly, quite a few poems that are reminiscent of Imagist poetry in both their subject matter and manner of presentation. Mirrors is similar in its technique and scope to the poetry that began with Pieces and continued through to Later primarily because it is, in the words of one critic who stated this with reference to Later, a "poetry of moments."[2] If we equate this idea of "moments" with the title of this volume, we can see that the "moments" Creeley attempts to "mirror" in his poetry depict images of his emotional and spiritual life in an effort to capture them, as Pound had stated, in an "instant of time."

Mirrors strives to be less of a meditation upon his life and the consequent struggle between the "mind" and the "world" that is apparent in Pieces and the later collections, but rather more of a reflection of his complex of thoughts and feelings. Even though the poems appear in an individual format unlike the journal entries of A Day Book and Hello, the continuity is maintained because of the subject matter and the informing vision that reflect the poet's interior life. Hence, it is interesting to consider the following criticism that was leveled at Later but which could have been similarly applied to Mirrors:

> What remains are the notes of a perplexed, aging man. True, there are occasional keen observations—but reportage doth not a poem make. . .Creeley's topics seldom escape the facile and the commonplace.[3]

Yet it is precisely the "facile" and the "commonplace" that are the subject matter of Creeley's poetry. His whole position depends upon his stance toward the "commonplace" just as it did for the Imagists, Objectivists, and William Carlos Williams; therefore, to disparage Creeley's stance toward his subject matter is to reject one of the tenets of modernist and postmodern poetics.

The impressionistic quality of poems like "The View" and "There is Water" reflects the objective world that the poet attempts to mirror in an unselfconscious manner. However, in the poem "Wind Lifts" we see a blending of the Imagist technique with the projective idea of integrating the Self within the content:

> Wind lifts lightly
> the leaves, a flower,
> a black bird
>
> hops to the bowl
> to drink. The sun
> brightens the leaves, back
>
> of them darker branches,
> tree's trunk. Night is still
>
> far from us. (Mirrors, p. 34)

It is interesting to note that up until the last line we are presented with strictly objective description of a world in seemingly benign harmony. In the last line, however, we are presented with a brief glimpse of a "mind" that has perceived this scene through the personalizing use of the pronoun, "us." Since there is no actual commentary on the speaker's part, we are left to intimate his feelings about Death through the juxtaposition of

words like "lightly," "sun," and "brightens" with "Night" in the final line. Also, there is a movement that is depicted from the "bright" visions to the "darker" branches"—a movement from light to dark and from the brightness of the "sun" to the darkness of the "Night" that parallels the speaker's own conscious manner of perceiving.

This poem, then, captures the "invisible action of the mind,"[4] similar to the most effective Imagist verse. It seems that Creeley approaches the technique of Imagism when his poems are this type of a lyrical response to the world. This seems to be at those rare times when unity between subject and object has been briefly achieved. However, it is important to observe that this position is never maintained throughout an entire collection primarily because the subject of Creeley's poetry involves the struggle to approach such a reconciliation. Thus, in the same way that Pound, Williams, and the Objectivists came to feel that lyrical description was not enough in a poem, Creeley's premise is likewise that the poem must depict the mind's "invisible action" and ability to transform.

Similarly, Creeley uses this manner of presentation in the poem, "Buffalo Evening":

> Steady, the evening fades
> up the street into sunset
> over the lake. Winter sits
>
> quiet here, snow piles
> by the road, the walks stamped
> down or shoveled. The kids
>
> in the time before dinner are
> playing, sliding on the old ice.
> The dogs are out, walking,

and it's soon inside again,
with the light gone. Time
to eat, to think of it all.

(Mirrors, p. 62)

Once again, it is the Imagist technique of juxtaposition that reveals the poet's "vision." The reflections on Death and the passage of time are only suggested through the personification of "Winter" sitting like some quiet predator observing the "light" (the passage of one's life) disappear. The tone of this whole poem is deliberately understated so that even when we notice the unusual positioning of "Time" within the rhythmical context of the lines we are drawn into the the poet's perception of the disturbing recognition of his mortality at the end of the poem. The spacing of "Time" following the concluding image of "light gone" is crucial. The reader pauses for an instant before continuing on to the next line, but long enough to establish the connection between the fading of the "light" and the passage of "Time." Most importantly, this poem, while thematically establishing the poet's concern with the significance of the small moments of everyday life, also draws the reader into the poet's world without any perceptible or conscious effort. The seemingly objective manner of presentation reveals the presence of the poet's Self at the poem's center.

The poem, "Early Reading," may be viewed as evidence of Creeley's appreciation of the Imagists's efforts:

Break heart, peace,
shy ways of holding
to the meager thing.

Little place in mind
for large, expansive counters
such as Hulme would also

seemingly deny yet afford
with bleak moon late
rising on cold night's field.

(Mirrors, p. 66)

The comparison of this poem to T. E. Hulme's "Autumn" (one of the first Imagist poems) is interesting:

A touch of cold in the Autumn night
I walked abroad,
And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
Like a red-faced farmer.
I did not stop to speak, but nodded;
And round about were the wistful stars
With white faces like town children.[5]

Through the reference to Hulme, Creeley is pointing out the irony inherent in the Imagist vision. The "meager thing" Creeley refers to in the first stanza of his poem is the "direct treatment of the 'thing'"—the acceptance of the objective world without the need for abstraction—that was one of the "Principles of Imagism." The "expansive counter" is also another reference to the manner of abstraction that Hulme and the Imagists denied.

The irony with respect to the Imagist vision that Creeley is pointing out is established in his line, "seemingly deny yet afford". By this Creeley means that Hulme, even though he makes every effort to avoid dealing with abstractions and to stick to concrete reality, is actually including statements of a universal nature. Certainly, if we consider the mood of Hulme's poem, we see that the "wistful stars" suggest a concern on the poet's part with some sense of loss that seems to be the emotional focus of the poem. The very ambiguity of this feeling, even though the

poet deliberately rejects naming it for fear of realizing an abstraction, is what suggests the more "expansive encounter" in Creeley's lines. Creeley, then, seems to be implying that within his minimalist descriptions (just as it was implicit in the poems of the Imagists) is a more "expansive" view of the world. Therefore, poetry is not just a particular emotion, for Creeley; rather, his belief is based on Williams' recognition that the poet's unique insight, if it is "sincere" enough, denotes a broader, more universal vision.

Creeley's connection to both the Imagists and to Williams may be observed at this point. Just as Williams felt that "ideas" (or abstractions) had to arise from "things" (or the objects of the material world), so Creeley feels that the poet's most intimate feelings must inform his poetry:

> Well, I've always been embarrassed for a so-called larger view. . .I am given as a man to work with what is most intimate to me—these senses of relationship among people. I think, for myself at least, the world is most evident and most intense in those relationships. Therefore they are the materials of which my work is made.[6]

Thus, the "shy ways of holding/to the meager thing," while it suggests an image of an uncertain lover, also conveys this same degree of "intimacy" that Creeley prizes.

This "intimate" connection Creeley strives to make with his reader is the informing vision of most of his poetry, particularly of the poems after and including Pieces. His notion of the continuous poem that remains "open" to the unity of Self and objects is based upon the idea of writing as a process that he had

learned from Charles Olson. This process implied the same kind of interaction that Olson felt the poet was a part of. For Creeley, then, the process of writing involves this intimate communion that both he and Olson felt could be apprehended in the open, projective poem:

> I feel that when people read my poems most sympathetically, they are reading with me. So communication is mutual feeling with someone, not a didactic process of information.[7]

This intimacy is then relayed to the reader because of the quality of the poet's emotion (what Williams called the "intensity of vision"). Creeley feels that it is necessary to present emotions of a certain quality—emotions that are specifically articulated, as opposed to those that are blurred by an assumptional sentiment. He feels that Williams had this capacity because he was able to present a "complex and intimate and modulated quality of feeling,"[8] the evidence of which is also communicated to and felt by the reader. It is these emotions of "quality," what Creeley calls "These retroactive small/instances of feeling," (Mirrors, p.3) that promote the sense of continuity and process in his previous poetry as well as in the poetry of Mirrors.

To say "open" to the everchanging moment is the object of poetry, Creeley believes, if one keeps to the poem as a continual process of "revelation and discovery." Creeley stated in an interview that "reality is continuous, not separable,"[9] and it is in this sense, also, that we must regard the poems in Mirrors. This process begins, as Laszlo Géfin pointed out in his study of Creeley's earlier collection, Pieces,

> . . .with an action, from a fidelity to the event-objects, whose images the poet carries over into language and thought.[10]

From this effort to align the subjective Self with these "events-objects" comes the "revelation and discovery" of the poet and the consequent energy of this feeling transmitted to the reader.

Creeley's poetry, then, is one of continuing beginnings, as he states in "The Edge":

> to begin again, forfeit
> in whatever sense an end,
> to give up thought of it—

From this recognition of the necessity to always "make it new," as Pound stated, comes his constant awareness of the way in which his "mind" distorts his given reality:

> I take the world and lose it,
> miss it, misplace it,
> put it back or try to, can't
>
> find it, fool it, even feel it.

His use of repeated alliteration in this passage depicts the confusion that he seeks to resolve in the final stanza:

> This must be the edge
> of being before the thought of it
> blurs it, can only try to recall it.
>
> (Mirrors, p. 5)

This "edge" that Creeley refers to is the precarious hold he maintains between the moment and the "thought of it," which is a concept that was also apparent in the poetry of the Imagists.[11]

This "edge" is also the fine line Creeley manages to tread between poetry that approaches sentimentality and the "significant emotions" of his finest verse. We find in a poem like "Wishes"—which describes the poet's relish for the comfort of everyday

things and relationships—things like:

> Lunch with its divers
> orders of sliced
> chicken going by on
>
> the lazy susan with
> the cucumber, the goat cheese,
> the remnants of rice
>
> salad left from last night.

a forceful statement like:

> Are we not well met
>
> here, factually nowhere
> ever known to us before,
> and will we not forever
>
> now remember this?

and the conclusion, "Nothing forgot." (Mirrors, pp. 47-48). What carries this poem beyond sentimentality to a significant emotion is the fact that the very "mundanities" of the poet's life are the things that will remain memorable because of the warmth and sincerity of a communion that was shared by himself and others.

Similarly, the poem, "Time," written for his young son, Willy, depicts the process of his feelings attaining an emotional intensity and focus. From the contrast of his present, aging state, he presents to the reader his disparate state as a child, which is the condition shared by his son:

> When I was young,
> the freshness of a single
> moment came to me
>
> with all hope, all tangent wonder.
> Now I am one, inexorably
> in this body, in this time.

The passage of time that he sees apparent within himself is summed

up in the conclusion that provides the transference of feeling from himself to his son and, by implication, to the reader:

> The place of
> time oneself in the net
> hanging by hands will
>
> finally lose their hold,
> fall. Die. Let this son
> live, let him live.
>
> (Mirrors, pp. 9-10)

The transference of emotion is apparent in the final two lines since it is not only the life of his son that Creeley prays for, but also his own innocence. The image of himself as "hanging by hands" that "will/finally lose their hold" because he is trapped "in this time" is juxtaposed with the vision of his son's youthful innocence that is, like his own youth was, one of "tangent wonder." We see in this poetry the "transformation" that Creeley feels occurs in the work of art that depicts the process of revelation and establishes the proper "relation between you & what you're writing abt."[12]

This concept of transformation and the poem as a process involves the belief on Creeley's part that one must approach, in poetry, the totality of a life (its singular significance), which is the stance that informs his poetry. This is the natural consequence of modernist poetics that asserted poetry captured an "instant of time." This becomes redefined through Creeley as the extension of the poetic method, whereby we have each poem that is part of a collection projecting a portion of its energy to the next one in the same sense that Fenollosa saw the "transference of power," as an exchange of force in nature to the

inclusion of the poetic technique as something inextricably linked to the content.

Creeley's technique may be paralleled with the ideogrammatic method that Pound developed through his own involvement with Imagism and Fenollosa's ideas, as Gefin points out:

> The ideogrammatic process is based neither on logic nor on subjective associationism; rather, it aspires to depict the world in accordance with the process of nature. . .They point to a reality and an order which is not human, at the same time they seek to affirm that man, neither the lord nor the freak of nature, is an integral part of the cosmic process.[13]

Certainly, the idea of man as an "integral part of the cosmic process" is central to Olson's beliefs in "Human Universe" and The Special View of History, as well as to Creeley's own stance with respect to the Self in relation to the "world."

In this respect, we can then realize the way in which technique is inextricably linked to content in Creeley's work since his statement that "form is never more than an extension of content" stems from his conviction that the form of his poetry—the method of serial writing and the concept of the continuous poem—depicts the achievement of continuity between writing and experience; therefore, Creeley sees technique not as something extensible or separate, but rather as the most "intimate aspect" of writing.[14] It is precisely due to this that the psychic "measure" of the "open" poem rests in its ability to involve the reader in the experience of the poet's emotions.

Language, consequently, serves as a referrent to the poet's "intimate" state and can denote the transformation, revelation,

and discovery that Creeley feels is embodied in a work of art. Language (words or "signs") acts as a referrent to material objects in its initial function, according to Creeley's poetic. However, the implicit irony and source of frustration for the poet is that language is always subjective since it is used and modified by a specific individual. Thus, language is used to internalize the objective world and to re-assert it as both its internal and external manifestation. Creeley, in all likelihood, derived this idea from Ludwig Wittgenstein, who wrote:

> Since language stands in internal relations to the world, it and these relations determine the logical possibility of facts. If we have a significant sign it must stand in a particular internal relation to a structure.[15]

Significantly, since language manifests an internal relation to the world, according to both Wittgenstein and Creeley, we can then see where the seemingly objective rendering of experience would be seen by Creeley to be impossible. In this sense the language of a Creeley poem reflects his personal vision precisely because it emanates as a rendering of the poet's internal relation to the world.

It is exactly in this respect that Creeley's poetics incorporates the vision of his predecessors wherein both the subjective and objective criteria must be realized in a poem. Consequently, even though the act of writing for Creeley may appear to be the "act of the instant" in Olson's terms, Creeley's art is not just a spontaneous, objective activity that the term "open-verse" seems to imply. Since we have dealt with the idea that

language manifests an internal relation to the world, we can note that this involves a certain degree of self-consciousness.

This degree of self-consciousness is certainly apparent in Creeley's poetry, as has been pointed out throughout this study. While every statement or utterance in the body of the poetry seems to have its place in a seemingly random framework, we can see that the poet's self-consciousness creates a pattern and tension of its own. This pattern that is created is the direct consequence of the struggle between the Self and the "world," or Creeley's attempt to resolve this subject-object duality. It is this very sense of the act of writing a poem that is, for Creeley, the process of reconciling this impossible duality. We see, then, that at the center of Creeley's poetics and poetry is an awareness of the difficulty of using language to convey the "dasein" of the everchanging face of the world. In his effort to stay "open" to the "essents" of the world, Creeley is able to approach a union of subject-object, as in the following poem from Mirrors:

Now by the edge

of the window glass at the level
of the floor the grass
has become particularized
in the late light, each

edge of grass stalk
a tenacious fact of being there,
not words only, but only words,
only these words, to say it.

(Mirrors, p. 56)

Words, inadequate as they are, do "particularize" and, hence, internalize the world. For it is only at this fine "edge" that

the Self and the "world" cohere, albeit briefly; and it is also at this moment that the "mind" is most open to admit and to encounter that Mystery without beginning or end:

—it
it—

(Pieces, p. 17)

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

[1] Robert Creeley, Mirrors (New York: New Directions, 1981). All subsequent page references to this edition are given in parentheses after the quotations as they appear in the text. When necessary to identify this collection, the following abbreviation will be used: Mirrors.

[2] Victor Howes, in the Christian Science Monitor, 6 Feb. 1980, p. 17.

[3] Robert Peters, in Library Journal 104: 1703, 1 Sept. 1979.

[4] Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), p. 186.

[5] William Pratt, ed., The Imagist Poem (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1963), p. 41.

[6] Robert Creeley, "The Art of Poetry" in A Sense of Measure (London: Calder and Boyars, 1972), p. 100.

[7] Ibid., p. 90.

[8] Ibid., p. 92.

[9] Robert Creeley, Contexts of Poetry: Interviews 1961-1971 (Bolinas, California: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973), p. 185.

[10] Laszlo Géfin, "Ideogram: The History of a Poetic Method," Diss. McGill University 1979, p. 289.

[11] See L.L. Marty's review of Pieces in The Yale Review, 51: 252, December, 1969, especially where he discusses the fine line Creeley manages to tread between abstraction and poetry: "It is impossible, I believe, to become more abstract without destroying the very presence of poetry. Yet Creeley manages to hold himself at the taut edge of poetic existence."

[12] George Butterick, ed., Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence, Vol. I (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 68.

[13] Géfin, p. 346.

[14] For a rather detailed discussion of this with specific reference to the poetry of Gary Snyder and Williams, see "The Art of Poetry" in Creeley's A Sense of Measure, pp. 92-93.

[15] Ludwig Wittgenstein, Notebooks, 1914-1916, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 42e.

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