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The Late Modernist Quest for a Human Community in post-1945 Epic Poetry

Reading David Jones's *The Anathemata*, William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*, and Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems* with Georges Bataille's *Summa Atheologica*

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by me and is entirely the result of my own work. It has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification. Some parts of chapter two, 'David Jones's *The Anathemata*', are about to be published as essay in *David Jones: A Christian Modernist?: New Approaches to his Art, Poetry, and Cultural Theory*.

Simon Trub
10 May 2017

For my dad,

Roger Trüb

(1960 – 2016)

Abstract

Reading David Jones's *The Anathemata*, William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*, and Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems* as epics, this doctoral dissertation challenges the old but persistent notion that epic poetry ceased being written at a particular point in the past and instead examines the particular formal, philosophical and political difficulties writers of this genre had to confront in the second half of the twentieth century. Twentieth-century epic poetry will primarily be defined in terms of its purpose or function, which is the representation of the identity of a 'community', while the literary period beginning with the end of the Second World War will be defined as late modernism. Chiefly inspired by Anthony Mellors's *Late Modernist Poetics*: *From Pound to Prynne*, late modernism will be discussed as an aesthetico-political challenge with which writers had to come to terms in the wake of twentieth-century European totalitarianism. Georges Bataille's philosophy of community, it will be argued, paradigmatically illustrates these aesthetico-political difficulties in philosophical terms, and the discussions of the three epic poems are therefore preceded by an analysis of Bataille's *Summa Atheologica*, which constitutes the core of his philosophy of community.

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work is not everything. At the same time I would like to apologise to them for the many times when I was not able or not willing to see this. I love you all with all my heart.

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Abbreviations

Georges Bataille

G	Bataille, Georges. *Guilty*. Trans. Stuart Kendall. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011. Print.
IE	---. *Inner Experience*. Trans. Stuart Kendall. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014. Print.
OC I	---. *Oeuvre Complètes: Premiers Écrits: 1922-1940*. Vol. 1. Paris: Gallimard, 1970. Print. 12 vols.
OC VI	---. *Oeuvre Complètes: La Somme Athéologique: Tome II: Sur Nietzsche, Mémorandum, Annexes*. Vol. 6. Paris: Gallimard, 1973. Print. 12 vols.
ON	---. *On Nietzsche*. Trans. Stuart Kendall. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015. Print.
TAS I	---. *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy: Volume 1*. Vol. 1. New York: Zone Books, 1988. Print. 3 vols.
TAS II & III	---. *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy: Volumes 2 and 3*. 2 and 3. New York, NY: Zone Books, 2007. Print. 3 vols.

David Jones

A	Jones, David. *The Anathemata*. London: Faber and Faber, 2010. Print.

William Carlos Williams

EK	Williams, William Carlos. *The Embodiment of Knowledge*. Ed. Ron Loewinsohn. New York: New Directions, 1977. Print.

MM Marsh, Alec. *Money and Modernity: Pound, Williams, and the Spirit of Jefferson*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998. Print.

P Williams, William Carlos. *Paterson*. Ed. Christopher McGowan. New York: New Directions, 1995. Print.

SL ---. *The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams*. Ed. John C. Thirlwall. New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1957. Print.

Charles Olson

CO/RC V Olson, Charles, and Robert Creeley. *Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence: Volume 5*. Ed. George F. Butterick. Vol. 5. Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1983. Print. 10 vols.

CO/RC VII ---. *Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence: Volume 7*. Ed. George F. Butterick. Vol. 7. Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1987. Print. 10 vols.

'HU' Olson, Charles. 'Human Universe.' *Collected Prose*. Ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. 155–66. Print.

LO ---. *Letters for Origin*. Ed. Albert Glover. London: Cape Goliard Press, 1969. Print.

'PV' ---. 'Projective Verse.' *Collected Prose*. Ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. 239–49. Print.

M ---. *The Maximus Poems*. Ed. George F. Butterick. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. Print.

SVH ---. *The Special View of History*. Ed. Ann Charters. Berkeley: Oyez, 1970. Print.

Introduction: From the Particular to the Universal

> It was from the *particular* that [Joyce] made the *general* shine out.
> (Jones, 'Notes on the 1930s' 46, italics in original)

> To make a start
> out of particulars
> and make them general . . .
> (Williams, *Paterson* 3)

> *All my life I've heard*
> *one makes many*
> (Olson, *Maximus* 3, italics in original)

Research Hypothesis and Rationale

It is a persistent, even if not particularly recent view in scholarship on epic poetry that its object ceased to exist at the latest in the eighteenth century. Like several perceptive critics, the present doctoral dissertation challenges this notion, for it is informed by the belief that, rather than vanishing at a certain juncture, epic poetry continuously developed throughout history as a result of changes in the cultural or social contexts in which epic poets set to work. Few scholars have suggestively but regrettably all too briefly considered the possibilities and difficulties of the twentieth-century, or modernist, epic poem. This dissertation, however, focuses more narrowly on the period after the Second World War because it maintains that the challenges epic poets faced in the twentieth century significantly changed or grew after the catastrophic consequences of totalitarian regimes throughout Europe had increasingly come to light, but also after Ezra Pound, in the shadow of whose *Cantos* all succeeding twentieth-century epic poets inevitably worked, had been arrested in Pisa as a result of his involvement in Italian fascism. The focus of the present dissertation, consequently, is on these specific difficulties that complicate the composition of epic poetry after 1945.

Section two below provides an overview of scholarship that focuses on epic poetry, and in the course of this overview it will be maintained that twentieth-century

epic poetry needs to be defined less in accordance with strict formal characteristics and rather in terms of its aim or function. The main objective that defines the twentieth-century epic, the central feature that relates it to earlier epics, it will be argued, is the representation – both in the sense of 'depicting' and 'standing in for' – of a 'community'. Yet, the representation of an entire community by one individual work or poet became increasingly suspect and problematic if not impossible in the twentieth century, especially after the Second World War. Hence, the modernist epic is characterised by an inherent tension, which will be discussed in the next section. Intriguingly, a closely related aesthetico-political or also philosophical tension has been described by literary critics who examine late modernist literature, and section three of this introduction therefore introduces to the discussion late modernist scholarship. While the term 'late modernism' is used by various critics to refer to literature from the nineteen thirties onward, the present dissertation dates late modernism in accordance with Antony Mellors to the years following the Second World War. Mellors maintains that late modernist poets distance themselves from the totalitarian politics of high modernists such as W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot or Pound, while they continue the latters' totalising and therefore also potentitally totalitarian poetics, which are based on nostalgic longings for an organic culture or community (Mellors 42). The understanding and definition of 'late modernism' on which the argument of the present dissertation is based are chiefly indebted to Mellors's work, but section three below shows that surprisingly many literary critics discern in late modernist literature a simultaneous attraction to and problematisation of notions of metaphysical absolutes or totalities. The present dissertation attempts to understand the inherent tension of post-1945 epic poetry as a particular manifestation of this problem or conflict of late modernism.

Post-1945 or late modernist epic poems, then, according to the present dissertation, imagine organic communities while they simultaneously betray an awareness of the political dangers that accompany reactionary, transcendental and perhaps above all totalising conceptions of collectivity. Chapters two to four discuss David Jones's *The Anathemata*, William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* and Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems* as late modernist epics, and they approach these poems to a considerable extent as intellectual experiements that attempt to conceive of

'community' as complete and coherent, but without resorting to any kind of totalitarian logic. Chapter one discusses Georges Bataille's philosophy of community and in doing so lays the foundation for the conceptual interpretations and discussions of the poems. If an ambivalent attitude towards transcendental totalities or absolutes characterises late modernist literature, then Bataille's philosophy of community has to be considered a late modernist philosophy of community. In *Inner Experience*, *Guilty*, and *On Nietzsche*, which Bataille wrote during the Second World War, and rewrote and edited while Jones, Williams, and Olson composed their epics, Bataille tries to conceive of a fundamentally inclusive kind of community that is organic and whole, but not based on any transcendental foundation. Bataille's philosophy of community is late modernist because it represents a reaction against the transcendental nationalism of German fascism, while its notion of community as organic whole constantly risks reintroducing transcendental categories. Bataille tries to avoid this danger by attempting to step beyond metaphysics. He conceives of 'community' as immanent totality, that is, as absolutely self-sufficient totality, as totality without outside, without transcendental foundation. This is an impossibility, but Bataille tries to realise it, and thus to escape metaphyiscs, by embracing the impossible, the irrational, the irreducible plurality of immediate experience. Jones, Williams, and Olson react against the processes of modernisation, which, according to them, alienated and fragmented their societies, and with their poems they attempt to recover or imagine coherent, organic communities that are fundamentally inclusive, similarly to Bataille. Chapters two to four examine the different ways in which or extents to which the poems do so by conceiving of community as immanent totality. Since the objective of this dissertation is to examine and understand the challenges and intricacies of the late modernist epic, to which, it is argued, the question of 'community' is central, Bataille's late modernist philosophy of 'community' represents an ideal point of departure. As the only philosopher considered in this dissertation, Bataille inevitably occupies a slightly privileged position. However, chapters two to four do not simply apply Bataille's philosophy to the poems in question but rather attempt to create dialogues between all key texts. Rather than simply offering Bataillean readings of post-1945 epic poetry, the

dissertation, thus, aims at contributing to the relatively young study of late modernist poetics.

While it is thus explained why Bataille's philosophy forms the subject of chapter one, it remains to be considered why in particular Jones's, Williams's, and Olson's poems are discussed below. Above all, it needs to be acknowledged clearly that the present dissertation, thus, exclusively considers texts written by heterosexual, white, middleclass men, and the speculative approach briefly outlined above, however compelling it might be, does not mitigate this racial, class, or gender imbalance. The reason why only post-1945 epic poems by heterosexual white middleclass men are considered in this dissertation is that, besides *"A"*, which would not increase the diversity of poets considered, I have not come across any other modernist poem written after 1945 that I was able to consider an epic in accordance with the criteria outlined in section two below. The present dissertation maintains that twentieth-century epic poetry exists, and to do so it was necessary to modify more traditional, stricter definitions of epic. Thus altering the definition of epic is dangerous, however, for stretching it too much could result in the loss of a meaningful notion the genre. Of course, there are modernist poems that engage with the epic tradition and have been written after 1945 by women, workingclass, non-Western, or LGBT poets. H.D.'s *Helen In Egypt* is just one example. Yet, I have not come across any poem written by a woman, workingclass, non-Western, or LGBT poet that I have been able to regard as epic without further qualification, and it was important to tread carefully here considering that the existence of twentieth-century epic poetry as such is contested. Yet, this absence of diversity is interesting for its own sake, particularly if it is taken for granted that epic poems represent a 'community'. Why, one might ask, have only heterosexual, white, middleclass men considered themselves to be in a position to speak for an entire community? Likewise, how do writers of other races, genders, classes or sexualities position themselves with respect to the modernist and epic traditions? While these are largely questions for another project, it is significant, and will also be discussed in the chapters that follow, that for Jones, Williams, and Olson the poet or artist is invariably male, and presumably also white, heterosexual, and middleclass. This is not specifically surprising, considering the social norms of the times in which they

worked, but it is nevertheless of immediate political significance. As chapters two to four will show, even though Jones, Williams, and Olson in different ways and to different degrees try to imagine a community without outside, they still repeatedly invoke an exteriotity or an 'other', and this 'other' is, of course, anything the poet is not.

Twentieth-Century Epic Poetry

At the beginning of her 2006 study *The History of the Epic*, Adeline Johns-Putra asks the basic question, 'What is the epic?', and she starts her answer by observing that '[o]urs is an age in which "epic" describes not just the likes of the *Odyssey* and *Paradise Lost*, but a bewildering range of texts, in the loosest sense of the word' (1). This situation in which 'epic' is both vague and 'ubiquitous' (Johns-Putra 1) could not differ much more from C. M. Bowra's assessment of 'epic' in 1945. In contrast to Johns-Putra's cautious and careful preliminary remarks, which testify to an open and wide understanding of the epic genre, Bowra opens his *From Virgil to Milton* confidently:

> In the disputable and usually futile task of classifying the forms of poetry there is no great quarrel about the epic. An epic poem is by common consent a narrative of some length and deals with events which have a certain grandeur and importance and come from a life of action, especially of violent action such as war. It gives a special pleasure because its events and persons enhance our belief in the worth of human achievement and in the dignity and nobility of man. (1)

Bowra focuses on 'literary', as opposed to 'oral', epic poetry and according to him there is no question: an 'epic' is a text, assumedly written in verse, that relates a heroic 'narrative of some length'. This strict, formal definition of 'epic' has important consequences, for as a corollary it is clear to Bowra that the literary epic hardly survived the age of Milton. 'Milton', he writes in his last chapter, 'is the last great practitioner of literary epic' (246). By contrast, Johns-Putra, who also considers epic prose and devotes an entire chapter to 'epic film', discusses as epic poems works such as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, and Tom Paulin's *Invasion Handbook* (166–187). Bowra's view that the epic ceased existing at a certain point is shared by numerous critics. While E. M. W. Tillyard in *The English Epic and Its Background* (1954), for

instance, does not posit the end of the genre as a whole, he establishes the end of the epic poem by arguing that 'in the eighteenth century the epic impulse left poetry for the novel' (14). Likewise, similarly to Bowra, for whom the question of 'epic' outside the realm of poetry does not enter discussion, J. B. Hainsworth in *The Idea of Epic* (1991) unhesitatingly declares in the 'Preface' that he can do no more 'than speculate why the genre died' (viii). Hainsworth's account suggests that the notion of the 'death' of epic poetry, if not of the epic genre as a whole, has proven persistent at least until the late twentieth century, and this is further illustrated by John P. McWilliams's *The American Epic: Transforming a Genre, 1770-1860* (1989). McWilliams does not define epic according to strict formal rules but only loosely as 'a heroic narrative' (4). Yet, the requirement of narrative, McWilliams deems nearly absolute, for, as he argues, 'the very word *epos* connotes the telling of sequential deeds' (217). Consequently, he objects to the description of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* or any other American long poem after this as 'epic' and maintains that 'once histories and novels became the dominant literary forms in the 1820s and 1830s, "the American Epic" was far more likely to be written in prose . . .', (5, 237). Similarly to McWilliams, and indeed also to Tillyard, David Quint maintains in *Epic and Empire* (1993) that the epic was eventually surpassed by the novel. Quint describes an opposition between epic and romance, and he remarks with respect to *Paradise Lost*, for example, that 'one can detect the beginnings of the romance of commerce and the emergence of a new moneyed class whose literary form – the novel – would displace the epic itself in the world of letters' (12; see also 10).

It is important, at this point, to acknowledge a difference between critics, such as Bowra, Hainsworth and Quint, who tend to identify 'epic' with epic poetry and for whom the end of epic poetry consequently coincides with the end of the epic genre as a whole, and critics, such as Tillyard or McWilliams, who posit the end of epic poetry but leave room for the possibility of a continuation of the epic in other genres, such as the novel. The question of whether 'epic' can or did survive in other genres, however, lies beyond the scope of the present thesis, and all of the above scholars can be grouped together insofar as they postulate the end of epic poetry. The opposite view, the view that epic poetry continued existing until the twentieth century and, in the cases of more recent scholarship, even beyond, is not much

younger, if at all, and has continuously been gaining representation. In *The Epic* (1971), for example, Paul Merchant remarks:

> The epic is not commonly thought to have survived to our own day, though various works have been suggested as the last true epic. In fact, the form is still very much alive, and in a state of continual development. In the field of poetry . . . the characteristic twentieth-century form appears to be collage, a natural development of epic's all-inclusiveness and discursiveness. (83-4)

Merchant considers as 'the great modern epics' *The Cantos*, *The Waste Land*, William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* and David Jones's *The Anathemata* (84). Similarly, in *Preludes to Vision* (1971), Thomas A. Vogler lists among epic poems Wallace Stevens's *Comedian as the Letter C*, *Paterson*, *The Cantos*, and Hart Crane's *The Bridge* (12). Vogler bases this assessment of what constitutes an epic particularly on the intentions or desires of the poets in question. He observes that '[f]ew critics . . . have directly confronted the unavoidable fact that poets have not given up the attempt to write epic poetry', and argues, '[i]t has become increasingly obvious to critics of the genre that the *desire* to write an epic must be examined as part of what the epic *is*' (2, 4, emphases in original). In the introduction to *Epic and Epoch: Essays on the Interpretation and History of a Genre* (1994), Van Kelly unhesitatingly discusses Pound's *Cantos* as part of the epic tradition and maintains that 'the epic has not so much persisted through change as it has changed in order to renew itself and persist' (2). More recently, *The Cambridge Companion to the Epic* (2010) features a chapter on *The Waste Land* and *The Cantos*, and another one on *Omeros*. In *A Companion to Poetic Genre* (2012), Alex Runchman refers to various long twentieth-century poems in his discussion of epic poetry and concludes that '. . . refashioning of the genre is still ongoing after thousands of years [,which] reminds us that the genre remains dynamic and influential even if its traditional conventions are no longer tenable' (530). Finally, in *Epic* (2013), Paul Innes remarks with respect to *Omeros* that '. . . far from being dead, the epic is alive, vibrant and capable of registering the concerns of those who had been the subjects of empire' (150). These examples, to which more could be added, illustrate that numerous scholars believe in the continuation of epic poetry in the twentieth century and beyond, and consider it a subject worthy of investigation. Before discussing in some more detail some of the scholarship on twentieth-century epic poetry, however, it is worth examining in a

little more depth some of the reasons why certain critics approach the notion of twentieth-century epic poetry with suspicion.

Among scholars who believe in the end of epic poetry, the theory that the epic poem was replaced by the novel is particularly popular, and Georg Lukács and Mikhail Bakhtin most famously represent this view. Lukács develops his theory of the epic and the novel in *The Theory of the Novel*. *The Theory of the Novel* is of particular interest in the context of the present analysis because, written in 1914-5 and published in 1916, it can be considered a modernist account of the epic and thus as belonging to the same literary period as the poems under investigation even though its publication and *The Anathemata*'s, the first of the poems considered below, are separated by 36 years. The 'age of the epic', according to Lukács, is the age of an organic, complete, continuous, pre-Oedipal or prelapsarian totality. 'There is not yet any interiority, for there is not yet any exteriority, any "otherness" for the soul', Lukács speculates, and further, '[t]he Greeks knew only answers but no questions, only solutions (even if enigmatic ones) but no riddles, only forms but no chaos' (30-1). This, he maintains, is the Greek world of Homer, for 'strictly speaking, his works alone are epics' (30). In ancient Greece, the age of the epic, according to Lukács, was followed by the age of tragedy and the age of philosophy, and while the first was the age of an absolute immanence of 'life', of an immanent 'totality of being' (34), the latter two ages represent succeeding stages in which, to use Lukács's words, immanent 'essence' distances itself from 'life' and becomes a 'transcendent reality' (35). Thus, Lukács writes: 'Within this process, substance was reduced from Homer's absolute immanence of life to Plato's likewise absolute yet tangible and graspable transcendence; and the stages of the process . . . are the great and timeless paradigmatic forms of world literature: epic, tragedy, philosophy' (35). Whereas for the ancient Greeks, even after the age of the epic, the immanent totality of life had still been recoverable or perceptible, this situation has fundamentally changed in the modern world, which, according to Lukács, suffers from a 'transcendental homelessness' (41). The gap between 'life' and 'transcendent reality' has turned into a break, and the homogeneous, organic totality of 'life' in which every part also contained the whole is therefore irretrievably lost. This loss, this

absolute separation of parts, manifests itself particularly clearly in the 'modern' phenomenon of the individual. 'The epic hero', Lukács maintains,

> is, strictly speaking, never an individual. It is traditionally thought that one of the essential characteristics of the epic is the fact that its theme is not a personal destiny but the destiny of a community. And rightly so, for the completeness, the roundedness of the value system which determines the epic cosmos creates a whole which is too organic for any part of it to become so enclosed within itself, so dependent upon itself, as to find itself as an interiority – i.e. to become a personality. (66)

In the realm of literature, the consequences of the loss of an immanent totality of being is that epic has become impossible, and the novel and the lyric inevitable. 'The epic individual, the hero of the novel', Lukács maintains, in contrast to the epic hero, 'is the product of estrangement from the outside world' (66). The novel attempts to represent a totality through the accumulation of details or fragments, while the lyric tries to represent the Whole synecdochically, through one of its fragments. In either case, the artist's subjectivity governs the selection of what is represented and it thus stands between the individual artist and the totality of life. Lukács argues: 'This is the paradox of the subjectivity of the great epic, its "throwing away in order to win": creative subjectivity becomes lyrical, but, exceptionally, the subjectivity which simply accepts, which humbly transforms itself into a purely receptive organ of the world, can partake of the grace of having the whole revealed to it' (53).

Lukács's theory is exceedingly complex, and much more could be said about it. However, it has to suffice here to comment on two aspects that are of particular interest with regard to the discussion that follows. Firstly, Lukács's *Theory of the Novel* shares with the epic poems that will be discussed in the following chapters a nostalgia for a lost totality of being, which, crucially, finds expression, in the long passage quoted above, in the lament of the loss of a primitive, organic community. Such nostalgia and, more specifically even, the belief that a harmonious state of being was lost as a result of 'estrangement from the outside world' unmistakably marks Lukács's theory as 'modernist'. Secondly, Lukács's observation that in modernity the epic gives way to the lyric (if not to the novel), or at least becomes lyrical, in other words, that the poet's subjectivity interferes with the composition of an epic, identifies a problem that will be encountered in the chapters on the particular poems below. In a world in which the part does not organically represent the whole,

works written by individual artists that aim at representing whole cultures or communities necessarily raise the question of the role played by the artist's subjectivity. The figure of the epic poet is closely related to figures of authority, such as the seer, shaman or priest, and in 'modern' society, in which such roles are anachronistic and such titles therefore not 'naturally' conferred on certain individuals, the assumption of such a role can become highly problematic. Interestingly, Lukács above leaves open the possibility of passively experiencing the 'whole'. '[S]uch a subject', however, Lukács adds one paragraph later, 'cannot write an epic: the epic *is* life, immanence, the empirical' (54). Lukács strictly distinguishes between the experience of the totality of being and its expression, the former of which is still possible, theoretically at least, while the latter is out of reach. The conception of the individual as passive 'receptive organ' is reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's ideal of an 'objective' poetics and specifically of his metaphor of the poet as mere catalyst in 'Tradition and Individual Talent'. This further illustrates the similarities between *The Theory of the Novel* and modernist aesthetics or poetics. However, insofar as Lukács denies the possibility of the artistic expression of the experienced 'whole', his outlook is more pessimistic than Eliot's.

In contrast to Lukács, for whom the epic represents an ideal past, for Bakhtin it stands for a hierarchical, static and oppressive world order. In his 1941 essay 'Epic and Novel' he writes, for example: 'The epic world knows only a single and unified world view, obligatory and indubitably true for heroes as well as for authors and audiences' (35). Consequently, Bakhtin does not only maintain that the epic was replaced by the novel, like Lukács, but he also approves of this development. The novel, according to him, bears witness to '[the] emergence [of European civilization] from a socially isolated and culturally deaf semipatriarchal society, and its entrance into international and interlingual contacts and relationships' (11). Bakhtin maintains that the novel is the only literary genre that came into being after the advent of literacy, and while it is therefore still evolving, the epic and other 'major genres' are fully developed and complete (3). 'We come upon [the epic]', he observes, 'when it is already completely finished, a congealed and half-moribund genre' (14). This difference in development between the epic and the novel, according to Bakhtin, is reflected in their formal characteristics, for while the novel establishes a vital

relationship to its contemporary world, the epic is fundamentally 'a poem about the past' (13; see also 14). Accordingly, Bakhtin conceives the novel as 'process' and associates it with 'openendedness', 'inconclusiveness', 'indecision' or 'indeterminacy', whereas he describes the epic in opposite terms (7, 16). In particular, he defines the epic through 'three constitutive features': '(1) a national epic past . . . serves as the subject for the epic; (2) national tradition . . . serves as the source for the epic; (3) an absolute epic distance separates the epic world from contemporary reality, that is, from the time in which the singer (the author and his audience) lives' (13). Bakhtin maintains that epic poet (or singer) and audience are absolutely separated from the national past that constitutes the subject matter of the epic. As a result of this absolute separation, this past is not open to interpretation but, on the contrary, can only be received passively in its valorised and hierarchical entirety. '[T]he tradition of the past is sacred', Bakhtin writes, and, '[o]ne can only accept the epic world with reverence; it is impossible to really touch it, for it is beyond the realm of human activity . . .' (15, 17). This association of epic with a doctrinal, hierarchical world view and, more significantly even, with a 'sacred' national past or tradition can explain Bakhtin's aversion to and suspicion of the epic genre, especially if it is remembered that 'Epic and Novel' was written during the Second World War.

If it is taken for granted, for the moment, that the epic does not exist in the twentieth century, the question that inevitably needs to be raised is, what precisely twentieth-century long poetic works then *are*, and one answer that has been given is that they are poetic sequences. Most prominently, M. L. Rosenthal and Sally M. Gall maintain in *The Modern Poetic Sequence: The Genius of Modern Poetry* (1983) that the poetic sequence is 'actually *the* modern poetic form within which all the tendencies of more than a century of experiment define themselves and find their aesthetic purpose' (vii, emphasis in original). Accordingly they interpret as sequences an astonishing number of poetic works written in English, stretching from Whitman's *Song of Myself*, which is considered 'the first realized modern poetic sequence', to contemporary poems, also including all three poems discussed in the chapters below (8). It is crucial to state explicitly here that the 'poetic sequence', which, as Kevin Hart explains, is a descendant of the sonnet sequence, is usually, if

not always, a sequence of lyric poems (187). Rosenthal and Gall define the modern sequence as 'a grouping of mainly lyric poems and passages, rarely uniform in pattern, which tend to interact as an organic whole' (9). The emphasis in this definition on organicism and lyricism nicely illustrates the scholars' indebtedness to the Romantic poetic tradition. Quoting from 'The Philosophy of Composition', in which Edgar Allan Poe declares the long poem an impossibility, for '[w]hat we term a long poem is, in fact, merely a succession of brief ones' (Poe qtd. in Rosenthal and Gall 6), they maintain that *'*[*a*] *poem depends for its life neither on continuous narration nor on developed argument but on a progression of specific qualities and intensities of emotionally and sensuously charged awareness'* (6, emphasis in original). Rosenthal and Gall do not explicitly argue that the modern poetic sequence takes the place of the epic, for 'it is sheer dogmatism to rule out any form or genre as obsolete', yet they imply it (6). This can already be suspected as a result of their dismissal of 'continuous narration' and 'developed argument' in the above quotation. Rosenthal and Gall contrast the poetic sequence with the epic poem from the beginning of their monograph and they unmistakably present the poetic sequence as the modern equivalent of the epic when they consider it 'the ambition of every great modern poet' (5). According to Rosenthal and Gall, the poetic sequence is uniquely suited to realising a work of epic proportions in a subjective, introspective mode that seems to have become more adequate, promising or perhaps simply inescapable in 'modern' times. They write: 'the modern sequence has evolved out of a serious need for an encompassing poetry, one completely involved with what our lives really mean subjectively. . . . The pressure, right or wrong, is to reconceive reality in humanly reassuring ways rather than in chillingly impersonal ones' (10-1).

Yet, despite Rosenthal and Gall's conviction and ambition the 'modern poetic sequence' has not become a widely recognised or described genre. Far more common in scholarship on twentieth-century poetry is the concept of the modern or modernist 'long poem'. In a recent issue of *Modernist Cultures* that focuses on the long modernist novel Michael Bell asks: 'is the "long modernist novel" a purely empirical reference to modernist narratives which happen to be relatively extended or is the word "long" a term of art with a force similar to that generally recognized in the "short" or the "short story"?' (282). The same question needs to be asked of the

modernist long poem: is 'long poem' a genre or just an empirical descriptor? Can a lyric poem be a long poem, and are all epic poems also long poems or are these two categories mutually exclusive? Both the problems and virtues of the concept of 'long poem' clearly derive from its vagueness. In the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Thomas Gardner observes that '[t]he term is used almost exclusively for mod[ern] poetry, usually in Eng[lish]', and he refers to Charles Altieri, who maintains: 'The most distinctive feature of the modernist long poem is the desire to achieve epic breadth by relying on structural principles inherent in lyric rather than narrative modes' (Gardner 813; Altieri, 'Motives in Metaphor' 653). Two widely held views about the 'long poem' can be found here. Firstly, it is a distinctly modern or, more precisely even, modernist genre. Secondly, a 'long poem' is what results if the epic is stripped of its narrative elements. Brian McHale associates modernism with a ban on narrative and comments on the close relationship between the 'long poem' and modernism:

> The long poem itself, as a distinct historical genre, seems indelibly associated with modernism. It is a modernist invention, a desperate solution to the problem that the high modernists . . . set for themselves of achieving poetry commensurate with the scale of their ambitious designs on literary history and the culture at large, but without violating the doctrine of the image, which held that the individual image was the foundation of poetic value, and without relapsing into overtly narrative modes . . . . In a sense, then, to undertake to write a long poem is to engage with a peculiarly high-modernist problematic and to practice a distinctively high-modernist genre; it is, in effect, to *be* a high modernist . . .' (*Obligation* 2, emphasis in original).

Like McHale, Margaret Dickie in *On the Modernist Long Poem* (1986) emphasises the close relationship between the 'long poem' and modernism. Focussing on *The Waste Land*, *The Bridge*, *Paterson*, and *The Cantos* and arguing that the stories of the compositions of these poems reflect the development of (American) modernism, she polemically concludes: '. . . what is American Modernism? It is the long writing of the long poem' (162; see also 17). The 'long poem', then, is quintessentially modernist. Furthermore, it is poetry that in scope, length, weight or ambition resembles the epic, while the absence of narrative invites comparisons to the lyric. Thus, on the one hand, Altieri associates the long poem with 'structural principles inherent in lyric [modes]' and Joseph N. Riddel similarly maintains that 'the theory of the lyric, rather than being antithetical to any notion of the long poem, indeed is

the only theory of the long poem' ('A Somewhat Polemical Introduction' 466). On the other hand, Anne Day Dewey observes that '[a]lthough the long poem genre includes a range of forms . . . epic is central to Modernist experimentation', and Susan Stanford Friedman similarly remarks that '[t]he generic grid within which . . . big long poems are read has been established pre-eminently by the epic . . .' (Day Dewey 65; Stanford Friedman 11). These views and observations are not mutually exclusive, and if they seem conflicting the source of this tension needs to be sought at least as much in the critical concept of the 'long poem', in the preconceptions with which 'modernist long poems' are approached, and in the theoretical frameworks that are applied to them, as in the poems themselves. The manner in which the concept of 'long poem' is used and applied to poetic works illustrates the extent to which the conception of this genre is informed by the view that epic poems are narrative poems, and that long poems without narratives, consequently, have to be something else, even if it is exceedingly difficult to establish what precisely they are. However, while the use of 'long poem' as modern or modernist equivalent of epic is widespread and possibly predominant, Lynn Keller in *Forms of Expansion: Recent Long Poems by Women* (1997) argues that 'long poem' can and should be applied even more broadly. In a 'partial list of the formal varieties' of the 'long poem' she includes: 'Narrative poems, verse novels, sonnet sequences, irregular lyric medleys or cycles, collage long poems, meditative sequences, extended dramatic monologues, prose long poems, serial poems, [and] heroic epics' (3). In her discussion, Keller establishes three 'broad heuristic groupings', namely long poems that are based on epic models, lyric sequences, and 'radically experimental, less representationally based texts' (5). Keller's account represents an alternative approach to and use of the concept of 'long poem' to the ones considered above. In particular, for Keller, the epic is a kind of 'long poem' rather than one of its, or even its sole, predecessor.

While the concept of 'long poem' has its virtues, it should not, as is often done in scholarship on twentieth-century poetry, be used in place of 'epic'. Describing *The Anathemata*, *Paterson*, *The Maximus Poems*, or any similar poetic work as 'long poem' rather than 'epic' is a way of avoiding, by hiding behind the fundamental vagueness of the term, the problem or question of genre these extended poems raise and which, rather than an obstinate by-product, needs to be considered

one of their central aspects. Moreover, considering *The Anathemata, Paterson*, or *The Maximus Poems* modernist long poems rather than modernist epics amounts to disregarding the fact that in writing these poems, the poets participated in epic traditions, to which the poems explicitly allude. Altieri and McHale above establish an opposition between narrative epic poetry and modernist poetry informed by lyricism or imagism. Elsewhere, but in the same context, McHale explains: 'Modernist poetry's interdiction of narrative stems in part from the general modernist anxiety about contamination by popular culture' ('Telling Stories' 253). Modernism, and its avant-garde by definition, did not aim at catering to popular tastes, yet the reasons for the absence of narrative modes in modernist epics, arguably, need to be sought elsewhere, as well. One central factor of modernism that needs to be considered here is certainly a pervasive metaphysical doubt or uncertainty, paradigmatically expressed by Nietzsche's death of God. One of the foremost scholars of postmodernism, McHale is quick to remark that 'postmodernists, as Lyotard has made us understand, are by definition incredulous towards master-narratives', but he does not take into account the extent to which modernists anticipated such incredulity ('Telling Stories' 252). Yet, this is one important reason why, in the late seventies and eighties, in the heyday of poststructuralist literary criticism, modernist epic poems offered themselves as welcome objects of study. For example, the 1978 issue of *Genre*, whose subject is 'The Long Poem in the Twentieth Century' and which includes contributions by numerous American critics who famously applied 'French Theory' to literature, such as Joseph N. Riddel, William V. Spanos, Paul Bové and Charles Altieri, features essays on the modernists Pound, Eliot, Williams, Hart Crane and Wallace Stevens. Schematically speaking, the aversion to or suspicion of an absolute, closed system or order that led Bakhtin to prefer the novel to the epic moved these critics to affirm the 'long poem', which, according to them, is capable of maintaining a formal openness that more traditional poetic forms are unable to realise. Riddel, for example, concludes his introduction to the 1978 issue of *Genre* by declaring that '[t]he (modern) long poem . . . represents the undoing of the dream of the epic to produce a myth of origin, to return upon itself' ('Polemical Introduction' 477). According to Riddel, who, in this respect, paradigmatically represents the views of twentieth-century poststructuralist critics,

the modern long poem does not aim at telling the definitive story of a nation or tribe, but, in contrast to the epic, it endlessly turns back on itself, interrogates, revises and even undoes itself (see also Riddel, 'Polemical Introduction' 468).

However, in this general critical atmosphere in which the epic after Milton or after the eighteenth century is considered to have been replaced by the novel, the poetic sequence, or the 'long poem', the label of 'epic' has retained its currency in the context of modern American poetry. The American epic poem in this regard represents an epic subgenre and, with respect to the tradition or 'non-tradition' of the twentieth-century epic, an exception or anomaly. This subgenre is of particular interest to the present dissertation since it includes two of the three poems discussed below. Roy Harvey Pearce's 1961 study *The Continuity of American Poetry* features a chapter on 'American Epic', and the word 'epic' even features in the titles of the following monographs on long American poems: James E. Miller's *The American Quest for a Supreme Fiction: Whitman's Legacy in the Personal Epic* (1979), Michael André Bernstein's *The Tale of the Tribe: Ezra Pound and the Modern Verse Epic* (1980), and Jeffrey Walker's *Bardic Ethos and the American Epic Poem: Whitman, Pound, Crane, Williams, Olson* (1989). Bernstein differs slightly from the other three scholars, because while they maintain that the tradition of the American verse epic largely starts with Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, his investigation begins with Pound's *Cantos*, which he considers the 'first and most significant document' of the tradition of the modern verse epic (M. A. Bernstein 10). These monographs on modern American poetry suggest that the label 'epic' was more readily available to American poets and critics than their European colleagues, firstly, because of the cultural and geographical distance that separates America from Europe and thus also from the origins of the epic, and, secondly, because, according to these critics, up until *Leaves of Grass* or *The Cantos*, respectively, America had not had a poem that adequately fulfils the requirements of epic, whatever these may be. Both of these factors seem to have weakened traditional, formal requirements. Pearce, for instance, comments on the need for an American epic when he states that '[i]t was the epic form which immediately, almost automatically came to mind when the lately colonial American meditated the possibility of a truly national culture and national literature', and Miller concurs that '[s]ince the Declaration of Independence in 1776,

and even before, American poets have dreamed of providing the States with a – perhaps *the* – Supreme Fiction, a delineated ideal, a set of beliefs, a model for living, a summation of the essence of what it means to be an American' (Pearce 60; J. E. Miller 13, emphasis in original). Likewise, Pearce emphasises the cultural distance between America and Europe, remarking with respect to Joel Barlow's *Columbiad* that '[t]his was a modern epic, freed, as only something made in America could be, of the fetters and forms of tradition', and Walker, who discusses Whitman, Pound, Crane, Williams and Olson, more generally states: 'The truth is that the American modern epic has little to do with the traditions and conventions of the classical epic' (Pearce 59; Walker 2). Miller makes a half-hearted attempt at pinpointing the distinctive Americanness of these epics, by suggesting that '[t]here *is* something especially American in the American poet's recurring ambition to write a long poem, sometimes a poem that takes a lifetime in the composition' (15, emphasis in original). However, two difficulties that specifically the American epic poem inevitably has to face also require attention here. Firstly, in contrast to European epic poets, Americans had recourse only to an exceedingly short history and small tradition from which to create their epics (see, for example, J. E. Miller 24). Hence, Pearce maintains that '[the] strategy is to make a poem which will create rather than celebrate a hero and which will make rather than recall the history that surrounds him' (61). As will be seen particularly in the case of *Paterson*, the American epic poem is in a markedly ambivalent relationship to its European predecessors, for while it aims at being a paradigmatically American literary work and consequently attempts to distance itself from European literary traditions, the genre of the epic inevitably links it to European culture. Secondly, as a significantly undemocratic genre that flourished predominantly in societies with discrete, hierarchical structures, the epic is only imperfectly suited to a fundamentally democratic nation like America. Walker is centrally concerned with this conflict and he remarks with regard to Whitman, for instance:

> The bardic poet, somehow, is to appropriate to himself the role of a Shelleyan legislator of the world . . . and to seek an extraordinary power over the public consciousness. This influence in effect abridges the moral authority of actual, politically constituted legislatures and, rather ironically for Whitman's celebration of democracy, the electoral workings of the democratic process itself . . . (5)

Famously, Pound did not have much respect for democracy, and consequently these cultural and structural features of the epic did not necessarily represent obstacles to *The Cantos*, but they were a challenge to most, if not all, other modern epic poets, especially for those who came after Pound. These political and ethical implications, the problem of the status of the modern epic poet and their work with regard to their society or community, are not specific to the American epic but represent challenges every modern epic poet needs to face. It might be possible to distinguish between the modern American and European epic in this respect insofar as democracy is tied in a fundamental and singular manner to American history. Hence, democratic values represent not only ethical and political imperatives for American epics but also part of the historical material from which they are created. However, since this thesis is less interested in distinguishing between the traditions of the modern American and European epic than in reaching conclusions about the modernist epic poem generally, it will focus less on such differences than on similarities.

The epic is fundamentally un-modern. This much has become clear by now and on this the vast majority of critics agrees. Tillyard expresses it memorably when he asks: '. . . how should an age which multiplies and abbreviates, which favours many short items in its radio programmes, less time devoted to more subjects in school, readers' digests, and miniature sermons, take to its heart a long poem calling for sustained concentration?' (9). Herbert F. Tucker in *Epic: Britain's Heroic Muse 1790-1910* (2008) similarly repeatedly emphasises the dichotomy between the epic genre and modernity, while Franco Moretti in *Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to García Márquez* (1996, published in Italian in 1994) notices in the term 'modern epic', '. . . a kind of antagonism between the noun and the adjective: a discrepancy between the totalizing will of the epic and the subdivided reality of the modern world' (Tucker 1–5; Moretti 5). Yet, Tucker and Moretti, unlike Tillyard, do not consider the epic extinct in modernity. The questions to ask, then, are what form or what forms epic poetry assumes in modernity and, given that even these critics acknowledge a tension or conflict inherent in the concept of the 'modern epic', how modern epic poets confront, and possibly resolve, the ostensible contradictoriness of this genre. John Whittier-Ferguson, who primarily discusses *The Cantos* and *The*

Waste Land, notes continuities as well as differences between the modern epic and its predecessors:

> Like the epics that preceded them in Western culture, these modern works aim to assemble, on the grandest possible scale, a model of the world that will both represent and explain the way things are, how they came to be, and the position of the human subject in the scheme of things, and yet the obstacles to this gigantic act of making in the modern era are so great that the attempt to make the model, and the record of others' attempts at such constructions, past and present, move to the centre of the epic enterprise. The paramount achievement recorded in the modern epic is not the justification of God's or gods' ways with us, or a hero's battles, or journey, or the foundation of a nation or an empire. It is an aesthetic act that may or may not have some social, cultural, political, or theological ramifications: the author's unlikely writing of the book we read. (212)

Thus, according to Whittier-Ferguson, modern epics, like epics of previous epochs, are inherently related to their communities or societies. They aim at being 'model[s] of the world that will both represent and explain the way things are, how they came to be, and the position of the human subject in the scheme of things'. The aim of representing to a people its own world, its identity, and, as a result, of representing this people, is a central, maybe even *the* central function of epic poems, and it is accordingly also the function of epic poetry that will be at the centre of the ensuing discussion. Hainsworth, for example, also emphasises this function of epic when he concludes his account of classical epic poetry with the remark that 'epic quality in literature' amounts to the representation of 'ideas that stood at the centre of [the] audience's view of themselves and the world' (150).[1] Yet, Whittier-Ferguson maintains that the composition of an epic poem in modernity is complicated by so many 'obstacles' that the writing of the poem itself becomes the epic feat. In fact, it is a widely held view, among scholars who believe in the modern epic, that with the emergence of Romanticism, and more specifically with Wordsworth's *Prelude*, the epic hero is identified with the poet and the epic quest becomes the composition of the poem itself (see also Innes 137; Johns-Putra 8; Runchman 525). Yet, what distinguishes the modern epic in addition to self-reflexivity is a characteristic politics

[1] For other critics on the relationship between epic poetry and 'community', see among many others, Tillyard 12; Greene 24; Innes 2; Vogler 11; Tucker 3, 16; Lukács 66-7; M. A. Bernstein.

that is the result of a particularly modern or maybe even modernist relationship between the epic poet and their community. Vogler observes in this regard:

> The difficulty, both in creating and in recognizing a modern epic, is that our culture does not provide the essentials with which earlier epic poets began. There is no common ideology, no vital, central source for universally acceptable concepts of authority and values. . . . part of the epic poet's task has always been to give to his race or age a completion and embodiment of the meaning of life that he finds in the accepted but not necessarily conscious metaphysic of the time. (8)

Similarly to Vogler, but more specifically with respect to the twentieth century, Runchman remarks, referring to Pound's 1962 *Paris Review* interview:

> For the modern (and postmodern) poet, no . . . understanding between author and audience can be assumed. Implicit in Pound's interview is a feeling that Western civilization in the twentieth century may be characterized by its acceptance of relativity, its absorption of vast amounts of varied information, and its general skepticism. In such a community, any shared sense of an ordered universe is lost, and once-unified systems of belief break down. Western society also became increasingly wary in the last century of the kinds of national myth that epic poems, such as Virgil's *Aeneid*, have traditionally propounded. This was particularly the case after the rise of Nazism – and Pound's own association with fascism marks him very much as a writer who could not expect the majority of his readers to share his ideology. Given such separation between poet and audience, it becomes impossible for the modern writer of epic to sound the confident tone of his poetic ancestors. (523).

The question whether 'earlier epic poets' really did have less complicated relationships to their communities and were consequently able to communicate with and represent their audiences more 'confidently', or whether this is also, to a considerable extent, a nostalgic projection of the past lies beyond the scope of the present dissertation. However, it is significant that the relationship between the epic poet and their audience or community is considered to be disrupted in modernity and that poets, despite these difficulties, continued to write epics. Moreover, it is plausible that the assumption of the role of the epic poet in post-Enlightenment, mostly democratic societies is fraught with difficulties that might not have existed in the same form or to the same extent in more hierarchical societies or in societies whose discourses are less stringently dictated by rationality. In any case, since, on the one hand, 'community' is divided in modernity but, on the other hand, the function of epic poetry is nevertheless the representation of a community to itself,

modern, or in any case modernist, epic poems project possible communities that do not exist as complete, coherent unities, rather than representing actual communities. The representation of a possible and, from the poet's perspective, desirable rather than actual community constitutes the central point at which the modernist epic enters the sphere of politics. Importantly, the interference of epic poetry in politics is nothing new. Quint, for instance, particularly convincingly argues that ever since the *Aeneid* epic poetry has been 'overtly political' (8). Yet, with the modernist epic the political dimensions of epic poetry become problematic in manners in which they have not been thus far. Runchman observes this when he remarks that in the twentieth century, 'Western society . . . became increasingly wary . . . of the kinds of national myth that epic poems, such as Virgil's *Aeneid*, have traditionally propounded', and it is particularly interesting, in the context of the present dissertation, that Runchman maintains that this situation worsened with or after Pound. In other words, epic poets in the second half of the twentieth century had to confront a particular, and a particularly challenging, set of difficulties. These difficulties and the manners in which poets confronted them are the subjects of chapters two, three, and four.

Moretti offers an invaluable, initial assessment of precisely these aesthetico-political challenges in his *Modern Epic*. Discussing Goethe's *Faust*, Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Wagner's *The Nibelung's Ring*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Pound's *Cantos*, Eliot's *Waste Land*, Musil's *Man Without Qualities*, and Garía Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Moretti devises the concept of 'world texts'. 'World texts', according to him, started to emerge with the beginnings of global capitalism and they are consequently texts 'whose geographical frame of reference is no longer the nation-state, but a broader entity – a continent, or the world-system as a whole' (50). Moreover, they are characterised by formal openness, and Moretti consequently describes them as 'mechanical' rather than 'organic': 'Organization imposes fetters; as does organic form. Mechanical form, by contrast, with its parts constructed one at a time, like the acts of *Faust*, or the chapters of *Bouvard* [*et Pécuchet*] and of *Ulysses*, leaves more freedom – more space for experimentation' (95). The chief principle of 'world texts', Moretti maintains, is the aesthetic or formal equivalent of the capitalist 'anything goes', which he names 'an ideology – of possibility' (143). In

the work of art this amounts to the opening, presentation and, crucially, preservation of various possibilities, which entails the infinite deferral of a decision '[b]ecause realization is always also renunciation: by confirming one possibility, [one] excludes all others' (146). In literary texts, this opening and maintaining of possibilities, Moretti shows, is particularly well realized by the stream of consciousness (139-0, 146, 153, 162). Moretti contrasts the 'world text', 'which allow[s] multiple readings', with the 'sacred text', 'the book that had to keep society united, and that therefore demanded a univocal interpretation' (92). However, Moretti's discussion of the modern epic becomes exceedingly interesting and relevant when he recognises in world texts of the twenties and thirties 'a tremendous totalitarian temptation' that is much more freely expressed and realised in sacred texts (111). Particularly clearly, he locates this totalitarian temptation earlier, namely in Wagner's *Nibelung's Ring*, which does not come as a surprise if it is considered to what extent Wagner's notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* appealed to the German Nazis.[2] Yet, Moretti maintains that this temptation represents '. . . the secret (and frustrated) desire of every world text, from *Faust* to *Ulysses* and beyond', the 'desire to reunite what history has divided' (107, 108). The present dissertation maintains what Moretti here implies but does not show, namely that the 'totalitarian temptation' of the modern epic persisted even after the thirties, in fact, even after the Second World War, when it became even more suspect and problematic than before. Arguably, this 'totalitarian temptation' informs also 'world texts', or epics, of the second half of the twentieth-century because it represents an intrinsic aspect of the epic, its 'totalizing will', in Moretti's words. Chapters two to four will examine the ways in which Jones's *The Anathemata*, Williams's *Paterson*, and Olson's *The Maximus Poems* betray and confront this temptation. Insofar as Moretti identifies the 'totalitarian temptation' of world texts merely with their literary unconscious, their 'secret' and 'frustrated'

[2] See, for instance, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's *Heidegger, Art, and Politics*, in which he maintains: 'The political model of National Socialism is the *Gesamtkunstwerk* because, as Dr Goebbels very well knew, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is a political project, since it was the intention of the *Festspiel* in Bayreuth to be for Germany what the Greater Dionysia was for Athens and for Greece as a whole: the place where people, gathered together in their State, provide themselves with a representation of what they are and what grounds them as such' (64).

desire, his account of these works is rather optimistic, generous and forgiving. This becomes even more pronounced, when he maintains:

> the totalitarian temptation is almost always present in the modernist world text, as a reaction to a complexity that has grown beyond every expectation. But it is just a temptation – which never becomes the dominant presence. And, let us be clear, it is not that literature cannot be fascist. It can very well be fascist, and indeed has been. But it is harder for that to happen *in the case of world texts*. Culturally impure, transnational, with no longer any sense of the 'enemy', hypereducated, indulgent towards consumption, enamoured of eccentricities and experiments: hard to make reactionary works, with such ingredients. Hard, above all, to do with *fragments*. (228, emphases in original)

Moretti even reads *The Cantos* as world text and consequently emphasises its formal openness. He considers Pound's poem alongside *Ulysses* and maintains with regard to both: 'If two people read the same word . . . it is not the same – *and this is a good thing*. For these are books whose ideal reader is no longer the individual, *but an entire society*' (222, emphases in original). Formal or semantic openness and social inclusiveness might well describe *Ulysses* but not *The Cantos*. Moretti here neglects the elitism of Pound's poem and the disdain for the contemporary world that fuelled its composition. *The Cantos* does not as openly as Moretti here maintains invite various interpretations and the society this epic poem imagines is markedly exclusive. 'A Fascist fascist like Pound may well sing the praises of Mussolini ("the Boss"), and insert here and there bits of unadulterated ideology', Moretti argues, 'but I would not really call the *overall structure* of *The Cantos* fascist. The man was weak, but the form was strong' (228, emphasis in original). Unfortunately, Moretti does not further substantiate how *The Cantos* escapes or avoids Pound's totalitarian politics, and as generalisation such a distinction between poetics and politics, between the work and the man, is both unconvincing and potentially insidious. The following chapters on Jones, Williams and Olson aim at exploring precisely such connections.

'World texts', according to Moretti, unlike 'sacred texts', represent a global, or at least transnational, loose, open, porous society. He maintains that they 'put epic universalism into practice – but without taking it seriously (38). Similarly to 'sacred texts', 'world texts' are encyclopaedic since they aim at including (encyclo-) the whole learning (*paideia*) of a community (Tucker 29), yet unlike 'sacred texts',

Moretti argues, 'world texts' are simultaneously informed by an awareness of the impossibility of this undertaking. They betray an awareness that '. . . modern Europe, which has subdivided and specialized the sphere of knowledge, renders any such ambition anachronistic and almost unreal', that all they can offer are individual encyclopaedias among others (37, 219). Perhaps Moretti is right, but probably, as argued above, he is slightly too generous. In any case, it is intriguing that Herbert Tucker describes a contrasting development. In his monograph on nineteenth-century British epic poetry, he notices around the time of the French Revolution, and thus around the time Goethe was working on *Faust* – the first of Moretti's 'world texts' – 'a deep shift in epic's theoretical premises', namely 'the replacement of a formal by a cultural criterion for epic unity' (13). Tucker maintains that in the course of the nineteenth century, with the weakening of Neoclassicism, requirements of formal unity that reached back as far as to Aristotle's *Poetics* lost authority, while the emergence of 'the sociology of literature' meant that epic poetry was approached and interpreted as expression of the coherence or unity of an entire culture (34-5; see also 44). Of course, it needs to be kept in mind that with *Faust*, Moretti comments on a German epic, while Tucker not only focuses on British literature but even more specifically on criticism. Nevertheless, it is interesting that, if Tucker is right, the notion of twentieth-century epic poetry as *first and foremost* an expression of a culture's, society's or community's identity can be traced back to nineteenth-century epic criticism. Granted, ever since Homer epics have betrayed what Kelly describes as an 'encyclopaedic tendency', which finds expression, for example, in classical epic conventions, such as digressions, epic similes, or catalogues, yet it is likely that with the appreciation of epics as cultural or historical documents that are expressive of an entire culture or society, rather than primarily as heroic narratives for their own sakes, this encyclopaedic dimension received more attention (Kelly 11). In twentieth-century criticism and scholarship epics are frequently described, if not as 'encyclopaedic', then as 'expansive', 'all-inclusive', 'universal', 'monumental' and so on.[3] Pound's famous definition of epic as 'a poem containing history' testifies to the same impulse (47).

[3] See, among many others, Tillyard 6; Bowra 13-4; Hainsworth 7; Merchant 4, 71, 93; Greene 9; Gabriel 13; Moretti 1. Edward Mendelson includes some epics in his

At this point, the precise place the present dissertation occupies in scholarship on the epic can be outlined. *Modernist Epic Poetry* as such, surprisingly, has not received much prolonged critical attention so far. Moretti discusses *The Cantos* and *The Waste Land* in *Modern Epic*; Whittier-Ferguson comments on the same two poems in his chapter on the modern epic in *The Cambridge Companion to the Epic*; Johns-Putra's chapter on modernist epic in *The History of the Epic*, as mentioned above, considers *The Waste Land*, *The Cantos*, *Helen in Egypt*, *Omeros*, and *Invasion Handbook*; Vogler's monograph includes a chapter on Crane; Innes's *Epic* does not consider a single modernist epic poet apart from Eliot; and Merchant's *The Epic* comments at least in some detail on *The Cantos*, *The Anathemata*, *Paterson*, and *The Waste Land*. However, no book-long study of modernist epic poetry exists that considers both American and European poems, and that discusses these works as 'epics' rather than as 'long poems'. Thus, the subject of modernist epic poetry as such already warrants further investigation. Yet, the focus of the present dissertation is more specific. As the above overview, which does not claim to be exhaustive, illustrates, if modernist epic poetry is discussed at all, it is usually done so with reference to the same poems. *The Cantos* and *The Waste Land* are the usual suspects; Crane's *The Bridge* is occasionally mentioned, as is *Paterson*. This dissertation, however, aims at broadening the field of modernist epic poetry, for in addition to *Paterson*, it focuses on *The Anathemata*, which is generally ignored (Merchant is a notable exception) and *The Maximus Poems*, which has received some attention in discussions of American epic poetry but hardly any beyond that field. The selection of these three poems is governed by the criteria that they have to be (a) epic poems (b) with strong connections to literary modernism that (c) were published after 1945. The start date of 1945 is not arbitrary but is based on the assumption that a 'totalising' genre like epic poetry must have confronted a unique, or at least uniquely difficult, set of challenges in the aftermath of twentieth-century European totalitarianism. The literary period under investigation here is not limited by an absolute end date, but a relative closure results from the criterion that the poems in

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category of 'encyclopedic narrative' and Northrop Frye does the same with his notion of 'encyclopaedic forms' (Mendelson; Frye, *Anatomy* 315–326). It could be argued that these are just two more attempts to reconceive or re-invent epic under another name.

question need to participate in the modernist tradition. It might be objected now that modernism had already finished by 1945, and this is a notion this dissertation aims at challenging, as well, by drawing on the relatively recent concept of 'late modernism', which is discussed in the following section. Accordingly, while the discussions of *The Anathemata*, *Paterson* and *The Maximus Poems* as *modernist*, or rather *late modernist*, epic poems are designed to result in insights about the epic tradition in the twentieth century, the focus on these poems as late modernist *epics* is likely to contribute to scholarship on late modernism. Apart from *The Anathemata*, *Paterson*, and *The Maximus Poems* not many other poems would have fulfilled all three necessary criteria and consequently could have been included in the present study. Louis Zukofsky's *"A"* would have been one, and this poem is not discussed primarily because Paul Zukofsky, who holds the copyright for *"A"*, is exceedingly unapproachable and possessive of his rights. Beside the criteria of participation in the modernist tradition and publication post 1945, the group of poems that could have been considered is narrowed down to a significant degree by the requirement that they have to be epics. Hence, a working definition of 'epic poem' is now overdue.

The *Princeton Encyclopedia* entry of 'epic' starts with the definition: '[a]n epic is a long narrative poem of heroic action' (Gregory, Meyers, and Newman 439). It also includes a list of epic conventions that it discusses in more detail: '. . . stylistic elements such as extended similes, elevated diction, and epithets; formal elements such as the proem, bringing the audience *in medias res*, digression, and prophecy . . . ; recurrent scenes such as the celestial descent, the earthly paradise, the catalog, the *locus amoenus*, *ekphrasis*, and *katabasis*' (440). Yet, as is clear by now, the present dissertation argues that epic poetry in the twentieth century does not have to be in narrative form, nor has to have an epic hero in any conventional sense, nor has to conform with formal epic conventions. What, then, defines epic poetry in the twentieth century and, consequently, why are *The Anathemata*, *Paterson,* and *The Maximus Poems* considered epics, while other poems are not? Firstly, an epic poem is a long text written in verse. That is, it is primarily one text, one poem, rather than a sequence of poems and it is long. 'Long' is completely relative, and it is exceedingly difficult to avoid such vagueness because any absolutely defined length would be arbitrary. In any case, poems like *The Waste Land* or *Briggflatts*, while long, are here

nevertheless considered too short to be epics. Secondly, epic poems represent, or aim at representing, the foundation of a 'community', be this a culture, society, people, tribe or any similar kind of group.[4] They aim at representing the entirety of a given group of people to this group. Thirdly, as a result of this communal function, epic poetry aims at being encyclopaedic, inclusive, expansive, monumental, universal, total, absolute. Finally, epic poems are poems that were intended to be epics and that consequently consciously participate in an epic tradition. They might do so, for instance, by referring or alluding to previous epic poems or by employing or playing with formal conventions associated with the epic genre.

The recognition of the existence of epic poetry in the twentieth century is not a hairsplitting exercise, and before continuing this introduction with a discussion of 'late modernism' it is useful to summarise why. At the most general level, it is important to recognise certain twentieth-century poems as epics because alternative labels like 'long poem' or 'poetic sequence' at best only inadequately and unsatisfactorily characterise such works. More specifically, it is important to interpret them as epic poems because failing to do so results in facile interpretations just as an interpretation of a sonnet that does not recognise the poem in question as a sonnet is flawed. In the case of twentieth-century epic poems, it results, for example, in the failure to appreciate the conflicting elements of the modernist epic as its defining features and consequently in the failure to investigate further this internal tension. Moreover, the recognition of certain twentieth-century poems as epics and the analysis of these works as epics represents an opportunity of two kinds that would otherwise be missed. From a diachronic perspective, it allows for an extended view on and understanding of the epic tradition, of its changes and continuities. From a synchronic perspective, the specific characteristics of epic poetry in a particular literary period could add to the understanding of this period if, for instance, epic poems or the genre of epic poetry more broadly is compared and contrasted with other literary texts or genres of the same time. The following section on 'late modernism' aims at outlining such a synchronic perspective.

[4] From here onwards 'community' in quotation marks will be used in this unspecific and inclusive meaning.

Late Modernism, or, the Absolute Limit of Modernism

'In contrast to the well-established body of criticism on early modernism in 20th-century literature, late modernism has only belatedly appeared in critical discourse', Cheryl Hindrichs remarks in a 2011 article, and a cursory survey of titles of articles, chapters and books, indeed, suggests that not only is the 'relatively new field of late modernist studies', as Thomas S. Davis described it in 2012, rapidly growing but the term 'late modernism' itself is trending (Hindrichs 840; Davis 'Late Modernism' 326).[5] 'Late modernism' represents a welcome new rubric for the vast, increasingly saturated field of modernist studies and its publishing market, for it not only invites the exploration of hitherto neglected figures but also the application of 'new perspectives' to canonical writers. However, while, as Hindrichs observes, 'late modernism' only 'belatedly' found recognition in 'critical discourse', it has been around for a while, as Michael Whitworth convincingly shows. According to Whitworth, in fact, the term 'late modernism' emerged around the same time as 'high modernism' and 'postmodernism', namely in the critical discourse on postmodernism in the nineteen seventies (274). Whitworth locates a first, tentative use of 'late modernism' in an interview William Spanos conducted with Jerome Rothenberg, which was published in 1975 in *boundary 2*, while he explains, as is generally recognised, that Charles Jencks consistently used this term in architectural criticism from the late seventies onwards, before it became a central concept in a sustained work of literary criticism with Alan Wilde's *Horizon of Assent* (1981) (Whitworth 275-6). Whitworth, furthermore, helpfully outlines two trends of the use

[5] The term 'late modernism' can be found in titles of recent articles on all kinds of topics related to literature from roughly the nineteen thirties onwards. Titles of chapters that mention 'late modernism' feature in *The Cambridge Introduction to British Poetry, 1945-2010* (2015), *The Cambridge Companion to British Poetry, 1945-2010* (2015), *The Cambridge Companion to American Poetry since 1945* (2013), *The Cambridge Companion to British Fiction since 1945* (2015), *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett* (2015), or *The Legacies of Modernism* (Cambridge UP, 2011). Cambridge University Press, it seems, grew particularly fond of the label of 'late modernism'. Among recently published books whose titles include 'late modernism' are Robert Genter's *Late Modernism: Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America* (2010), Alex Latter's *Late Modernism and the English Intelligencer* (2015), C.D. Blanton's *Epic Negation: The Dialectical Poetics of Late Modernism* (2015) and Thomas S. Davis's *The Extinct Scene: Late Modernism and Everyday Life* (2016).

of ‘late modernism’, for he remarks that it ‘has been used to denote both a transitional period between high modernism and postmodernism, and the continuation of a distinct modernist tradition alongside postmodernism’ (275).

Considering the vagueness of the term ‘late modernism’ it is not surprising that critics disagree about the years or the kinds of literature to which it should refer, and various critics consequently apply ‘late modernism’ to writers and literatures from, roughly, the nineteen thirties up to the present. However, even from such diverse uses of ‘late modernism’ it is possible to derive some generalisations about which most late modernist scholars would agree. Firstly, ‘late modernism’ exists at a distance to the ‘high’ or ‘classical’ modernism(s) of the teens and twenties. Secondly, as a result of this distance, ‘late modernist’ writers are frequently self-consciously, intentionally or despite themselves ‘modernist’. Finally, ‘late modernism’ represents an aesthetic, metaphysical or political ‘limit’ or ‘extreme’ of modernism, beyond which ‘modernism’ does or would become something else.

In *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism and the Ironic Imagination*, Alan Wilde conceives irony as relationship between the experience of a ‘disjunctive’ world and an ‘all-encompassing vision of life’ (3, 28-9), and he investigates how the nature of this relationship changes between modernism and postmodernism. According to Wilde, in modernist literature the unified or unifying vision of life is imagined as truth that can be discerned beneath surface appearances, while he associates postmodern literature with the rejection of the belief in an ultimate foundation, which manifests itself in a focus on the surface, on appearance rather than essence (Wilde 43-4). ‘Late modernism’, in Wilde’s exposition, accordingly, refers to the moment of ‘a noticeable, if somewhat ambiguous, shift to surface’ that he locates primarily, but not exclusively, in British literature of the nineteen thirties (108). These writers who include, but are not coextensive with, the ‘Auden Group’, Wilde maintains, ‘reveal themselves to be, if anything, still more self-conscious, yet more aware of the rift between self and world than their elders’, while their works show that ‘. . . modernism appears to have been sliding toward a state of exhaustion and impasse’ (41, 43). Wilde accordingly describes ‘late modernism’ as ‘a reaction against modernism by writers who retain a good many modernist presuppositions and strategies’ and he characterises this ‘reaction’

primarily as ‘a reversal . . . in epistemological assumptions’. He explains further: ‘The reversal is fundamental. The early modernist tendency to connect truth with depth, and at times to sacrifice the phenomenal for the reality that is presumed to underlie it, gives way to a counterassertion that truth inheres in the visible’ (108). According to Wilde, the ‘impasse’ of modernism to which late modernists react precisely results from the fact that modernism tends to ‘sacrifice the phenomenal’ for a transcendental truth ‘that is presumed to underlie it’. The unifying ‘all-encompassing vision of life’ that modernist works oppose to the alienating experience of reality can only be sustained by maintaining a distance to this reality, and this formalism or aestheticism represents both the condition and limitation of modernist literature. Wilde maintains:

> . . . exactly the attitudes Joyce and Forster embody and reject in the persons of their outsiders [represented in their texts] they confirm through their own techniques: the aesthetic threatens to subvert the moral; and one is hard put at least to say whether victory lies with the enclosed and enclosing world of art, implicitly articulating its ideal of transcendence and resolving unity, or with the dynamic, imperfect world of human activity it overtly dramatizes. (118-9)

Focusing on surface, ‘late modernism’ does not subordinate, at least not unequivocally, ‘the dynamic, imperfect world’ to a transcendental, unifying, ideal order, and in this respect ‘late modernism’ prefigures postmodernism (119–121). Yet, rather than eschewing the notion of transcendental ‘truth’ altogether, as Wilde asserts, ‘late modernism’ ‘gives way to a counterassertion that truth inheres in the visible’ (108), and this retention of an, albeit dislocated, ideal links ‘late modernism’ to modernism ‘proper’.

In *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), McHale draws on Wilde’s speculative approach to ‘late modernism’, even though he prefers the term ‘limit-modernism’ to refer to those texts that hover somewhere between modernism and postmodernism (*Postmodernist Fiction* 13). According to McHale, the fundamental difference between modernist and postmodernist fiction is that the former is primarily interested in epistemological questions, while the latter engages with ontology (McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 10-1). In other words, modernist fiction is concerned with the relationship between concrete particulars and universal notions, such as truth,

whereas postmodernist fiction inquires into the nature of universals. Yet, McHale shrewdly maintains:

> There is a kind of inner logic or inner dynamics . . . governing the change . . . from modernist to postmodernist fiction. Intractable epistemological uncertainty becomes at a certain point ontological plurality or instability: push epistemological questions far enough and they 'tip over' into ontological questions. By the same token, push ontological questions far enough and they tip over into epistemological questions – the sequence is not linear and unidirectional, but bidirectional and reversible. (*Postmodernist Fiction* 11)

'Limit-modernist' texts, then, are texts that undergo this 'tip over' from epistemology to ontology, or vice versa, and McHale's examples include William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), Samuel Beckett's *Malone Dies* (1951), Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Dans le labyrinthine* (1959), Carlos Fuentes's *Cambio de piel* (1967), Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962) and Robert Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association Inc., J.Henry Waugh, Prop.* (1968) (McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 12–21). Faulkner notwithstanding, 'limit-modernism', according to McHale and in contrast to Wilde's 'late modernism', can thus be located approximately in the fifties and sixties. McHale's 'limit-modernist' 'tip-over' from epistemology to ontology, which, unfortunately, he does not consider in much further detail, is of central interest to the present thesis, for such incomplete or ambivalent paradigm shifts are a defining characteristic of 'late modernism' as it is going to be defined. These shifts raise compelling questions. McHale describes the transition from epistemology to ontology as 'tip over', which implies that this change is spontaneous, momentary and autonomous. It is related to, possibly the result of, certain literary strategies or techniques, but the 'tipping over' itself happens suddenly and all by itself. However, could this change also be considered a turn, a leap, a fall, or an elevation? Even more intriguingly, what is the nature or status of this shift? Attributing it either to the realm of epistemology or ontology seems problematic for it leads from the one to the other, but does this mean that there is something outside or beyond the ontological? Such questions, albeit in different and changing terms, are central to the discussions of the following chapters.

In *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts between the World Wars* (1999), likely the most influential study of 'late modernism' to date, Tyrus Miller dates the emergence of 'late modernism' to 1926, and thus not considerably earlier

than Wilde (10, 42). Moreover, similarly to Wilde, Miller conceives of modernism as a movement that is based on the notion of artistic autonomy and of 'late modernism' as reaction to the latter that highlights an 'impasse' or 'limit' inherent in this position. Yet, in contrast to Wilde and McHale, Miller considers 'late modernism' as overlapping with modernism rather than postmodernism, and while the former two describe the 'limits' of modernism in philosophical and formal terms, Miller focuses on the historical and cultural context of what he considers 'late modernism' (7, 10). Thus, Miller writes for instance:

> Late modernist writing . . . coheres as a distinctive literary 'type' within the historical development of modernist literature, serving as an index of a new dispensation, a growing skepticism about modernist sensibility and craft as means of managing the turbulent forces of the day. Viewed from the narrow perspective of literary form, late modernist writing weakens the relatively strong symbolic forms still evident in high modernist texts. It reopens the modernist enclosure of form onto the work's social and political environs, facilitating its more direct, polemical engagement with topical and popular discourses. From the point of view of the external context, it also registers the ways in which intense social, political, and economic pressures of the period increasingly threatened the efficacy of high modernist form. (20)

Thus, according to Miller, early and high modernist art represent attempts at ordering or taming 'the turbulent forces of the day' through artistic form. By contrast, 'late modernism' is characterised by an increasing 'skepticism' regarding the imposition of order through formal techniques. Late modernist writers, Miller maintains, 'developed a repertoire of means for unsettling the signs of formal craft that testified to the modernist writer's discursive mastery' (19). However, it is not altogether clear in Miller's account whether these 'late modernist' writers primarily objected to modernist formalism or whether they did not have any choice but to abandon it since 'intense social, political, and economic pressures of the period increasingly threatened the efficacy of high modernist form'. Miller usefully summarises how in the late twenties and thirties, artists and their works increasingly came under political pressure, primarily due to the rise of fascism in Europe, while they also had to confront social and economic challenges (see for example 29-0). Accordingly, Miller not only characterises 'late modernism' as a 'reaction to a certain type of modernist fiction dominated by an aesthetics of formal mastery', but also as '. . . a *failure* to repress, a failure of the forms to contain the turbulent historical energies that sweep

through late modernist works' (18, 32, emphasis in original). Whether 'late modernists' primarily wanted to challenge '[m]odernism's radical autonomy' (30) or whether in the face of political, economic and social forces they were not able to maintain it, with 'late modernism', according to Miller, the spheres of art and 'reality' started to merge, which resulted not only in the loss of the elevated status of art but also in an increasing 'fictionalisation' or 'aestheticisation' of 'reality'. In the works of his chief 'late modernists', Wyndham Lewis, Djuna Barnes and Samuel Beckett, for instance, Miller discerns 'the vision of a general depersonalization and deauthenticisation of life in modern society'. Miller explains:

> Everyday life, in their view, was being increasingly penetrated by mimetic practices . . . previously confined to well-defined spheres in religious ritual, theatre, and the arts. Such generalized mimetism was at once an involuntary process for individuals, a compulsory lowering of the threshold of difference between subjects and objects, their unconscious assimilation to an objective environment – and a social phenomenon consciously manipulable for political and commercial ends. . . . Late modernism, as it emerged in the late twenties and thirties, both reflected and reflected critically *upon* this loss of a stable, authentic social ground. (42-3, emphasis in original)

Crucially, the dwindling of the distance between art and 'reality' that Miller discerns in 'late modernist' texts in the last instance amounts to a challenge of the dichotomy between subject and object and thus to a threat to the self (45; see also 24). One way in which late modernists confront this threat, he suggests, is through laughter, whose corporeal reverberations affirm the body and thus re-assert the self against its outside. With respect to Lewis, Miller maintains, for example: 'Laughter may turn back self-reflexively on the subject, "stiffening" the self against danger, marking that minimal "spatial" difference between conscious life and the pure extensivity of dead nature' (51). Miller intriguingly considers how the limits of modernism, that is, the limits of aesthetic autonomy, impinge on the limits that separate the artist from the work of art, the subject from the object, the self from the 'outside'. Questions regarding the status of the subject repeatedly surface in discussions of late modernism and also figure centrally in some of the key texts discussed in the following chapters.

In *A Shrinking Island* (2004), Jed Esty, similarly to Miller, focuses on the historical and cultural context of 'late modernism'. Yet, unlike '[t]he most widely

held views about the end of modernism' that 'have tended to concentrate on causal factors associated with European politics (the rise of fascism and the dampening effects of World War II), economics (the depression that ran through the thirties), and culture (the growing threat to high art from mass media in the age of radio, cinema, and television)', with which Miller can also be associated, Esty is interested in the relationship between the end of modernism and the decline of British imperialism (2). Accordingly, Esty identifies 'late modernism' with 'the blank space or interregnum between modernism and postmodernism, between empire and welfare state', and he dates it to between 1930 and 1960 (4). At the same time, however, the focus of Esty's study is exceedingly close to 'high modernism', for rather than discussing the works of 'second generation' modernists or later artists, he examines the late writings of the 'high modernists' Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot, E.M. Forster and J.M. Keynes. In so doing, Esty establishes a crucial relationship between imperialism and the modernist notions of fragmentation and alienation. Drawing on the works of Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn but also of Fredric Jameson, he argues that 'we can identify imperialism's place in the modernist imaginary as both a floating symbol and a material predicate of lost cultural wholeness' (6; see 6-8). The lack of this 'cultural wholeness', according to Esty, is particularly felt or located at the centre of the empire, and it is related to the primitivism that informs much of modernist art, which figures less developed peoples as more authentic or complete and therefore as objects of nostalgia. '[W]hile the culture of imperial modernism represented itself as an expanding and synthesizing universalism *at the periphery*', Esty writes, 'it registered an attenuated or absent totality *at the core*, where knowledge of the inside was mystified into the atomized but dazzling unreality of metropolitan perception' (7). How this predicament changed with the disintegration of British imperialism, Esty observes in the late works of his canonical modernists, who, according to him, 'measured the passing of British hegemony not solely in terms of a vitiated imperial humanism but also in terms of a recovered cultural particularity that is, at least potentially, the basis for both social and aesthetic renewal' (3). Esty's vocabulary of 'universality' versus 'particularity' in the context of 'late modernism' is of specific interest to the present dissertation. The late works of Eliot, Woolf and Forster, Esty argues, register a change in focus from 'the

redemptive agency of *art*' to 'the redemptive agency of *culture*', the latter of which, unlike the former, is intricately connected to the concept of nation (2-3, emphases in original). Thus, Esty closely associates 'late modernism' with what he terms 'the anthropological turn' and 'the rise of "culturalism"', which refer to the tendency of applying 'the tropes and modes of colonial knowledge' to the home culture and, thus, to the emergence of English (rather than British) culture as an object of study (2, 9). In Woolf's *Between the Acts* or Eliot's *Four Quartets*, for example, Esty discerns 'literary forms dedicated to accommodating the fading significance of English universalism to the emergent significance of English particularism' (5). In other words, he posits the substitution of the notion of British art, which, in the context of the British empire, equals art generally or universally with English culture, as one culture among many. Yet, intriguingly, Esty convincingly shows that the 'late modernist' texts he examines also '*implicitly* reinscribe universalism into the language of English particularism' (emphasis in original). He explains:

> . . . the anthropological turn of 1930-60 consolidates a second-order universalism based on English cultural integrity. If the primary universalism of the metropolitan era turned on the sovereign subject of a border-crossing, myth-making imperial humanism, then this new secondary universalism turns on the representative status of a bounded culture. The afterlife of British hegemony is written into this new language of cultural exemplarity, so that Englishness represents not just a type but the very archetype, of modern nationalism, of deep and integral shared traditions emanating from within the prototypical industrial class society. (14)

Interestingly, in this passage, Esty briefly touches on the 'high modernist' subject, 'the sovereign subject of a border-crossing, myth-making imperial humanism', and implies that 'late modernism' is informed by a different conception of the 'subject', a point on which he comments elsewhere. Generally speaking, the beginnings of 'culturalism' and the 'anthropological turn' that Esty associates with the change from 'modernism' to 'late modernism' coincides with the emergence of a new conception of subjectivity as socially and culturally conditioned rather than transcendental and self-identical (11). Thus, like Miller albeit in different ways, Esty locates in 'late modernism' 'a new representation of the subject/object problem' (13). However, of chief interest in the above quotation is Esty's observation that his 'late modernist' writers do not succeed in abandoning the transcendental notion of 'universality' even

though they try. At the same time, or as a result of this, he also observes that these late modernist texts 'offer valuable conceptual resources for coming to terms with the problem of universalism' (14). That is, while Esty's 'late modernist' writers cannot get rid of 'universality', it simultaneously remains an unattainable ideal. In the works of Eliot, Woolf, Forster and Keynes, English culture might approach the status of a universal by being represented as archetypical, paradigmatic or quintessential culture, but it stops short of becoming absolute for it always requires other cultures against which it can be defined. Esty reinforces this observation by referring to Homi Bhabha who shows, according to him, that 'the nation, when it is no longer defined against its "Other or Outside," finds itself foundering on its own internal contradictions . . .' (15). With its focus on 'high modernist' writers and on British imperialism *A Shrinking Island* might not be particularly closely related to the present study. Yet, Esty's recognition and theoretisation of the 'universal' in 'late modernist' literature as impossible in multiple ways or to multiple degrees represents a central characteristic of 'late modernist' literature discussed here. The universal, or the absolute, in 'late modernist' literature is impossible to accept, impossible to avoid and impossible to attain.

Yet, Esty's study of 'late modernism' has proven influential and is useful to the present dissertation for further reasons. Esty situates 'late modernism' against a geopolitical background and by commenting on the relationships between universalism and particularism in his 'late modernist' texts, by locating in them 'the problem of universalism', he establishes crucial relationships between historico-political developments, philosophical or conceptual problems and aesthetic challenges. A similar space is occupied, for instance, by Thomas S. Davis's *The Extinct Scene: Late Modernism and Everyday Life* (2016). Moreover, with respect to the present dissertation, *A Shrinking Island* is interesting because with its focus on the period between the thirties and the sixties, Esty establishes a connection between the thirties and post-Second World War Europe that is frequently obliterated due to the tendency of identifying the year 1945 as watershed between modernism and postmodernism. Esty links the thirties and the sixties primarily by maintaining that the pre-war 'anthropological turn' is directly related to the emergence of the Birmingham School in the sixties. He writes: 'By tracing this turn back to the

thirties, we can see how canonical English writing of the prewar period established key tropes and concepts of the postwar reclamation of England's cultural integrity and authenticity' (2). Interestingly, according to Esty, the growing interest in particularly English culture that he locates in pre-war literature, to a noticeable extent, reduced political differences between intellectuals and artists of the political left and right (13, 19). Marina MacKay in *Modernism and World War II* similarly registers a growing interest in nationalism, specifically in national culture, in the nineteen thirties that bridges the gulf between the political left and right (5, 14, 20). 'Late modernist' literature, according to MacKay, is primarily literature of the Second World War, and while she, thus, shares Esty's understanding of 'late modernism' as post-imperial, she emphasises the importance of the Second World War and disagrees with the latter's subsumption of the World War under the wider developments of the decline of imperialism (Esty 10; MacKay 17). At the same time, MacKay follows Miller's path by arguing that 'late modernism' represents the moment when 'modernism' became political, the moment when it was no longer capable of maintaining its autonomy (17-8, 20). MacKay interestingly illustrates what she calls 'the collapse' of 'the political binaries of the 1930s' with an analysis of Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941), 'a 1200-page essay on imperialism and its legacies in the Balkans' (18, 44; see also 70). She shows how West, who belonged to the political left, in *Black Lamb* embraces nationalism and employs a literary technique closely related to Eliot's 'mythical method' to argue that Britain needed to join the war (44-5, 65-6). 'West's advocacy of national myth over material and economic causality', MacKay recognises, 'is problematic' (64). Yet, MacKay also shows that West's use of myth is politically more complex than, for example, Eliot's. Quoting Auden, MacKay maintains that West offers an 'antimythological myth', by which she means that in West's hands myth does not become an absolute structuring principle but retains 'particular implications' (66-7). She concludes: 'When myth found its new life in the Second World War it became simultaneously a qualified nationalist ideology and a defence of a particular modernist aesthetic' (67). Restoring 'modernism's irrational element', West, according to MacKay, 'undertakes nothing less than an early examination of the politics of modernism' (67). MacKay's reading of West's *Black Lamb* is interesting

with respect to the present dissertation because the texts under consideration in the succeeding chapters in different but related ways betray an aesthetico-political tension similarly to this case of a left-wing writer who employs a transcendental or transcendentalising aesthetics.

So far, the focus of scholars interested in 'late modernism' has all but exclusively been on Europe. This changes with Fredric Jameson, who in *A Singular Modernity* (2002) provocatively declares 'late modernism' 'an American invention' and 'a product of the Cold War' (*Singular* 165). However, already more than ten years earlier, in a passage of *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) that is well known among scholars of 'late modernism', Jameson reflects on the necessity of recognising a 'late modernism' that precedes, and to some degree overlaps with, postmodernism. He writes:

> . . . we should probably also make some place (but not as late as he does) for what Charles Jencks has come to call 'late modernism' – the survivals of a properly modernist view of art and the world after the great political and economic break of the Depression, where, under Stalinism or the Popular Front, Hitler or the New Deal, some new conception of social realism achieves the status of momentary cultural dominance by way of collective anxiety and world war. Jenck's late moderns are those who persist into postmodernism, and the idea makes sense architecturally; a literary frame of reference, however, throws up names like Borges and Nabokov, Beckett, poets like Olson or Zukovsky, and composers like Milton Babbitt, who had the misfortune to span two eras and the luck to find a time capsule of isolation or exile in which to spin out unseasonable forms. (*Postmodernism* 305)

The 'properly modernist view of art and the world' that, according to Jameson, the 'late modernists' continue beyond its time can rather straightforwardly be identified with the modernist ideal of the autonomy of art. In *Postmodernism*, Jameson, for instance, asserts that '[a]s a form of production . . . modernism . . . gives off a message that has little to do with the content of the individual works: it is the aesthetic as sheer autonomy . . .' (*Postmodernism* 307). Similarly, he writes in *Singular Modernity*: 'This ideology [of modernism] can be easily recognized and identified: it is first and foremost that which posits the autonomy of the aesthetic . . .' (*Singular* 161). 'Ideology of modernism', at first sight likely a puzzling phrase, here once again signals the 'late modernist' moment most scholars of late modernism posit, even if at different historical junctions. It refers to the moment when

modernism becomes self-conscious, when the radical artistic experimentation and provisional strategies of the modernists 'proper' become recognisable and articulable as 'movement' or, in Jameson's words and from his Marxist perspective, as ideology. '[T]his ideology', Jameson accordingly maintains, 'was not contemporaneous with the modern movement itself . . . . It is a belated product, and essentially an invention and an innovation of the years following World War II' (*Singular* 164; see also 197). According to Jameson, late modernism 'transforms the older modernist experimentation into an arsenal of tried and true techniques, no longer striving after aesthetic totality or the systemic and Utopian metamorphosis of forms' (*Singular* 166). The difference between 'modernism' and 'late modernism', as Jameson conceives it, is here presented in a nutshell. The works of 'modernists' such as Pound, Eliot or Joyce, Jameson argues, are results of radical experimentation. '[I]n the moderns', he maintains, '[form] is generated experimentally in the encounter, leading on into formations that could never have been predicted' (*Singular* 208). Through this experimentalism, modernist artists accentuate their distance to their social or political environments and look for alternatives. Thus, 'modernist' art is always also politically invested. 'Art for art's sake', in other words, for the modernists, is never only just for art's sake. Jameson argues, for example: '. . . the politics of Pound and Eliot . . . was the sign that they were genuine modernists, that is to say, that they held to the Absolute and to Utopianism . . .' (*Singular* 168). 'Late modernists', by contrast, took the 'modernists' as their models, and the modernist ideal of aesthetic autonomy, at which the 'classical' modernists, according to Jameson, arrived through trial and error, for 'late modernists' is an article of faith (see, for example, *Singular* 199-0). For the late modernists, Jameson writes, form 'is known in advance, as a given and as a set of requirements to which the raw empiricities of the content already selected in advance must dutifully submit' (*Singular* 208). As a result of this heightened formalism, of its increasingly exclusive focus on the work of art, 'late modernism', unlike 'modernism', is not utopian, or at least decisively less so. Coinciding with the advent of 'late modernism', Jameson asserts, 'the Cold War spelled the end of a whole era of social transformations and indeed of Utopian desires and anticipations' (*Singular* 165). These differences between modernism and late modernism, the turn away from experimentation to

established rules, away from political to even more formal, even more 'autonomous' art, Jameson maintains, can also be observed in the change from 'classical' modernist 'autoreferentiality' or 'self-designation' to a heightened 'reflexivity' typical of 'late modernism' (*Singular* 198). While, according to Jameson, 'classical' modernist works can frequently be considered 'allegories of their own production' (*Singular* 159), 'late modernist' art takes this self-consciousness a step further by developing its own theory of art, from which it becomes indistinguishable. Thus, Jameson argues for example, abstract expressionism developed its own theory, 'which then accompanied it everywhere abroad as a specifically North American cultural imperialism' (*Singular* 168). Likewise, he considers Wallace Stevens 'as the originator of poetry that is at one and the same time modernist theory, and of theory that is at one and the same time modernist poetry' (*Singular* 196). It is of particular interest with regard to chapter three of this thesis that Jameson in this respect contrasts Stevens with William Carlos Williams, who consequently emerges as modernist 'proper' (*Singular* 168).

However, Jameson recognises that the modernist ideal of aesthetic autonomy is ultimately doomed to failure. The manner in which he describes this aporia and the changes that he registers with regard to it as modernism becomes late modernism make his account of 'late modernism' particularly relevant to the present investigation. Since the modernist artwork, according to Jameson, aims at being completely independent, it represents at its most extreme an attempt at creating an alternative world. Hence, modernist artists, Jameson writes, are tempted

> . . . to conceive of their ambitions on an ever greater scale, which will culminate in the 'book of the world' itself, that Book as which, according to Mallarmé, the world is destined to end up. And this is then the moment to evoke, however unseasonable it may seem today, that ultimate claim of modernism to a relationship with what André Malraux called the Absolute. . . .
>
> We can convey the claims for the absolute more modestly and recognizably by quoting Adorno one last time, to the effect that 'in order for the work of art to be purely and fully a work of art, it must be more than a work of art'. The purely aesthetic is in other words indissolubly linked to the requirement that it be ultimately impure. (*Singular* 159-0)

Mallarmé's notion of 'the book of the world' is of crucial interest here because it sheds light on the limits of aesthetic autonomy and thus, according to Jameson, on the limits of the modernist aesthetic, which Jameson here emphasises by invoking

the ‘Absolute’. This limit of modernism is also the moment of ‘late modernism’. Without going into too much detail but in a manner that helpfully clarifies and supports Jamesons’s quotation above, Michael Levenson briefly but illuminatingly comments on Mallarmé and the latter’s concept of the ‘book of the world’:

> Mallarmé is at once the exemplar and the theorist of autonomy, and he is a central case for later claims that Modernism makes a cult of the autonomous artefact: self-contained, self-justifying. . . . The art-object as a system of internal relations, generating its meaning from within, indifferent to the biographical artist and audience – this is the epitome of autonomy. Beyond the autonomous work, there is the notorious question of *Le Livre* (The Book), the inclusive volume that would justify the life of the poet. . . . The total work will justify the whole life. Moreover, once the world exists in the book, it will surrender its independence and live only within the autonomous work that completes it. (120)

When Jameson writes that ‘[t]he purely aesthetic is . . . indissolubly linked to the requirement that it be ultimately impure’ and when he refers to ‘the Absolute’, he means that the ‘classical’ modernist ideal of aesthetic autonomy is not a self-sufficient principle but a means to an end. ‘[T]he very term Absolute’, he explains, ‘if it means anything, designates a transcendental motivation, an appeal to something outside the practice in question and enveloping it’ (*Singular* 163). The relationship between modernism and such an ‘Absolute’ can be grasped, for instance, precisely in the fact that most, if not all, ‘classical’ modernist artworks have a utopian or nostalgic dimension, that, as Jameson writes, ‘art, even in its modernist form as the Absolute – especially in its modernist form as the Absolute – has a genuine function to redeem and transfigure a fallen society’ (*Singular* 178). Mallarmé’s notion of the ‘book of the world’, however, represents the apotheosis of aesthetic autonomy. It signals the hypothetical moment at which the work of art reaches completion and consequently absolute autonomy. At this moment the work of art is not anymore conditioned by any ‘transcendental motivation’, by anything external to it, but, as complete totality, it becomes its own ‘Absolute’. The opposition between the work of art and the ‘world’, on which the notion of aesthetic autonomy depends, is absorbed by the work of art, as, in Levenson’s words, the world ‘will surrender its independence and live only within the autonomous work that completes it’. The particular, nearly autonomous, nearly closed-off work of art becomes its own all-embracing, all-inclusive cosmos. This is precisely the ‘late modernist’ moment, the

extreme limit of modernism, of aesthetic autonomy, and it is of immense interest because McHale's and Esty's accounts of limit-modernism and late modernism, respectively, associate the end stages of modernism with analogous shifts from a particular position or point of view to a universal one. While McHale describes it as 'turn over' from epistemology to ontology, Esty posits a change from English cultural particularism to a 'second-order universalism' at the moment when, in the works of his 'late modernists', English culture assumes the status of paradigm or achetype.

The notion of a total or totalising work of art is also central to Anthony Mellors's account of 'late modernism' in *Late Modernist Poetics: From Pound to Prynne* (2005), his investigation into the roles myth and the occult play in interwar and post-Second World War poetry. Taking issue with Tyrus Miller's dating of 'late modernism' to the late twenties and thirties, Mellors maintains that according to Miller, 'modernism was dissolving almost before it had begun' (3). By contrast, he locates 'late modernism' 'schematically' in 'the period 1945-1975' (2). Mellors identifies 'late modernism' with the continuation beyond the Second World War of the modernist poetic tradition, associated with Ezra Pound, that 'presents the poet as a shamanic figure spelling out the archetypal, spiritual values allegedly lost to rational technocratic society' (4). While the troubling similarities between the logic and rhetoric of such a poetics and the politics of authoritarian regimes that came to power in Europe around the same time are well appreciated, Mellors observes that a surprisingly similar interest in the occult persists in poetry written after the Second World War, and written by poets of political convictions that fundamentally differ from their predecessors'. He maintains:

> The Anglo-American avant-garde (including late modernism) finds in pagan religion the model for a unified, spiritual culture which offers an alternative to the perceived disorder of advanced capitalist society. Clearly this is a continuation of the nostalgic tribalism familiar from the pronouncements of Eliot and Pound. But little critical attention has been given to the fact that, although the modernists' identification of the 'mystic man' of so-called primitive cultures has long been discredited as politically reactionary, its influence on the left-leaning, liberationist movement in mid-century poetry has been profound . . . (8)

'Late modernism', whose chief representatives in Mellors's account are Charles Olson and J.H. Prynne, then, refers to works written around and after the middle of

the twentieth century by poets who share their major predecessors' interest in hermetic traditions even though they fundamentally disagree with their politics. These 'late modernist' poets, Mellors argues,

> . . . continue to affirm a redemptive aesthetic that links *poiesis* with occult power while disowning the reactionary politics of high modernists such as Yeats, Eliot and Pound. Art remains the alternative order to rationalising and inevitably compromised political systems. But precisely by being posited as alternative to the political, art becomes the political alternative, albeit in the guise of 'culture'. Upholding culture, the province of the organic community, over the institutionalised collectivity, late modernism misrecognises its own temporal investment in the political. As with high modernism, its aesthetic ideology is its equation of culture with nature. Late modernism is belated because it maintains this ideology while dissociating it from Anglo-American modernism's complicity with authoritarian regimes. (42)

On the one hand, Mellors's discussion of 'late modernism' here needs to be distinguished from Jameson's. Whereas according to Mellors, 'late modernism' is related to modernism because it continues the latter's 'redemptive aesthetic', for Jameson, 'late modernism' signals the end of art motivated by utopianism or nostalgia. On the other hand, Mellors's analysis reveals several interesting similarities to previously considered accounts of 'late modernism', even where these are based on literatures of earlier decades. The emphasis on 'culture', and the notion of 'culture' as whole, 'organic' or 'natural', that Mellors discerns in 'late modernist' poetry, for example, evokes the 'anthropological turn' and more specifically the 'second-order universalism' Esty posits in the 'late modernist' texts of his 'high modernist' writers. Likewise, Mellors's perception of late modernist literature as politically ambiguous recalls the collapse of 'political binaries' MacKay discovers in West's *Black Lamb* (70). The strengths of Mellors's account of late modernism lie in his perspicacious analysis of the political implications of literature that is based on but disowns a transcendental foundation. According to Mellors, 'late modernist' poetry, like its immediate precursor, figures 'culture' as lost totality, as a forgotten or obliterated unity with the world or cosmos, it is capable of restoring. Even though, unlike the poetry of figures such as Pound or Eliot, 'late modernist' poetry is, or at least tries to be, less elitist, less exclusive, Mellors convincingly argues that late modernist poetics is totalitarian insofar as it is still based on the notion of 'totality'. Thus, he states:

> The real difference [between late modernism and modernism] is political: an inclusive, liberal humanist and/or revolutionary project versus an exclusive, conservative and/or fascist one; yet both orientations are problematically ordered by the ideological figure of 'totality'. This retention of the totality and its sublimation into the religious is what I would call the condition of late modernism. Postmodernism, for better or worse, destroys immanence. (24)

While the conception of 'late modernism' entertained in the present dissertation shares various features with the accounts of 'late modernism' summarised above, its central, defining criterion can be located in this passage. 'Late modernism' is here examined, just as in Mellors's work, in relation to post-1945 American and European poetry, and just like Mellors, the following chapters focus on the relationships between the politics and the poetics or philosophy of the texts under consideration. More significantly, still, this thesis is inspired by Mellors's discussion of 'late modernism', for it maintains that 'late modernist' poetry can be defined by a reliance on notions of 'totality' and a simultaneous attempt to avoid transcendence, which results in conceptions of 'totality' as immanent. Yet, by complementing Mellors's account of 'late modernism' with other interpretations it is possible to arrive at an even more differentiated understanding of 'late modernism'. Indeed, while Mellors's analysis of 'late modernist' poetics is incisive and his focus on its politics distinguishes his discussion from most other accounts, in effect, he does not describe much else than the return or the retention of the 'absolute' that also figures in Jameson's and Esty's discussions of 'late modernism' and that can also be related to McHale's identification of 'limit-modernism' with the 'tip over', back and forth, between epistemology and ontology. Indeed, Wilde, too, associates 'late modernism' with a closely related phenomenon when he maintains that 'late modernists', unlike 'modernists', do not conceive of 'truth' as hidden and disclosable but as '[inhering] in the visible' (108). Thus, according to Wilde, as well, 'late modernists' keep believing in an ideal (truth), and they locate it in their immediate environment rather than in a transcendent beyond.

It could be objected now that the concept of 'late modernism' outlined here is too vague for it draws on numerous critical accounts, many of which to considerable degrees conflict with each other. How is it possible, for example, to base an understanding of 'late modernism' on Mellors's analysis, which expressly locates

‘late modernism’ after the Second World War, while also relying on the insights of Wilde’s, Esty’s, MacKay’s, and, to a lesser extent, Miller’s discussions, all of which place ‘late modernism’ in the nineteen thirties or early forties? Alternatively, since it is possible to relate these different conceptions of ‘late modernism’, it could be maintained that what is described as ‘late modernism’ does not exist, that it is nothing other than modernism. While ‘late modernism’, as the name suggests, indeed belongs to modernism, it might be possible to counter these objections by distinguishing between ‘late modernism’ as historical period and as genre, for the latter of which McHale’s term ‘limit-modernism’ might be more appropriate. As literary period, ‘late modernism’ refers to a late phase of modernism, and insofar as it denotes a period, it certainly makes sense to identify it with the period after the Second World War, as Mellors and Jameson do, because this allows for recognising that modernism persists after the Second World War and for conceptually differentiating, not only between pre- and post-war modernist literature but also, within the post-war period, between ‘late modernism’ and postmodernism. Mellors’s argument that by dating ‘late modernism’ to the thirties, Miller places the end of modernism too early is thoroughly convincing (3, 20–2). As literary genre, ‘late modernism’, or perhaps then rather ‘limit-modernism’, would refer to modernist works that approach, encounter, or probe the extremes or limits of modernist aesthetics, such as the limits or extremes of the modernist ideal of aesthetic autonomy. Accordingly, even if ‘late modernism’, as literary period, is identified with the years after 1945 it is possible that ‘late’ or ‘limit-modernist’ texts, in the generic sense, can be found earlier. Of course, if this distinction is accepted, ‘late modernism’ as genre and as literary period would, to a considerable extent, overlap. It would not be particularly surprising to discover that as modernism develops and approaches postmodernism, literary texts increasingly encounter, examine or try to extend the limits of modernist aesthetics. Thus, even though the present dissertation locates ‘late modernism’ periodically in the years after 1945, the account of ‘late modernism’ given here is not undermined by the fact that it also draws on literary analyses that posit ‘late modernist’ texts in the thirties and early forties. With this sketch of the coordinates and characteristics of ‘late modernism’ in mind it is now possible to outline the place epic poetry occupies with respect to late modernism.

The Quest for a Human Community

In *Late Modernist Poetics*, Anthony Mellors remarks that late modernism

> was a period of consolidation, when substantial parts of long poems begun before 1939 were composed and published, and new ones were written: *The Cantos*, *Four Quartets*, Louis Zukofsky's *A*, David Jones's *The Anathemata*, William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*, Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems*, Basil Bunting's *Briggflatts*, Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony: The United States.* (19)

The ease with which Mellors can provide a surprisingly long list of 'long poems' that were written and published after the Second World War could suggest that the form of the long poem, or maybe even the epic, was for one reason or another particularly timely at this literary-historical juncture. While this is an ambitious hypothesis that cannot be sufficiently substantiated here or later, it is possible to sketch the beginnings of an answer. As discussed in section two, according to Lukács, the ancient epic represents a 'totality of being', Whittier-Ferguson maintains that epics 'aim to assemble, on the grandest possible scale, a model of the world that will both represent and explain the way things are . . .', Vogler states that 'the epic poet's task has always been to give to his race or age a completion and embodiment of the meaning of life that he finds in the accepted but not necessarily conscious metaphysics of the time', and Moretti simply calls modern epics 'world texts' (Lukács 34; Whittier-Ferguson 212; Vogler 8; Moretti). The project of epic, thus, intriguingly resembles Mallarmé's ideal of the 'book of the world', whose impossible realisation Jameson associates with late modernism. The project of epic is the representation and simultaneous foundation of everything, of an absolute entirety, and it can consequently likewise be related to McHale's 'limit-modernist' 'tip over' from epistemology to ontology, that is, from a system of thought that assumes at least some givens, that admits some external foundation, to a mode of enquiry that tries to subsume everything, including itself. Now, if Mellors is right, and 'late modernist' poets, like their predecessors, criticise the consequences of modernisation, contrast the alienation and fragmentation of contemporary capitalist society with ideals of an organic community, while they reject totalitarian politics, then, the epic genre represents a fundamental impossibility to them. It is the ideal

genre for ‘including’, thus, unifying, and representing – in both senses of the word – entire ‘communities’, whereas its inherent ‘totalitarian temptation’ (Moretti) renders it highly problematic. Exactly as the universal or absolute in late modernist literature is impossible to accept, avoid and attain, the epic genre, for late modernist poets, is both impossible to resist and embrace. Hence, while Jones, Williams and Olson wrote epics, the following chapters examine the ways in which they attempt to come to terms with the genre’s totalising predisposition. All three poems, in different ways, try to strip the totality to which epic aspires of its transcendental dimensions, which, particularly in *The Anathemata* and *The Maximus Poems*, but more implicitly also in *Paterson*, gives rise to the notion of an immanent totality. This problematisation of ‘totality’ and its return or stubborn persistence as immanence evokes the ‘second-order universalism’ Esty discovers in the later modernist discourse of cultural particularlism and also Wilde’s observation that late modernists postulate ‘truth’ in empirical reality rather than beyond it.

Written and published, at least partially, after the Second World War, David Jones’s, William Carlos Williams’s and Charles Olson’s epic poems try to conceive of an inclusive, non-totalitarian kind of ‘community’. Thus, it is possible and perhaps tempting to consider them alongside the rethinking or questioning of ‘community’ with which a number of mostly European philosophers engaged in the nineteen eighties and nineties, most notably Jean-Luc Nancy, Maurice Blanchot, Giorgio Agamben, and Alphonso Lingis. Yet the manners in which these three epic poems attempt to reconceive ‘community’, and perhaps particularly the ways in which this project is complicated, have more in common with Georges Bataille’s philosophy of community, which centrally influenced the above philosophers and which is roughly contemporaneous with the epic poems. It is thus time to turn briefly to the key text of this dissertation that represents the focus of the first chapter: Bataille’s *Summa Atheologica*. Frustrated with the realities of communism and worried by the rise of fascism in Europe, Bataille, in the nineteen thirties, gradually disengaged himself from party politics and started to conceive an alternative, non-totalitarian kind of community, a human community that unites all humanity and even the whole realm of ‘being’. This conception of ‘community’ forms the central, continuous subject of three books Bataille wrote and published during the Second World War and which

he kept revising after the war under the title of *Summa Atheologica*. Bataille's *Summa* forms the subject of the first chapter of this dissertation on late modernist epic poetry because it shares with the poems two characteristics that represent nuclei of the present investigation, namely a concern with 'community' and an approach to this problem or question that can be described as 'late modernist'. If it is taken for granted that twentieth-century epic poetry is centrally interested in representing a 'community' and that this project became more complicated, or at least assumed a particular form, around and after the Second World War, then Bataille's philosophy of community might be capable of shedding an interesting light on the problem of the late modernist epic poem.

Bataille's *Summa Atheologica,* Jones's *The Anathemata*, Williams's *Paterson* and Olson's *The Maximus Poems* are 'late modernist' texts, it will be argued, because, while they were written either as reaction to twentieth-century totalitarianism or with full awareness of its catastrophic consequences, and while they therefore betray a suspicion of transcendental values and totalising tendencies, they are nevertheless based on totalising categories. Specifically, similarly to Bataille, in their poems, Jones, Williams, and Olson in different ways turn to notions of 'humanity', 'humanness', 'human condition' or 'human nature' to solve the problem of conceiving 'community' as open, 'inclusive', and, above all, non-totalitarian. However, even though the concept of a human 'community' is 'inclusive', for it is based on a quality that is, by definition, shared by all human beings, it is nevertheless, in Mellors's words, 'ordered by the ideological figure of "totality"', namely the totality of human beings, of humanity as such, which is politically problematic (24). In other words, the 'communities' of humanity of Bataille's philosophy, and Jones's, Williams's and Olson's epics represent 'immanent' rather than 'transcendental' totalities, and while they therefore differ from the transcendental nationalism of fascism, they are still 'communities' imagined as whole, complete, total and therefore totalising. The problem is that 'totalities', no matter how hard one tries, are always also 'exclusive', not just inclusive. This, again, represents the 'late modernist' return of the absolute or the universal, or the moment at which the 'totalitarian temptation' of the epic reveals itself. The discussions of the following chapters will show, for example, that even

'human communities' require an 'other' or 'outside' against which they can define themselves, and this postulation of an 'other' can give rise to hierarchies within the 'community' itself. Accordingly, some kinds of human beings (for example men or artists) are considered to represent 'humanness' more paradigmatically than other kinds of human beings, and while those other human beings also form part of the 'human communities', these 'communities' are not in the same way or to the same degree theirs. In the *Summa*, Bataille recognises the inherent impossibility of the notion of an absolutely immanent totality, while he nevertheless attempts to imagine it.

C. D. Blanton's recently published *Epic Negation: The Dialectical Poetics of Late Modernism* (2015), like the present dissertation, combines the subjects of 'epic' and 'late modernism'. Hence, this introduction closes with a brief summary of how the present project differs from Blanton's. While *Epic Negation* is a highly intricate study, its basic premises can rather straightforwardly be summarised. Taking his cues from Pound's definition of 'epic' as 'poem including history' and Lukács's notion of the modern epic as impossibility, Blanton maintains that epic aims at representing (historical) totality but that this has become impossible in modernity, chiefly because history has become too complex and abstract (3–7). Hence, Blanton argues that the modernist epic is distinguished by '. . . the recognition that totality *is* a negation and that an epic poetics must therefore proceed by negation' (9, emphasis in original; see also 7). Since history in modernity is unrepresentable, according to Blanton, modernist epics represent it negatively, through their gaps and silences, and, consequently, the modernist epic does not exist as poem in any conventional or traditional sense, either, but as 'shadow-text' underneath, beyond or in-between other texts (10). Blanton, thus, interprets the entire *Criterion*, Auden's *Another Time*, Louis MacNeice's *Autumn Journal* and H. D.'s trilogy as 'negative' epics. Problematic about Blanton's approach to the epic is that it is at once too conventional and too innovative. On the one hand, by claiming that the epic in the twentieth century exists only as negation, Blanton sells the modernist epic short, for he implies that it does not exist anymore in more conventional form. On the other hand, by reading as epics – be it as negative epics or not - *Another Time* and *Autumn Journal*, and especially *The Criterion*, Blanton stretches the definition of epic too much. If

The Criterion is an epic of some kind, one might ask, what, then, is *not* an epic? Furthermore, Blanton identifies all of his primary texts with late modernism, and in this respect, the present dissertation also significantly differs from his monograph, for it chiefly identifies late modernism with the post-war period, while the primary texts Blanton discusses were written between 1922 and 1946. In his review of *Epic Negation*, Neal Alexander insightfully challenges Blanton's invocation of 'late modernism', as he writes:

> . . . Blanton seems to align himself with recent work in the new modernist studies that has sought to expand and problematise the conventional periodisation of late modernism, without eschewing the problems of periodisation altogether. And yet, in practice, *Epic Negation* confines itself to a much narrower historical period, implicitly accepting the received critical wisdom that literary modernism happened between 1900 and 1940, and that late modernism was essentially a phenomenon of the interwar period (1919-1939). As a result, Blanton has nothing to say about such late modernist epics as William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* (1946-1958), David Jones's *The Anathémata* (1952), Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems* (1960-1975), or Louis Zukofsky's *"A"* (1928-78). (455)

With this reference to the three late modernist epic poems discussed in the present dissertation, it is now high time to end this introduction and start with the investigation at hand.

1. Georges Bataille's *Summa Atheologica*

1.1 Introduction

Georges Bataille's 'philosophy' (the importance of the quotation marks will become clear in the course of the chapter) has several things in common with the epic poems considered in the succeeding chapters and, hence, is capable of shedding an interesting light on the challenges with which late modernist epic poems grapple. Like the epic poems under consideration, and arguably like epic poetry generally, a significant part of Bataille's texts is devoted to the question of 'community'. Written shortly before, during and after the Second World War, these texts are preoccupied with the conception of a form of 'community' that escapes any kind of totalitarian logic, be it National Socialist or communist. Bataille's 'philosophy' shares this awareness and burden of twentieth-century totalitarianism with the following epics. In response to it, he tries to think 'community' as an 'immanent totality', and in doing so, he emerges as a paradigmatic 'late modernist' thinker, for he illustrates the 'retention of the totality and its sublimation into the religious' that Mellors defines as 'the condition of late modernism' (24). Bataille's 'philosophy' of 'community' presents the problem of imagining a non-totalitarian communal totality, a problem that, in different forms, will also be encountered in the following three epics, and a problem, moreover, that defines these epics as 'late modernist'. The present chapter is structured as follows: section two locates the *Summa Atheologica*, the 'core' of Bataille's 'philosophy' of 'community', in the context of his writings and his life; section three offers an introduction to and overview of Bataille's 'philosophy' of 'community'; section four further describes Bataille's notion of 'community' and considers some problems to which it gives rise by focusing on the contemporary response it received from Jean-Paul Sartre; section five focuses on the role Bataille's thought plays in later developments of the 'philosophical' discussion of community by examining the exchange that took place between Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot in 1983; section six eventually concludes this chapter with a brief reflection on why the *Summa* is of interest to a study of late modernist epic poetry.

1.2 The *Summa Atheologica* in Bataille's Life and Writings

Bataille's *Summa Atheologica* is widely considered to comprise three books Bataille wrote and published during the Second World War, namely *Inner Experience*, initially published in 1943, *Guilty*, published for the first time in 1944, and *On Nietzsche*, published in 1945 (see, for example, Botting and Wilson 11-18; Hegarty 8,80; Hollywood; Noys 47-8; Richardson 64, 110, 114). The present chapter focuses on the *Summa* because it represents the core of Bataille's 'philosophy' of 'community' and marks an important change in his life. In 1924, Bataille came into contact with the Surrealists and, through them, became interested in politics (Surya 67). From then until the outbreak of the Second World War, he associated himself consecutively with various groups of artists, intellectuals and political activists, several of which he founded and led, namely the Surrealists, Boris Souvarine's Democratic Communist Circle, *Contre-Attaque*, Acéphale, and the College of Sociology (Surya 116–8, 167-8, 220-1, 235–8, 244, 261-2; Kendall, *Bataille* 86–139).[1] The outbreak of the Second World War, however, put an end to Bataille's involvement in such projects. It marks a certain 'inward turn' in Bataille's life and writings, and a withdrawal from party politics, although by no means from politics *per se*.[2] In *Inner Experience*, Bataille memorably contrasts his life before the war with his attitude during it:

> *I am irritated if I think of the period of 'activity' that I spent – during the final years of peace – in forcing myself to reach my fellows. . . .*
>
> . . . . . .
>
> *The war put an end to my 'activity' and my life became all the less separated from the object of its search*. (*IE* 95, italics in original)

In the *Summa*, Bataille seeks unity with his '*fellows*' and the '*object*' of his life's search by focusing on his personal experience. This development, however, does not represent a radical break that separates Bataille's 'activities' before the war from his 'philosophy' during and after. Rather, it can be considered a logical consequence of some changes that can be observed, as Bataille moves from the Surrealists to the

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[1] As a foreign name, 'Acéphale' would have to be italicised by default. Yet, in order to distinguish between the society and the journal of the same name, it is not italicised if it refers to the society.

[2] The notion that around the beginning of the Second World War an important 'turn' occurred in Bataille's thought is widely described and accepted (see among many others, Connor 39-0, 146-7; Gemerchak 73).

Democratic Communist Circle, before becoming the central figure of *Contre-Attaque*, and finally of Acéphale and the College of Sociology. From the mid-1920s to the years of the Second World War, Bataille's interest in politics changed in character, and this change can be observed in part in the differences of aims and strategies of the Democratic Communist Circle, *Contre-Attaque* and Acéphale. Arguably, this development can be conceived as transition from an interest in party politics to the rise of a proto-post-structuralist awareness that there is nothing outside politics.

Souvarine's Democratic Communist Circle was a 'discussion group' that welcomed 'comrades' who had left, or had been excluded from, the Communist Party (Surya 167). The Circle fell apart in 1934, and violent upheavals, first by the extreme right and then by the left, in February 1934 unmistakably showed that communism was no viable alternative to fascism, while they reinforced the failure of democracy (Surya 183–6; Kendall, *Bataille* 104-5). In 1935, as a response to the rapidly growing threat of fascism in Europe, Bataille with a few others, most notably André Breton, started *Contre-Attaque*, a group, resolutely anti-nationalist, anti-patriotist, anti-capitalist, anti-reformist, as well as against democracy and parliamentarism, whose chief aim was to fight fascism by replacing its myths with others (Surya 220-1). Immediately after the upheavals of February 1934, Bataille wrote to Pierre Kaan in a letter: 'I have no doubt about the level on which we will have to place ourselves: it can only be that of fascism itself, which is to say the mythological level' (Bataille qtd. in Kendall, *Bataille* 106). Thus, Bataille anticipated the project and strategy of *Contre-Attaque*. Quoting and paraphrasing from the manifesto '*Contre-Attaque*: Union of Combat of the Revolutionary Intellectuals',[3] Michel Surya describes their position:

> 'We intend in our turn to use for our benefit the weapons created by fascism, which has been able to use humanity's fundamental aspirations for affective exaltation and fanaticism.' But this exaltation and fanaticism, in radical opposition to fascism, must be placed in the service of humanity's universal interest. (221)[4]

[3] My translation. The French original title is: '*Contre-Attaque: Union de lutte des intellectuels révolutionnaires*'.

[4] For the original passage quoted and paraphrased here, see (Bataille, *OC I* 382). The phrase 'humanity's universal interest' ('*l'intérêt universel des hommmes*') also

Contre-Attaque's aim of using myth, or 'affective exaltation and fanaticism', against fascism is interesting because it is unique. Yet, even more intriguingly, this statement illustrates that the position or strategy of *Contre-Attaque* is based on the conception of humanity as uniform entirety. Humanity as a whole is associated with 'aspirations for affective exaltation and fanaticism' and attributed a 'universal interest'. Hence, while 'universal' humanity is here considered the target or beneficiary of *Contre-Attaque*'s counter-myths, the notion of a 'univeral' humanity functions as foundational myth of *Contre-Attaque* in the first place. In slightly different form, it occupies a no less central place in the *Summa*. This 'universal humanity' is a humanity far beyond the contemptible little differences and divisions of party politics, unified by its universal condition, and, due to this strong unity, bristling with revolutionary potential or energy. The concept of such a 'universal humanity' can paradigmatically be discerned in Bataille's 'Popular Front in the Street', which was published in the first and only issue of *Cahiers de Contre-Attaque*. Bataille here praises the formation of a unified front on the left against fascism, while he simultaneously accuses it of defending democracy and capitalism ('Popular Front' 164). He contrasts the 'human reality in the street' with 'the mediocre conceptions and betrayals of conniving politicians', the 'immediate comprehension of life' with 'so-called political situations' ('Popular Front' 164 and 166). Absolutely distrusting political discourses, *Contre-Attaque* affirms immediate experience – 'Our fundamental and urgent task is the constitution of a doctrine *resulting from immediate experiences*', a sentence in the *Contre-Attaque* manifesto reads (Bataille, *OC I* 379, emphasis in original) –[5] and based on such immediate experience, according to *Contre-Attaque*, a new sense of human belonging can be established. In 'Popular Front' the notion of a united humanity is implicit in recurring phrases, such as 'human masses' and 'human reality'. However, the most evocative image of human unity is delayed until the last lines of the text, where Bataille writes in disjunctive and nearly poetic lines whose register and style anticipates the literary form of the *Summa*:

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occurs in the manifesto in the passage quoted, even though Surya does not present it as part of the quotation.

[5] My translation. In French, the sentence reads: 'Notre tâche essentielle, urgente, est la constitution d'une doctrine *resultant des expériences immédiates*'.

> After February 16.
>
> 500,000 workers, defied by little cockroaches, invaded the streets and caused an immense uproar.
>
> Comrades, who has the right to lay down the law?
>
> This ALL-POWERFUL multitude, thus [*sic*] HUMAN OCEAN . . .
>
> Only this ocean of men in revolt can save the world from the nightmare of impotence and carnage in which it sinks! ('Popular Front' 168, ellipsis in original)

The immediate experience of these 500,000 workers in the street and the revolutionary energy that they embody is all that counts. This experience and the energy that emerges from between every single worker unites them as an 'immanent totality', as a totality that is based on nothing other than their shared experience, on nothing that lies beyond them. It is significant that Bataille here conceives this 'immanent totality' as 'HUMAN OCEAN', for such water metaphors can also be found in his later writings, including the *Summa*.

If the transition from the Democratic Communist Circle to *Contre-Attaque* can be considered a step away from party politics and, due to the privileging of direct experience, a turn toward the personal or human, these tendencies intensified with the end of *Contre-Attaque* and the beginning of Acéphale. Acéphale was a secret society Bataille conceived in 1936 in the company of André Masson (Surya 235). While much is uncertain about Acéphale, it is probably best known for the fact that Bataille wanted to found it on a human sacrifice, which, the story goes, eventually failed because nobody was ready to assume the role of the executioner (Surya 250). Simultaneously, Bataille started the journal *Acéphale*, which is related to and yet independent from the secret society, and which ran for four issues from 1936 to 1939 (Surya 237-8, 244). Even though the secret society and the journal were distinct, as far as this can be ascertained, the interests of the journal and the society overlap to some degree, for instance in a text like 'The Sacred Conspiracy', published in the first issue. Here, Bataille writes: 'Human life is exhausted from serving as the head of, or the reason for, the universe. To the extent that it becomes this head and this reason, to the extent that it becomes necessary to the universe, it accepts servitude. . . . The Earth, as long as it only gave rise to cataclysms, trees, and birds, was a free universe . . .' ('Sacred Conspiracy' 180). In the contemporary world, Bataille believes, humanity is fragmented into individuals, and the individuals, far from free, are slaves to utility and rationality ('Sacred Conspiracy' 179). Acéphale,

consequently, aims at unifying and liberating humanity. Here it can be witnessed how the notion of a universal humanity, encountered in the context of *Contre-Attaque*, evolved further. In 'What We Have Undertaken …', a lecture Bataille addressed to the members of the secret society, Bataille speaks of 'the exhaustion of contemporary existence', 'the current decomposition' or '[t]he disintegrated human material', and he considers the possibility, in the present, of 'finding or recovering *the totality of being*', which he defines as their goal ('Undertaken' 189, 190, 191, 193-4, emphasis in original). Bataille hopes to succeed in this by following the models of myths and rituals of primitive societies. 'These societies', he argues,

> appear to have been constructed mythically and ritually, to the extent that a human being does not exist within them like an isolated brick. The images and the rites of primitive and savage communities . . . represent for us the fabric of these communities. And, to the extent that we move to a philosophical interpretation of these facts, we will admit that these myths and rites compose the being of these communities. ('Undertaken' 192)

According to Acéphale, the 'totality of being' can be recovered in myths, sacrifices and rituals, which illustrates why Acéphale was not only a community but also a religion as whose priest or shaman Bataille functioned (Surya 253; Kendall, *Bataille* 135). Religious concerns became ever more concrete towards the end of Acéphale, when Bataille was confronted with death in the form of the demise of his partner Colette Peignot. In response to her death, he wrote 'The Practice of Joy before Death', which was published in the final issue of *Acéphale* (Surya 244). 'Joy before death' refers to the unconditional celebration of everything, of the 'totality of being'. Bataille writes: '"Joy before death" means that life can be glorified from root to summit. It robs of meaning everything that is an intellectual or moral *beyond*, substance, God, immutable order, or salvation' ('The Practice' 237). Unlike, for instance, Christians, who embrace 'an intellectual or moral *beyond*' and in view of future salvation exclude from their lives certain aspects that are not considered right or good, the person who practises joy before death completely submits to the immanence of life as a whole and thus, in contrast to the Christian, he or she can, at least theoretically, access the 'totality of being'. Hence Bataille maintains:

> The mystical existence of the one whose 'joy before death' has become inner violence can never attain the satisfying beatitude of the Christian who gives himself a foretaste of eternity. . . . but the totality of life –

> ecstatic contemplation and lucid knowledge *accomplished in a single action* that cannot fail to become risk – is, however, just as inexorably his lot as death is that of the condemned man. ('The Practice' 236)

It is significant that Bataille describes the practice of joy before death as mystical, and just as significant that he qualifies shortly afterwards: 'this implies no more than an affective resemblance between this practice and those of the religions of Asia and Europe' ('The Practice' 236). In 'The Practice', Bataille offers after a short introduction five short texts that might help the reader achieve 'joy before death', and Surya emphasises that 'The Practice' is Bataille's first 'mystical' text (273). In any case, this last contribution to *Acéphale* can certainly be considered a further important twist of Bataille's 'turn inward', and it represents the point from which the texts of the *Summa* continue.

Many scholars straightforwardly identify the *Summa* with *Inner Experience*, *Guilty*, and *On Nietzsche*, and while the present chapter, similarly, understands '*Summa*' primarily as referring to these three books, this notion needs to be qualified. According to Stuart Kendall, incisive Bataille scholar and translator of many of his books, Bataille's plans for the *Summa* started to form in 1949, when he mentioned them to Raymond Queneau, a friend and editor of the publishing house Gallimard ('Unlimited' xxxiv-v). When Bataille died in 1962, however, only two volumes of the *Summa* had been published, and between 1949 and 1962 his plans for this project had considerably changed numerous times (see Bataille, *OC VI* 360–5). Volume one of the *Summa*, entitled *Inner Experience*, was published in 1954, and it consists of an edited version of the 1943 text of *Inner Experience*, *Method of Meditation*, initially published in 1947, and a new afterword entitled 'Post-Scriptum 1953'. Volume two, *Guilty*, appeared in 1961 and it features a new introduction, a new edition of *Guilty* (1944), and *Alleluia*, first published in 1947. A paratext in *Guilty* (1961) states that the *Summa* consisted of three volumes: *Inner Experience*, *Guilty*, and *On Nietzsche* ('Unlimited' xii, xliii). Yet, since volume three was never published, and considering the extremely fluid nature of Bataille's plans for the *Summa*, it is impossible to guess how volume three might have looked, or even whether it would, indeed, have represented the end of this project (see Kendall, 'Unlimited' xii). Hence, the *Summa*, as it is available to the reader, is exceedingly porous, protean and open-ended. *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge* (2001), edited by Kendall, collects some texts

that could be considered part of the *Summa* but that have not been included in the second editions of *Inner Experience* and *Guilty*. However, there are few major texts that Bataille wrote and that cannot, in some way, be related to the *Summa*, chiefly because Bataille was often working on several 'projects' at the same time. For instance, when Bataille in 1939 started the notebooks that became *Guilty* he was also working on material that evolved into *The Accursed Share* (1949) (Kendall, *Bataille* 156-7; Kendall, 'Autobiographica' x-xi). While the beginnings of *The Accursed Share* can be traced back to the late 1920s, Bataille planned on rewriting the 1949 text until the end of his life, and on turning it into the first volume of another trilogy. This trilogy, also entitled *The Accursed Share*, was, indeed, published posthumously, with *The History of Eroticism* and *Sovereignty* as volumes two and three, respectively (Surya 381). It can be considered, alongside the *Summa*, as Bataille's second major 'philosophical' work. With its sober, discursive prose and clear structure, *The Accursed Share* significantly differs from the *Summa*, and yet Kendall recognises an important connection between *The Accursed Share* (1949) and *Inner Experience*: '[*Inner Experience*] stands in a very clear relation to *The Accursed Share*: both reject utilitarian reductionism, *The Accursed Share* with the temper of dispassionate calculation, *Inner Experience* [with] that of the tempest itself . . .' (*Bataille* 163). However, in 1941, Bataille interrupted his work both on *Guilty* and *The Accursed Share* to write 'Torture', the central part of *Inner Experience*, and the erotic fiction *Madame Edwarda* (Kendall, *Bataille* 160). He completed *Inner Experience* and *Edwarda* before continuing the notebooks for *Guilty* in 1942. Apart from the sections written in 1941, *Inner Experience* also contains earlier texts that have been adapted for inclusion in the volume, the earliest of which, like the beginnings of *The Accursed Share*, dates to the late 1920s (Bataille, *IE* 209, 210n; Kendall, *Bataille* 162). In 1942, while working on the notebooks for *Guilty*, however, Bataille also wrote poetry and 'a new kind of fiction' that, according to Kendall, 'was all but indistinguishable from *Guilty* itself' ('Autobiographica' x-xi). Among the fiction of this time can be mentioned, most notably, *The Little One* and pieces that will eventually be included in *The Impossible*. Thus, Bataille's texts not only flow into each other but also cross the boundaries of genres. His fiction and philosophical texts are intrinsically interrelated and, as Kendall argues, become at

times even indistinguishable. Among other texts by Bataille with a close relationship to the *Summa* can be considered *Literature and Evil*, which, according to Kendall, resembles a fourth volume of the *Summa* projected in 1950, and *Theory of Religion*, which evolved from a lecture Bataille once planned to include in a volume of the *Summa*, but which was only published posthumously in 1973 (Kendall, 'Unlimited' xxxv-i). Hence, while '*Summa*', in the present chapter, refers to *Inner Experience* (1954), *Guilty* (1961), and *On Nietzsche* (1945), these three texts are not considered as complete and self-sufficient, and consequently will not be discussed in isolation.

1.3 Bataille's 'Philosophy' of 'Community'

Bataille's philosophy of community is predicated on the conception of 'being' as 'immanent totality' or 'immensity'.[6] In *On Nietzsche*, Bataille reflects, for instance:

> All beings are fundamentally only one.
> Beings push each other back at the same time that they are one. And in this movement – which is their essence – annul fundamental identity. (*ON* 79)

The image of 'beings' pushing against each other and of the resulting 'movement' as expressing their 'essence', which defines them as one rather than as individual identities, tellingly resembles the impression of the workers in the street Bataille gives in 'Popular Front' – this 'HUMAN OCEAN'. 'Being' embraces and unites everything that *is* and while it does not represent a transcendental beyond of what exists but can only be located in what *is*, it can merely fragmentarily be grasped in particular beings. Throughout his writings, Bataille describes 'being' as 'movement' to convey its immanence and elusiveness. He maintains in *Guilty*, for instance: 'What we call *substance* is only a provisional state of equilibrium between the radiance (loss) and the accumulation of force. *Stability* never exceeds this short, relative equilibrium: it seems to me that it is never static' (*G* 13). Accordingly, and even more radically, Bataille argues in *Inner Experience* in the same vocabulary of fluidity and energy: 'I am and you are, in the vast flux of things, only a stopping point favorable to a resurgence' (*IE* 97). Any attempt to grasp and define 'being' consequently is doomed to failure, because at best it is possible to capture an

[6] Bataille uses the word 'immensity' throughout the *Summa* but most often in *Guilty*. On Bataille's notion of 'immanent immensity', see also Pawlett 112-3.

individual moment or state of a small fragment of an ever changing entirety. In 'The Labyrinth', first published in 1936 but adapted for inclusion in *Inner Experience*, Bataille writes that '[b]eing is *nowhere*', which is to say that it cannot be located in any particular place or object (*IE* 86). Rather, as the title implies, 'being' is a labyrinth. Like a person in a labyrinth, the being that *is* is enclosed by being and can, theoretically at least, get lost in it. 'Being' cannot be actively sought like an object, and if somebody decided to do so they would merely chase a spectre down barren corridors and into cul-de-sacs. As pure immanence, 'being' is neither transcendental nor based on any transcendental ground. In lieu of such a foundation, Bataille posits 'chance'. He writes:

> If I envisage my coming to the world – linked to birth then to the union of a man and a woman, and even, to the moment of union – a unique chance decided the possibility of this *self* that I am: in the end, the mad improbability of a sole being without whom, *for me*, nothing would exist. . . .
>
> This infinite improbability from which I come is under me like a void: my presence, above this void, is like the exercise of a fragile power, as if this void demanded the challenge that I *myself* bring to it, me, which is to say the infinite, painful improbability, of an irreplaceable being that I am. (*IE* 73, emphases in original)

There is no foundation of being but only a void, only nothingness, and this is true, not only for Bataille, and neither only for human beings, but for everything that exists. Positing 'chance' as origin of 'being' amounts to arguing that 'being' exceeds rationality, for there is no reason why that which exists, and not anything else or not nothing, should exist. In *Guilty,* Bataille uses an evocative metaphor to describe this 'infinite improbability' that gives rise to 'being':

> I saw large and solid hooks on a roof, halfway up the slope. Suppose a man fell from there, by chance he might hook onto one of them with an arm or a leg. . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Now, picturing the momentum of the fall, I see: nothing is in the world if not for having encountered a hook.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The hook arranges the universe; I fall into an infinite play of mirrors. . . . (*G* 65)

This metaphor of the hook helpfully illustrates the lack of foundation of 'being'. Nevertheless, it also falsifies matters, since the metaphor of the hook replaces a fundamental lack with an object or image, and the same could be argued with regards

to expressions like ‘void’ or ‘nothingness’. Here Bataille pushes against the limits of language, of which he was well aware, but which, nevertheless, gave rise to fundamental disagreements, as will be shown below.

As ‘immanent totality’, ‘being’ is all-inclusive, unlimited and yet also self-contained. However, in Bataille’s contemporary world, ruled as it is by individualism, the human being fundamentally isolates itself and is considered in isolation. As ‘individual’ or ‘subject’, it is deemed autonomous and complete, and placed in opposition to the object or ‘other’, to everything it is not. Thus, the ‘immanent totality’ of ‘being’ is fragmented and obliterated. Yet, considering human beings from the perspective of ‘being’ as a whole, Bataille maintains that their primary mode of existence is as ‘particles’ of ‘ensembles’ (*IE* 87). Hence, while human beings have autonomous bodies, they are not autonomous beings (*IE* 86). In particular, Bataille argues that ‘[t]here exists a principle of insufficiency at the base of human life’ (*IE* 85), which is to say that, on its own, a human being is fundamentally incomplete, lacking, open, or to use one of Bataille’s favourite words, ‘lacerated’. ‘There is no being without a crack . . .’, he asserts in *Guilty* (*G* 19). To emphasise this fundamental openness or incompleteness, Bataille does not use the terms ‘individual’ or ‘subject’ but instead writes about the human being as ‘*ipse*’. On the one hand, being or possessing an ‘autonomous body’, ‘*ipse*’ is endowed with a ‘relative’ autonomy, but, on the other hand, as ‘particle’ of an ‘ensemble’, it can only ever attain completion at the moment of self-loss, when it merges with others, becomes part of a larger structure and, thus, is transcended (*IE* 87-8). According to Bataille, this dilemma, the impossible decision between renouncing itself or remaining in a fundamentally unsatisfactory state of individual lack and vulnerability, defines the human condition. He writes:

> The uncertain opposition of autonomy to transcendence puts being in a position that slips: at the same time that it encloses itself in autonomy, for this very reason, each being *ipse* wants to become the whole of transcendence . . . . Its will to autonomy opposes it at first to the ensemble, but it withers – is reduced to nothing – to the extent that it refuses to enter into it. It then renounces autonomy for the ensemble but only provisionally: the will to autonomy only relaxes for a time and quickly, in a single movement in which equilibrium is created, the being devotes itself to the ensemble and the ensemble to itself. (*IE* 88)

Ipse 'wants to become the whole of transcendence' because in isolation each being is painfully aware of its own insufficiency, which results in an existential anguish. The 'crack' that can be found in each being makes humans aware of their own contingency, for it opens them up to the void over which they are suspended by the hook of chance. 'Death', of course, is the name most commonly given to this void. The human 'will to autonomy' results from this existential anguish and manifests itself in the conceptions of the human being as subject or individual, that is, as absolutely self-sufficient, self-contained and distinct from the rest of existence. This separation between the subject and objects, between the human being and the rest of existence, is based on transcendental principles, such as reason, morality or God. The imposition and pursuit of such transcendental principles results in what Bataille calls 'work', 'action' or 'project'. These are activities that shift the attention away from the present moment of 'danger' towards a future goal that is defined by a transcendental notion. In effect, 'work', 'action' or 'project' refer to the vast majority of human activities, from the work of the scientist or philosopher who follows the dictates of reason and seeks to expand 'our' knowledge to the lives of pious people, led in pursuit of personal salvation, and, much more generally, to any act that complies with the rules of morality. All of these activities have in common that they establish or consolidate the individual human being in the position of the 'subject' and in opposition to the rest of existence, which is relegated to the position of 'object'. Discourse, or discursive thought, as a whole, thus belongs to the sphere of 'action'. While, according to Bataille, then, as a result of their separation from the rest of existence, human beings are alienated and fragmented, their 'will to autonomy', which finds expression in 'work', 'action', 'project', only ever exacerbates this situation. Indeed, Bataille maintains that the human being who, in 'work', subjects the world and treats it as an object, in turn, becomes an object, a tool, of 'work' itself because it submits to its transcendental principles (*TAS II & III* 213). Since in 'work', 'action' or 'project', the human being is fundamentally separated from the rest of existence and focuses on a future goal rather than on the present moment in which alone 'being' can be experienced, Bataille maintains that 'project' amounts to '*putting existence off until later*' (*IE* 51, italics in original).

Consciousness sets human beings apart from the rest of existence and lies at the heart of the dilemma of the human condition. The individual human being equates existence with consciousness, that is, with the known and knowable. Descartes's '*cogito ergo sum*' expresses this paradigmatically (see *IE* 107–110). However, according to Bataille, much of existence escapes consciousness and this presents an unsolvable problem to the human being. Thus, he writes, for instance, in *Guilty*:

> *Anguish is not really possible for human beings. No! Anguish is impossible. . . . Mankind is the only animal that knows exactly how to make death weighty, impossible, because mankind is the only animal that dies in a closed sense. . . . I die to the extent that I am conscious of death. But death takes consciousness away . . . .* (*G* 5, italics in original)

Death represents the limit or the outside of consciousness. It is 'impossible' because it cannot be fully understood. It can only be explained to the extent that it is made the 'object' of discourse, to the degree that the void or nothingness, which death is, is turned into a sign. To be fully conscious of death without assimilating it would amount to pulling the rug out from under one's feet. Anguish, the 'will to autonomy' and 'work', 'action', 'project', result from the limits of consciousness. However, Bataille convincingly argues that, at the dawn of humanity, consciousness did not simply give rise to 'work', but 'work', in turn, 'expanded' consciousness. Already Neanderthal 'man', who created and used tools, Bataille argues, must have done so by envisioning the particular use to which the tools will be put and thus by anticipating the outcomes of 'his' work. Hence, Bataille argues: '. . . work is the intellectual operation that changed the brain of the animal that man initially was into a human brain' ('Cradle' 149–50). The anticipation of a future outcome that motivates 'work' and in which the anguished being loses itself, or for which the lacking being suspends the immediate satisfaction of its desires, is crucial here. '*Mankind'*, according to Bataille, '*is the only animal that dies in a closed sense*' because unlike animals, which live in the present moment only, human beings, in 'work', anticipate a future that death can frustrate. 'The fear of death', Bataille writes, 'appears linked from the start to the projection of oneself into a future time, which, being an effect of the positioning of oneself as a thing [that is, an effect of 'work'], is at the same time the precondition for conscious individualization. The being that work made consciously individual is the anguished being' (*TAS II & III*

218). While human consciousness, and 'work', 'action' or 'project', thus, present a problem because they separate the human being from the totality of existence, it is also impossible to renounce them without losing that which defines the human being. Yet, this impossibility is precisely what Bataille pursues.

Bataille's project – and he is fully aware that it is a project despite everything (*IE* 29, 52, 63-4) – is to push the individual or consciousness, without completely losing it, so much to its limits that it can momentarily enter into communication with the totality of being, on the separation from which it fundamentally depends. This is Bataille's understanding of 'communication', which gives rise to 'community'. In *Guilty*, for instance, he maintains: 'To the extent that beings seem perfect, they remain isolated, closed within themselves. But the wound of incompletion opens them. Through that which we can call incompletion, animal nudity, wound, diverse separate beings *communicate*, take life by losing themselves in *communication*, one with another' (*G* 22; see also 26; *ON* 33–5). Similarly, he asserts in *On Nietzsche*: '"Communication" only takes place *between two beings at risk* – lacerated, suspended, both leaning over nothingness' (*ON* 34, emphasis in original). In other words, Bataille believes that human beings can only leave behind their current state of isolation and alienation by embracing their insufficiency or incompleteness rather than by trying to compensate for it through 'projects'. Hence, he muses at the beginning of *Inner Experience*: '*asking oneself before another: by what means will he calm within himself the desire to be everything?*' (*IE* 4). According to Bataille, the wound, crack, laceration or lack each individual human being in isolation endures is not a defect but represents the possibility of entering into communication with the entirety of existence. To be able to do so, however, the individual must overcome anguish, must resist the desire to be complete and autonomous, to be 'everything', and this means that it must cease being an 'individual'.

Bataille's 'community' thus depends on the abandonment of the 'individual', or on the obliteration of the distinction between subject and object, and this is achieved only with difficulty, because it means entering into intimate union with the 'other' or 'outside' that anguish tries to keep at bay. This 'other' already specifically occupies Bataille in two essays he wrote in the early nineteen-thirties, and in these texts he considers it under the term of the 'heterogeneous' (see 'Sade'; 'Fascism').

'Heterology', accordingly, is defined as '[t]he science of what is completely other', even though 'science' is an inadequate expression in this context since 'science' assimilates its objects to the realm of knowledge, while the 'heterogeneous', fundamentally 'indefinable', 'concerns elements that are impossible to assimilate' ('Sade' 97, 102n2; 'Fascism' 140). The 'heterogeneous', accordingly, includes all forms of waste, filth and dirt, and all forms of 'expenditure', that is, of unproductive activities, many or even most of which result in the creation of 'waste' ('Fascism' 142). However, it similarly includes the 'sacred' and anything that is regulated by social taboos, for instance, violence, excess and the irrational ('Fascism' 142). The 'heterogeneous', Bataille moreover explains, needs to be understood less in terms of 'strictly defined and identified objects' but rather as a 'force or shock' that, furthermore, provokes 'affective reactions of varying intensity', be they attractions or repulsions ('Fascism' 142-3). Interestingly, in the *Summa* Bataille does not use the concept of 'heterogeneity' anymore, but expressions, such as the 'impossible', 'nothingness', 'abyss' or 'nonknowledge' – that is, the unknowable rather than the unknown – convey a very similar, if not identical, notion.[7] The individual human being, then, can escape its individuality and enter into contact with the totality of existence through unproductive actions, through expenditure, and the forms of expenditure on which Bataille particularly focuses in the *Summa* include debauchery, sacrifice and meditation, which are further discussed below. However, Bataille maintains that if the human being is considered as part of the totality of existence rather than as isolated individual, expenditure is not just one 'activity' among others but its paramount task. This represents a recurring hypothesis of Bataille's thought, but it is chiefly developed in *The Accursed Share*. Here, Bataille outlines the concept of a general economy whose object is the whole of existence rather than merely the exchange of goods and money that forms the realm of restricted economy. In its most general expression, general economy is concerned with the movements on the

[7] This change in vocabulary can be noticed particularly well in one instance. The section of *Inner Experience* entitled 'Death Is in a Sense a Deception' is an extensively edited and rewritten version of a text originally composed in 1936 and entitled 'Sacrifices'. At the beginning of 'Sacrifices' Bataille refers to 'a total heterogeneity' ('*une hétérogénéité totale*') ('Sacrifices' 130; *OC I* 90), but in *Inner Experience* this phrase is replaced by the 'absolutely foreign' ('*étranger absolument*') (*IE* 73; *OC V* 84).

surface of the globe of the energy that ultimately derives from the sun (*TAS I* 21, 28). In contrast to the restricted point of view, which is based on the individual and from which resources are always lacking, from the general point of view energy is always in excess (*TAS I* 21, 23, 39). This excess energy needs to be wasted in one way or another, and in 'nature' this happens, for example, through death, through 'the eating of one species by another' or sexual reproduction, which, in contrast to asexual reproduction, also unnecessarily uses energy (*TAS I* 33–5). The human being, located at the top of the food chain, or in Bataille's words, at 'the summit' of existence, would be in the perfect position to waste big amounts of energy, but because the individual, terrified by the possibility of its own death, devotes itself to 'work', which demands that resources be used productively, it increases the excess of energy rather than wasting it (*TAS I* 23, 30, 37). Only a human being that can overcome the concern for the future, thus escape 'action', and live in the present moment alone, is capable of expenditure, and such a being, according to Bataille's terminology, is 'sovereign'. Sovereignty, he explains, 'is essentially the refusal to accept the limits that the fear of death would have us respect in order to ensure, in a general way, the laboriously peaceful life of individuals' (*TAS II & III* 221). Accepting its place in the totality of being rather than trying to subject existence, the sovereign human being, facing death, does not take refuge in 'action'. For the sovereign being, death is not troubling, because, freed from all necessity, it lives life to the fullest in the present moment rather than projecting itself to the future. 'The sovereign is he who *is*, as if death were not', Bataille maintains, and he continues: 'He is not man in the individual sense of the word, but rather a *god*' (*TAS II & III* 222, emphasis in original). At the same time, insofar as the sovereign being lives in the immediate moment alone, 'he' also resembles the animal. Bataille, however, maintains: 'The sovereign being is not an animal, but this is because, *familiar with death*, he resists individual consciousness, whose principle exists within him' (*TAS II & III* 220). In other words, the sovereign being is distinct from the animal because, even though 'he' 'knows' death, he is not scared of it, because, even though 'he' could develop or exhibit an 'individual consciousness', 'he' does not. The limits of consciousness, the separation between the animal and the sovereign, here, indeed, become faint. In *The Theory of Religion*, Bataille writes that, '[t]he return to immanent intimacy', which is

the condition of the sovereign being, 'implies a beclouded counsciousness' (*Religion* 45). This 'beclouded consciousness' designates a mid-region between the 'clear consciousness' of the individual human being and the lack of consciousness of animals (*Religion* 56-7).

As a form of expenditure, debauchery represents one way of abandoning individual consciousness and moving towards a 'community' of being. This is achieved in states of sensual ecstasy, in which the individual human being confronts and perhaps even transgresses the boundaries of its being. 'When drinking, people flow into one another naturally', Bataille observes (*ON* 105). Eroticism, that is, 'non-productive' sexuality, further illustrates the capacity of expenditure to open individual beings to a 'community' that exceeds them. Unlike drinking, eroticism frequently does so by focusing on bodily orifices, literal 'cracks' in the human being. Thus, Bataille reflects: 'A man and a woman, attracted to one another, bound together by lust. The communication that joins them is part of the nakedness of their wounds' (*G* 26). More evocatively and provocatively, he writes in *Alleluia*, which is addressed to Diane Kotchoubey, his partner at the time:

> Only the unbearable joy of lifting your dress is equal to the immensity . . . in which you know you are lost. The immensity, like you, has no dress, and your nudity, lost in immensity, has the simplicity of the dead. In the immensity, your nudity exposes you immensely: you are contorted, wracked with shame, and your obscenity puts you immensely at stake. (*G* 140)

The nearly compulsively repeated 'immensity', here, without doubt, is the 'totality of being'. The excessive occurrence of 'immensity' in these lines reflects the excess of eroticism, its lack of inhibition, which brings the human being into 'communication' with the boundless, and thus excessive, 'totality of being'. Simultaneously, however, the conspicuous repetition of 'immensity' and 'immensely' implies the limits of discourse: no matter how often it is reiterated, 'immensity' never succeeds in describing adequately the magnitude of the 'totality of being'. This totality always remains out of reach. The human being that exposes itself in sexual play, in turn, is exposed to this 'immensity', which unifies everything that *is*, including the dead. This human being is risked and obscene because, in addition to defying the rules of morality and reason by refusing to comply with the laws of utility or productivity, it takes pleasure from its body's lack of integrity. The defilement associated with

excreted matter and bodily orifices, Bataille maintains, like the dead, 'express[es] *nothingness*' (*ON* 36, emphasis in original).

Another important form of expenditure, and thus, another way of breaking out of the world of 'work', away from the sphere of subjects and objects into the totality of 'being' is sacrifice. Sacrifice, Bataille reflects, represents a form of expenditure and thus flouts the law of 'utility' because what is sacrificed is always something useful (*Religion* 49). No matter the particular nature of the sacrificed, it is consequently always an 'object' or 'thing', and the purpose of sacrifice is to remove it 'from the world of things' (*Religion* 43). Hence, Bataille maintains that sacrifice is '[t]he opposite of project . . . . Nothing in sacrifice is put off until later; sacrifice has the power to contest everything in the instant that it takes place, to summon everything, to render everything present' (*IE* 137; see also Bataille, *Religion* 49). Sacrifice, that is, opens the world of action, of objects and things, to the 'immensity' of 'being'. In *On Nietzsche*, Bataille reflects on the crucifixion, the sacrifice of Christ, but what he thence concludes can be applied to sacrifice more generally. The Crucifixion, the killing of the Son of God, Bataille establishes, was a crime. However, since sacrifice generally involves waste, the destruction of useful objects, it commonly belongs to the spheres of crime or sin (*ON* 34). The human beings involved in the sacrifice, thus, are guilty, and this guilt, Bataille argues, represents a wound in their being that finds its counterpart in the wound inflicted on the sacrificed during the sacrifice. Thus, in the case of the Crucifixion, human beings communicate with God through the wounds of their guilt and the wound inflicted on Christ (*ON* 32-3). Sacrifice represents the possibility of 'communication' between the sacrificed and those involved in the sacrifice, and through this 'communication', in the case of the Crucifixion, humanity comes in touch with the divine beyond. However, since Bataille conceives of 'being' as 'immanent totality', not as transcendental foundation, sacrifice, according to him, opens the individual to this immanence. 'Beyond my being', he writes in *On Nietzsche*, 'is, first, nothingness', and sacrifice, consequently, opens up on this 'nothingness' (*ON* 34).

In the *Summa Atheologica*, however, Bataille is not primarily interested in entering into 'communication' with the 'totality of being' through debauchery or sacrifice, even though both of these subjects figure prominently, but through 'inner

experience'. That is, Bataille is primarily concerned with ecstasy achieved through meditation. 'By *inner experience*', Bataille explains at the beginning of *Inner Experience*, 'I understand what one usually calls *mystical experience*: states of ecstasy, of ravishment, at least of meditated emotion. But I am thinking less of *confessional* experience . . . than of a bare experience, free of ties, even of an origin, to any confession whatsoever. This is why I don't like the word *mystical*' (*IE* 9). The simultaneous affiliation to and distancing from mysticism is intriguing and already familiar from 'The Practice of Joy Before Death'. It will be examined further below. Early in *Guilty*, Bataille describes an 'inner experience':

> I became an immense flight out of myself, as if my life flowed in slow rivers across the ink of the sky. I am no longer myself, but that which issues from me reaches and encloses in its embrace a limitless presence, itself similar to the loss of myself: that which is no longer either me nor an other, but a deep kiss in which the limits of lips linked to this ecstasy would be lost, as dark, as little foreign to the universe as the course of the earth across the loss of the sky. (*G* 15)

In 'inner experience', the human being escapes its individuality and enters into a continuous relationship, into 'communication', with existence. Since 'inner experience', thus, lies beyond discourse, beyond the dichotomy between subject and object, poetic language alone can approach a description of this state, and Bataille frequently employs the imagery of light and darkness to convey its epiphanic nature. Night and the sky, consequently, often figure in such passages. The continuity and immanence of existence that inner experience reveals is often portrayed by metaphors of movement, water, flow, or by images of vast, open expanses (see *IE* 63-4, 113-4, 121, 127-8; *G* 28, 70; *ON* 106, 112). Interestingly, with respect to the discussion below, Peter Tracey Connor in *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin* remarks that the vocabulary Bataille employs in the *Summa* in his descriptions of inner experience closely relates his writings to the discourses of Christian mystics (54-5). Furthermore, inner experience is closely related to 'sovereignty'. Indeed, in *Method of Meditation*, Bataille uses 'sovereign operation' synonymously with 'inner experience' (*IE* 194). 'Inner experience' is the experience of the sovereign human being, located on a timeless, open plane with the rest of existence (see *TAS II & III* 240, 241, 246, 255). Moreover, just like debauchery or sacrifice, inner experience establishes a continuity between the individual and existence by capitalising on the

individual's 'laceration', its insufficiency, incompleteness or fissure. In 'inner experience', the individual human being transcends its individuality, paradoxically, by focusing on its 'inner' life, on what Bataille frequently calls its 'inner movement'. By increasing its solitude, exacerbating its state of isolation, and directing its attention thence, the human being's sense of incompletion and vulnerability can be heightened, and the openness that is thus discovered can enable it to connect, or 'communicate', with other 'open', 'lacerated' human beings.[8] Hence, Bataille writes in *Guilty*, for example, that '[n]akedness reveals itself to someone enclosed in a hostile solitude', before declaring: '. . . I offer my solitude to everyone' (*G* 53).

Bataille relates the meditation with which he experiments to Hindu yoga, the meditative practises of Zen Buddhism, and most centrally to the meditations of Christian mystics, while he also clearly distinguishes it from all three (see, for example, *IE* 22–5 and 170; *ON* 141, 171-2). He distances himself from all three since, different ways of seeking personal salvation, they are all 'projects' (*IE* 25–30). Among other techniques and strategies, many mystics, Hindu yogis and Zen Buddhists attempt to approach salvation through asceticism, and Bataille objects to this in particular. '*Asceticism*', he argues, '*is a sure means to detach oneself from objects*', and yet, '*it is at the same time to make experience an object*' (*IE* 28, italics in original). Thus, asceticism does not transcend the world of action and discourse, but is a renunciation of everything with the goal of becoming 'everything' (*IE* 29). Much more generally, of course, the transcendental doctrines of Hindu yoga, Zen Buddhism and Christian mysticism fundamentally conflict with Bataille's notion of 'being' as immanent. Bataille accordingly reflects: 'It would be pleasant if some manual existed, stripping the *yogi's* practices of the moral and metaphysical beliefs' (*IE* 170, emphasis in original). The aspect of yoga and Zen most important to Bataille is their focus on breath (*IE* 23, 170; *ON* 171). He explains in *Guilty*: 'It is good to maintain a relaxed but steady and "flowing" body position. Personal opportunities exist, but first we might trust effective methods: deep breathing, concentrating attention on the breath, as on the intuited secret of all life' (*G* 31).

[8] In 'The Sovereign', Bataille, for instances considers how 'the *instant* in isolation' is 'closed' in one sense but 'in another, much more acute sense, opens itself up while denying that which limits separate beings . . .' ('Sovereign' 187, emphasis in original).

Focusing on one's breath means directing one's attention 'inside' and away from the '"sphere of activity" (or, if you like, the real world)' (*IE* 170). However, the breath that flows through the body's openings, not to say 'wounds' or 'lacerations', inside and out also connects the human being with its environment. The flow of the breath is the flow of existence that pervades the human being just as it does the whole of the universe. This flow of existence, Bataille also attempts to discover inside himself in what he calls 'ecstasy before the object' or 'before the point' (*IE* 118–123). In this meditative practice, the subject attempts to project the whole of existence, including itself, onto a point or object, which, according to Bataille, is normally a person (*IE* 119). This projection of oneself outside, into or onto another point or object, which results in the dissolution of the dichotomy between subject and object, self and 'other', Bataille calls 'dramatisation', opposes to 'discourse', and associates with Saint Ignatius's *Exercises* (*IE* 20, 120). The disciples of Saint Ignatius, Bataille explains, are asked to imagine themselves present during the Crucifixion and to have the feelings they would have had, had they been there. 'One desires that [the disciple] should get out of himself, deliberately dramatizing this human life . . .', Bataille writes, and he argues that, in doing so, the disciple concentrates the whole of existence in the point of Christ during the Crucifixion (*IE* 120). Bataille practises such meditation, but instead of the image of the Crucifixion, he uses photographs of a Chinese torture victim in the process of being dismembered: '. . . the patient, his chest flayed, twisted, arms and legs cut at the elbows and knees. Hair standing on his head, hideous, haggard, striped with blood, beautiful as a wasp' (*IE* 121). The beauty Bataille experiences is the 'beauty' of the heterogeneous, of 'nothingness'. He explains: 'I write "beautiful" . . . something escapes me, flees from me, fear robs me of myself and, as if I had wanted to stare at the sun, my eyes slip' (*IE* 121, ellipsis in original). Just as the wound inflicted on God through Jesus during the Crucifixion enables the Christian to enter into 'communication' with the divine beyond, Bataille 'communicates' with the Chinese torture victim through the wounds inflicted on the latter. In doing so, Bataille transcends the state of individual isolation and enters into contact with the 'totality of being', the 'flow of existence'. Thus, he writes, in analogy to the dramatisation of Ignatius's disciples: 'When an image of torture falls before my eyes, I can, in fear, turn away. But if I look at it, I am *outside myself*. . .

The sight – horrible – of torture opens the sphere that enclosed (or limited) my personal particularity, it opens it violently, lacerates it' (*G* 30, italics and ellipsis in original).

So, Bataille's 'community' is the immanent 'totality of being' that can only be experienced in states of ecstasy, on condition of transcending individuality or subjectivity and the realm of 'work' and 'discourse'. It is emphatically not a 'community' of individual beings in any sense, and Bataille, thus, significantly modifies most conventional definitions of the term. However, Bataille's notion of 'community' also gives rise to a number of questions and problems. For instance, considering that Bataille repeatedly reflects on the similarities between meditation that results in 'inner experience' and mysticism, that he compares and distinguishes them, considering furthermore that he is painfully aware of the difficulties, in fact of the impossibility, of his 'project of escaping from project' (*IE* 64), the question needs to be raised whether Bataille indeed succeeds in his aim of 'avoid[ing]' or even 'destroy[ing]' transcendence (*ON* 65, 144). The question, in other words, eventually amounts to whether Bataille finds a way out of metaphysics, and his ambivalent relationship to mysticism is particularly interesting in this respect. These problems and questions form the focus of the following section.

1.4 Questioning Bataille's 'Community': Sartre, Mysticism and Metaphysics

Jean-Paul Sartre's long 1943 review of *Inner Experience*, published in three monthly instalments and entitled 'A New Mystic' (Surya 332, 550-1n9), is of particular interest, not because Sartre was the first to criticise Bataille's 'mysticism' – Roger Callois did so before Sartre and there might have been others (Hollywood 62) – but because Sartre's review, intriguingly oscillating between skilful explanation and crude misinterpretation of Bataille's text, explicitly shows and unwittingly reveals what is at stake in Bataille's ambivalent relationship to mysticism. In 1943, Sartre was, in Kendall's words, 'at the height of his powers, if not quite yet of his fame', one of the leading French intellectuals, whereas Bataille was not particularly well known beyond his circle of friends, collaborators and interlocutors ('Debauchery' xvii). Why, then, one might wonder, does Sartre devote to *Inner Experience* the time and space of such a substantial review, and of a review, moreover, that, according to

Jean-Michel Heimonet, is informed by 'bad faith' and represents one of the 'great literary misunderstandings', and which, according to Roberto Esposito, is a 'comedy of misreadings' in which the personal plays a considerable role, or that Surya describes as an 'article [that] vacillates repeatedly between analysis and lampoon, only, in the end, to collapse entirely into provocative denigrations' (Heimonet 59; Esposito 128-9; Surya 331-2)? Sartre was offended by *Inner Experience* and, even more significantly, felt threatened by it. Hence, while his review testifies to his familiarity with and understanding of Bataille's writings, Sartre nevertheless repeatedly pretends not to understand (Heimonet 59; Hollywood 28).

In his review, Sartre levels various interrelated criticisms against *Inner Experience* and Bataille. Firstly, he undermines Bataille's text by nearly compulsively establishing relationships between *Inner Experience* and the works of various philosophers. While doing so, he not only implicitly challenges Bataille's originality but also explicitly questions the latter's understanding of his philosophical predecessors. Secondly, Sartre is troubled by the discontinuous, poetic and aphoristic style and form of *Inner Experience*, which leads to the first explicit and serious attack in his review. 'By contrast with the analytical methods of the philosophers,' Sartre writes, 'we might say that M. Bataille's book presents itself as the product of a totalitarian thinking' (229). Sartre presents Bataille as a shaman, priest or cult leader. He writes that, '. . . M. Bataille's work is, like most mystical writings, the product of a *re-descent*. M. Bataille is returning from an unknown region; he is coming back down among us' (230, emphasis in original), and again, '. . . the communication [Bataille] wishes to establish is without reciprocity. He is on high, we are down below. He delivers us a message and it is for us to receive it if we can' (233). Thirdly, Sartre criticises *Inner Experience* on 'analytical' grounds. He maintains that Bataille makes a logical mistake because he attempts to give an objective, scientific account of the human condition, which he can access exclusively through his own, subjective experience. According to Sartre, therefore, Bataille conflates two irreconcilable languages and points of view, namely a philosophical, existentialist, and a 'scientistic' language or attitude, respectively (240–9). Thus, Bataille, according to Sartre, fails to distinguish the subjective from the objective, the 'inside' from the 'outside'. With respect to Bataille's 'improbability' of existence, for

instance, Sartre maintains: '. . . M. Bataille has poisoned his experience, since he actually makes it bear upon improbability, a hypothetical concept borrowed from external reality. In this way, the outside has slipped inside myself . . .' (245). Fourthly, Sartre questions the possibility of escaping from project and Bataille's sincerity in this undertaking. *Inner Experience*, according to Sartre, proposes a form of escapism, 'an attempt to evade history, politics, and responsibility' (Hollywood 62). It is an escapism, moreover, to which Bataille is not even fully committed, Sartre implies: 'For, in the end, M. Bataille writes; he has a job at the Bibliothèque Nationale; he reads, makes love and eats' (268). Hence, and since, according to Sartre, even the escape from 'project' is a 'project', Sartre accuses Bataille of acting in 'bad faith'. He maintains that Bataille wants to escape 'project', that Bataille wants to lose himself, renounce everything, only to become everything, to merge with it (272-3). From there, Sartre moves to what could be considered his major criticism, for he argues that Bataille does not rid himself of transcendence but instead reintroduces it in his thought by '[hypostatizing] nothingness' (281). Even though Bataille presents 'non-knowledge' as 'movement' and not as a 'thing', Sartre maintains, Bataille 'substantifies' it. He writes: 'non-knowledge, which previously was *nothing*, becomes the "beyond" of knowledge. By throwing himself in it, M. Bataille suddenly finds himself *in the realm of the transcendent*' (279, emphasis in original). Hence, Sartre calls Bataille a 'new mystic', fully aware of how this label undermines the latter's position. 'In calling Bataille a mystic', Amy Hollywood writes, 'Sartre wants to underline Bataille's purported desire to be all, to escape time and history, and to become one with the unknown' (35).

Sartre's review is interesting, for while it is, indeed, a misinterpretation of *Inner Experience* it nevertheless raises important questions. Sartre's and Bataille's positions are absolutely incommensurable, and 'A New Mystic' is a misreading of *Inner Experience* because Sartre subjects Bataille's text to criteria they do not share even though he is aware of this fact. Towards the end of his review Sartre even acknowledges the gulf that separates him from Bataille, as he writes: 'At present I know I can do nothing for him and he won't be able to do anything for me. He looks like a madman to me and I know, too, that he regards me as a madman' (277). According to Roberto Esposito, Sartre primarily objects to Bataille's antihumanism,

which he opposes to his own humanist existentialism (133). Hence, Sartre criticises Bataille for destabilising the dichotomy between subject and object, between the 'inside' and the 'outside', while this is not an oversight on Bataille's part or an undesired consequence of his position but precisely Bataille's aim. Hollywood recognises this tension in Sartre's interpretation of *Inner Experience* when she observes that,

> [b]y continually reinterpreting Bataille's arguments in terms of German existentialism . . . Sartre suggests that what Bataille lacks is the existentialist, phenomenological method through which subjective consciousness can be philosophically described. In other words, to make sense of the quasi-existential aspect of Bataille's thought, Sartre needs the method and descriptive ontology that he himself provides in *Being and Nothingness*. (29)

Thus also, Sartre rejects from the outset the possibility of escaping from 'project' and the desirability of the 'useless', of 'expenditure', since, as Hollywood recognises, for Sartre, 'to be human is to engage in projects' (30; see especially Sartre 285-6). However, even more generally, Sartre's interpretation of *Inner Experience* is a misreading because he assesses it as a philosophical work and thus as something which, according to Bataille, it emphatically is not. Bataille objects to philosophy because, according to him, philosophy is a 'project' that takes knowledge as its goal and to this end excludes from human experience all the heterogeneous elements, everything that cannot be assimilated by rational discourse. In *Guilty*, which was published after Sartre's review, Bataille for instance argues: 'All philosophy (all knowledge makes chance an exception) is reflection on a lifeless residue, on a regular course without good or bad luck. To recognize chance is the suicide of knowledge' (*G* 67; see also *IE* 14-5). Accordingly, when Sartre criticises what he considers Bataille's weak understanding of the latter's philosophical predecessors, when he objects to the discontinuous, aphoristic style of Bataille's book and contrasts it with the rational discourse of philosophy, or when he maintains that Bataille makes a *logical* mistake by conflating different points of view or discourses, he completely misses the point. Conversely, precisely when Sartre rejects Bataille as 'madman', thus granting him a relationship to the irrational, he comes closest to appreciating what is at stake in *Inner Experience*. In a note in *Method of Meditation*,

which was not part of the 1943 edition of *Inner Experience*, Bataille declares: 'I am not a philosopher, but a *saint*, perhaps a madman' (*IE* 193n, italics in original).

'Bataille was profoundly affected by Sartre's aggressive response [to *Inner Experience*]', Surya writes, and he reacted to it in several ways (335; Kendall, *Bataille* 170–2). Most interestingly, in the present context, Bataille included a reply to Sartre's review as an appendix in *On Nietzsche*. In this defence of *Inner Experience*, Bataille respectfully maintains that Sartre has misunderstood his book, that he has not revealed any difficulties or weaknesses of which Bataille had not already been aware, and, most importantly, that due to the fundamental differences between their positions, Sartre is not capable of criticising his thought. The distance that separates Sartre from Bataille, Bataille acknowledges, enables Sartre to assess *Inner Experience*, objectively, philosophically or scientifically: 'Fortunately Sartre described the movements of my mind, based on my book, emphasizing their foolishness from the outside, better than I could from within (I was moved): outlined, dissected by an indifferent lucidity . . .' (*ON* 174). Yet, this distance is the distance that separates the subject from the object, and Sartre's position, thus, is based precisely on categories Bataille aims to overcome. From the beginning Sartre assumes as given what Bataille contests. The corollaries of this disagreement between Sartre and Bataille become particularly clear when Bataille reinforces that nothingness, for him, is not a thing but a movement, a proposition Sartre acknowledges but whose significance he does not appreciate. Bataille writes:

> While Sartre, never fazed or intoxicated by any movement, judging my suffering and intoxication from the outside, without experiencing them, *concludes* his article by dwelling too long on emptiness . . . . What I tried to describe in *Inner Experience* is this movement that, losing all possibility of stopping, easily falls under attack by a criticism that believes it can arrest it from the outside, since criticism, itself, is not *taken up* in the movement. My dizzying fall and the *difference* that it introduces in the mind cannot be grasped by those who do not experience it themselves. (*ON* 177, emphases in original)

Thus, while Sartre maintains that Bataille reifies nothingness, Bataille argues that only Sartre does so in his criticism of *Inner Experience*. Sartre is not capable of understanding and criticising Bataille's thought because, as a result of the absolute alterity of his position, 'nothingness', as Bataille understands it, interminably eludes Sartre.

Yet, despite these differences between Sartre and Bataille, the question of totalitarianism cannot be dispelled so easily. When Sartre opposes Bataille's 'totalitarian thinking' to 'the analytical methods of the philosophers', it is presumably because the works of 'the philosophers', based as they are on reason, are 'democratic' insofar as they follow an intelligible set of rules. Theoretically at least, everybody can follow the progression of the 'philosophers'' thoughts, and disagree with them if so inclined, while this is not possible in the case of Bataille's intuitive, disjunctive text. Interestingly, Connor understands Bataille's turn to mysticism in the nineteen-thirties precisely as a critique of rationalism. He observes: 'What is remarkable about Bataille's interest in mysticism is indeed its untimeliness: when he published *Inner Experience* in 1943, rationalism, in the form of Sartrean existentialism – *Being and Nothingness* appeared in the same year as *Inner Experience* – set the agenda for philosophical and moral debate . . .' (16). Now, the precise nature of the threat Bataille represents to Sartre becomes clear. Bataille's thought amounts to a potentially detrimental challenge to Sartre's philosophy and even post-Enlightenment philosophy as a whole. 'Bataille wants to suggest', Connor shrewdly recognises, 'that in positing knowledge as its sole end philosophy is based on a sacrifice: worshiping rationalism, it sacrifices the peculiar pleasures offered in the experience of not knowing, of non-knowledge, or "unknowing" . . .' (32). However, Bataille occupies a truly 'impossible' position for philosophers like Sartre, for he does not even privilege 'non-knowledge' in opposition to knowledge and rationalism, but, on the contrary, aims at reintroducing this excluded 'other' into rational discourse, at reuniting knowledge and non-knowledge. This is why Sartre, according to Connor, is centrally concerned with re-establishing the dichotomy between philosophy and mysticism. 'Sartre is anxious', Connor recognises, 'lest Bataille, who "inserts" so many philosophical words, be mistaken for a philosopher . . .' (32). To the extent that Sartre cannot approve of Bataille's critique of rationalism, to the extent indeed, that, for Sartre, it is not even a question of approval but rather intelligibility, since, for him, Bataille's challenge to rationalism is, to use one of Bataille's key words, absolutely 'impossible', Sartre's misreading of Bataille's text has much in common with Jürgen Habermas's rejection of Bataille's thought. Habermas does not accuse Bataille of totalitarianism, but he considers him a leading

figure of what he terms the 'young conservatives', whose 'line leads from Bataille via Foucault to Derrida' (12). Like Sartre, Habermas is deeply suspicious of what he considers a rejection of rationalism, and like Sartre, he associates this rejection with a right-wing political agenda. Similarly, to add the voice of a third, albeit more sympathetic philosopher, Walter Benjamin in the 1930s, in the context of Bataille's College of Sociology, and thus several years before *Inner Experience*, famously exclaimed 'You work for fascism!', thus expressing his suspicion concerning the political implications of Bataille's interest in the sacred and myth, generally in the power of the 'affective' rather than the 'rational'. Benjamin's worried exclamation is all the more telling since, similarly to Bataille and in contrast to Sartre and Habermas, as Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi states, 'Benjamin's vision of society . . . included a positive evaluation of affectivity . . .' (3).

Granted, totalitarianism and mysticism are exceedingly complex and diverse concepts, and the use of these terms consequently always entails generalisation. Here 'totalitarianism' primarily but not exclusively refers to German National Socialism, which gained strength in Europe at the time Bataille turned to mysticism. In what follows, mysticism and totalitarianism are compared and related to Bataille's thought. The degree of generalisation consequently even increases, but it is justified by the insights about the *Summa* that the similarities and differences between mysticism, totalitarianism and Bataille's position yield. Totalitarianism, mysticism and Bataille's thought in the *Summa* have in common that they rely on strong personalities – the totalitarian leader, the mystic or Bataille himself – who communicate and to different degrees personify a unifying idea that, at least in the first two cases, assumes the form of a transcendental ideal. This is one way in which the intrinsic relationship between, on the one hand, totalitarianism and mysticism, and, on the other hand, transcendental idealism becomes particularly graspable. It now remains to be examined whether Bataille's *Summa* shares such a transcendental foundation. In this regard, Connor discerns an interesting similarity between the rhetoric of mystics and 1930 National Socialist propaganda. Mystics, according to Connor, frequently write not to persuade the reader but merely to show and instruct. They preach to the converted, and if somebody disagrees or fails to understand, this testifies to a deficiency on the reader's part. Mystical text, thus, are 'exclusionary,

even elitist' (Connor 64). In this context, Connor introduces the concept of the mystic's '*volo*', a term that means 'I will' and that denotes the practice of many mystics to demand from the outset the subjection of the reader's will to theirs. Thus, 'the mystic seems to deny the reader a basic right – the right to dissent', Connor incisively remarks, and the *volo* consequently 'effectively excludes difference and otherness from the reading experience' (63). The proximity between mysticism and totalitarianism in this respect becomes particularly concrete, and Connor shows, for example, how the *Myth of the Twentieth Century* by the National Socialist Alfred Rosenberg starts with a *volo*, a demand to suspend any suspicion, disbelief or criticism, borrowed from the mystic Meister Eckhart (129). Of course, this reliance on the *volo*, the decision to instruct and tell but not to convince, is directly related to the privileging of affect over rationalism that can be observed in mysticism and National Socialism alike. In the *Summa*, Connor convincingly argues, Bataille also '[invokes] the "mystic privilege"': 'Bataille recognizes that what he is trying to communicate will remain obscure to those readers who have no prior knowledge of the "living experience" . . .' (64). This strategy can be observed above, for example, when Bataille rejects Sartre's criticism because 'never fazed or intoxicated by any movement', Sartre has not experienced Bataille's ecstasies. Had Sartre seen and felt what Bataille has, he would know better: 'My dizzying fall and the *difference* that it introduces in the mind cannot be grasped by those who do not experience it themselves' (*ON* 177). By the same token, it is possible to argue that Sartre misinterprets *Inner Experience* because he pretends that Bataille's thought does not involve a *volo*, all the while refusing it. Yet, Connor also observes an important difference between the mystics' *volo* and Bataille's, for Bataille, who aims at abolishing the 'individual', at unifying the subject and the object, the 'self' and the 'other' through communication, is hardly interested in 'the [exclusion] of difference and otherness from the reading experience' that ensues from the mystics' *volo*. Connor locates this difference on Bataille's part primarily in the latter's suspicion of discourse that is expressed in his notion of 'dramatisation'. While the mystic, through their *volo*, wants to ensure that the reader adheres as closely as possible to the meanings of their words, Bataille's *volo*, as expressed through, or in conjunction with, his concept of 'dramatisation', aims at liberating the words from any fixed

meaning or interpretation (Connor 81-2). The performative element of 'dramatisation' dissolves the separation between the words or the text – the object – and the reader – the subject, and with this dissolution of the dichotomy between subject and object, the boundaries between 'subjects' or 'individuals' give way, too. 'If we didn't know how to dramatize', Bataille writes in *Inner Experience*, 'we would not be able to get out of ourselves' (*IE* 18).

Yet, the 'exclusion' of otherness that can be discerned in the mystics' discourse and totalitarianism, and the 'communication' with otherness to which Bataille aspires have in common that in both cases 'otherness' is eventually obliterated, and this is problematic. While mysticism and totalitarianism with different forms and degrees of violence silence the 'other', it could be argued that Bataille uses the 'other', that is, the heterogeneous, to attain a state of unity in which the differences between self and other are extinguished. According to the French sociologist Émile Durkheim, who exerted a great influence on Bataille, Alexander Irwin explains, the sacred assumes two opposing forms, namely 'on the one hand, a pure, noble elevated, life-giving form (the "right" sacred) ; on the other, an impure, vile, degraded, and dangerous form (the "left" sacred)' (xxiii).[9] The 'other' or heterogeneous, all that escapes discourse and consequently introduces the *volo*, is closely related to Durkheim's 'left sacred', and this can account for the reason why Bataille's thought at times becomes almost indistinguishable from idealism. In the *Summa* the heterogeneous or 'otherness' is represented by the female, by childhood, primitives, and in one instance by the working class. Bataille writes about the female:

> The illusion of completion given – in human terms – in the figure of a woman with her clothes on; even partially undressed, her animality becomes visible and the sight of her sets my own incompletion free . . . To the extent that beings seem perfect, they remain isolated, closed within themselves. But the wound of incompletion opens them. Through that which we call incompletion, animal nudity, wound, diverse separate beings *communicate*, take life by losing themselves in *communication*, one with another. (*G* 22, emphases in original; see also *G* 49, 59, 67; *IE* 139; *ON* 133, 135)

Similarly, he writes about childhood:

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[9] For Durkheim's influence on Bataille, see also Pawlett.

> The happiest laughter is that which is given birth by a child. For the child must grow up and from the insufficiency that it reveals, at which I laugh, I know that it will be followed by the sufficiency of the adult . . . . A child is an opportunity to look into – without deep uneasiness – an abyss of insufficiency. (*IE* 92; see also *IE* 47, 49; *G* 135-6; *ON* 74)

In *On Nietzsche* Bataille reflects about primitivism:

> What were the highest moments of the lives of savages? Which freely translated our longings? The *festivals* – nostalgia for which still moves us – were times of sacrifice and orgy. (*ON* 43, emphasis in original)

Finally, he comments on the working class:

> I see it as essential to always be *at the human level*, to only transcend degradation, plaster cast transcendence. If I were not myself at the level of the workers, I would feel my transcendence above them like a gob of snot, hanging from my nose. I feel like that in cafés, in public places . . . I physically judge the beings with whom I assemble, who cannot be either above or below me. I differ profoundly from a worker, but my feeling of *immanence*, when talking to workers, if sympathy brings us together, is the sign indicating my place in the world: that of a wave in the middle of the sea. Meanwhile the bourgeois, *secretly* competing with one another, seem condemned to an empty exteriority. (*ON* 155, emphases in original)

These quotations illustrate how, for Bataille, women, children, primitives, and workers, and there might be other 'groups' or 'categories', occupy a privileged position because they are closer to the desired 'intimacy', to the immanent totality of being. For exactly this reason, however, they are at the same time inferior, since they are less complete, or more conspicuously incomplete, individuals. In contrast to Bataille or presumably most Western middle-class men, they are at once more and less than a human individual. The immanence of being, for Bataille, is intrinsically related to animality (see, for example, *Religion* 17, 23), and when he writes about the woman's 'animality' that her nudity reveals, this is not unequivocally misogynistic, but it is significantly also misogynistic. In this regard, it is also telling that Bataille completely distinguishes himself from the workers in the last quotation, asserting, 'I differ profoundly from a worker', before relating them to 'immanence', conceived as a 'wave in the middle of the sea', which is a metaphor he repeatedly uses in relation to the animal state in *Theory of Religion*, and with regard to inner experience in *Inner Experience* and *Guilty* (*Religion* 18-9; *IE* 56, 71, 98-9, 130; *G* 53). Thus, Bataille is a human being who is as complete as is possible, while he discerns at the same time a way out of the fragmented state of individuality to absolute unity with the totality of

being. If women, children, primitives or workers, then, could be considered to occupy a privileged, albeit ambiguous, position because of their proximity to the immanence of being, Bataille is nevertheless superior to them because he embodies the best of both worlds.

Tellingly, Bataille's conception of the immanent 'totality of being' as negativity, as 'nothingness' or the 'impossible', does not sufficiently distance him from mysticism and other forms of idealism. For instance, among the European Romantics, the idea that certain truths cannot be expressed was not uncommon. Indeed, Michel Heimonet maintains that due to his conflation of literature and philosophy, Bataille needs to be located in the tradition of European Romanticism, and he specifically relates Bataille's 'nonknowledge' to the Romantic notion of 'irony' and to Novalis's concept of '*néscience*', 'according to which all true "knowledge" is only the ephemeral residue of an "ignorance," where the insatiable quest undertaken by the mind to push beyond its limits will necessarily take any knowledge' (61, 63). This is fascinating, and to Bataille's 'nonknowledge' and Novalis's '*néscience*', one could also add John Keats's 'negative capability'.[10] Connor agrees with Heimonet insofar as both the German Romantics and Bataille 'held that a certain form of mysticism was not foreign to critical thinking', but he complicates the association of 'irony' and Novalis's '*néscience*' with Bataille's 'nonknowledge' (12-3). The Romantics, Connor argues, use 'irony' as a 'conceit', to express that which cannot be expressed, while this is absolutely impossible according to Bataille (13). Distinctions and boundaries become blurry here, but perhaps one could schematically summarise the difference between the Romantics and Bataille thus: according to the Romantics, whatever exceeds objective representation can still be subjectively known, while 'nonknowledge', according to Bataille, lies beyond or outside the sphere of knowledge altogether. In any case, Connor maintains that Bataille's 'nonknowledge' places him closer to the mystics than to the Romantics (14). Even if these generalisations fail to do justice to the intricacies of German Romanticism, and also of mysticism, they emphasise the crux of Bataille's thought. The point at which critics repeatedly stumble and with which Bataille himself

[10] Keat's 'negative capability' will play an important role in the chapter on Olson's *Maximus Poems*.

wrestles is that 'nothingness' needs to be thought as absolute lack without turning it into an ideal. It is here that the limits of metaphysics, but also of Bataille's thought, are encountered. A more general manner in which this limit can be made explicit is by asking how precisely immanence – Bataille's immanent totality of being – can be thought without relying on the notion of transcendence as that which it is not.

In a recent article, Elisa Heinämäki further examines some of the similarities between *Inner Experience* and the writings of mystics, and she convincingly shows that the mere negativity of Bataille's 'nothingness' does not yet completely differentiate him from their discourse. Heinemäki demonstrates how various mystics describe God in negative terms. They make use of *apophasis*, which means 'un-saying', to argue 'that God is "neither this nor that"' (116). 'God himself is not safe from the negations of apophatic theology', Heinämäki explains: '[a]t its most radical, mysticism seems to deny God' (117). Heinämäki in particular compares Bataille and Meister Eckhart, and she shows how Eckhart, similarly to Bataille, conceives God as nothingness (119). Associated with 'being-nothingness', Eckhart's God is not 'the Supreme Being of traditional Western metaphysics' (120), Heinämäki remarks, but He nevertheless represents a unifying and totalising principle, a ground and origin of everything that is (119-0). Heinämäki writes: 'the deepest, most intimate point of Eckhart's mysticism is reached when we realize that this "beyond" is not away from us, this indistinct is precisely not distinct from us, but, instead, "God's ground is my ground, and my ground is God's ground"' (119). This is where Heinämäki locates the decisive difference between Eckhart and Bataille, in whose writings, according to Heinämäki, by contrast, the 'ground' of everything is never revealed, but the 'revelation of "what there is"' invariably amounts to a 'catastrophe' (120). 'What is glimpsed is the irreducible strangeness of what there is, which can never be captured as a totality' (Heinämäki 120). Eckhart's identification of God, or the (quasi-)metaphysical ground, with the individual being is thus replaced by a radical otherness of oneself from oneself. Bataille repeatedly describes the lack of a metaphysical foundation as 'abyss' and it is also important to remember that his notion of 'chance' fulfils the same function. '[W]hat the moment of chance reveals', Christopher M. Gemerchak recognises, 'is . . . not that one *becomes* other, but rather that one *is* other . . .' (72, emphasis in original). Heinämäki shows that the

relationship between Bataille's thought and mysticism is much more complex than frequently assumed, and that the identification of the one with the other more than likely testifies to a reductive understanding of both. However, more importantly with regard to the *Summa*, Heinämäki's comparison between Eckhard's unifying 'ground' and Bataille's 'catastrophe' brings home the inherent contradiction involved in the notion of an 'immanent totality'. Bataille's concept of an immanent 'totality of being' is fundamentally impossible, and Bataille, at his best, succeeds in embracing the notion of an 'immanent totality' by embracing the 'impossible'. Problems emerge, however, when Bataille's thought is not at its best, when the immanent 'totality of being' appears to be coherent and viable, when, in other words, it assumes the status and function of an ideal. This, arguably, is why Bataille's attitudes in the *Summa* towards the female, childhood, primitives and workers, in other words towards the 'other', as illustrated above, remain troubling.

Towards the end of the twentieth century a debate on the subject of 'community' emerged between several 'continental' philosophers. Bataille's texts on 'community' represent one major point of departure of this exchange, which, accordingly, subjects the problems and questions considered above to further scrutiny.

1.5 Beginning a (')Philosophy(') of Community: Nancy and Blanchot

In 'The Inoperative Community', which was originally published in 1983 but extensively edited for inclusion in the book with the same title in 1986 (Bernasconi 5), Jean-Luc Nancy cannily scrutinises some of the difficulties of Bataille's notion of community. However, Nancy's essay also clearly demonstrates the central but frequently neglected position Bataille occupied at the beginning of a debate that evolved into a whole philosophical 'tradition' devoted to the question of 'community' within continental thought. In addition to Nancy, this 'tradition' is represented by Maurice Blanchot, Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito and, perhaps as slight 'outsider', by Alphonso Lingis, to mention only the most eminent names.[11]

[11] On the question why Bataille is frequently only a marginal figure in later discussions of the question of 'community', while he was such an important point of reference for Nancy at the beginning, see Kemp Winfree.

In a comprehensive overview of the 'philosophies' of 'community' from Hobbes to these twentieth-century thinkers, Julián Jiménez Heffernan shows how Nancy presents Bataille's and his insights as the beginnings of a new approach to the problems and questions of community, and Jiménez Heffernan maintains that this isolated, innovative status Nancy claims for himself is questionable. Nevertheless, Jiménez Heffernan concedes that, considered against the significantly narrower background of phenomenology, Nancy's contributions were indeed original (Jiménez Heffernan 27). It is in the context of this more restricted philosophical tradition that the present section considers how Bataille, Nancy and Blanchot represent a 'beginning' of a 'philosophy' of 'community'.

Centrally influenced by Bataille and Martin Heidegger, Nancy, as Ian James concisely summarises, 'is suspicious of certain moments within both Bataille and Heidegger, namely a residual logic of the subject which persists in the former's use of a Hegelian language, and in the latter's invocation of the historical destiny of a people' (*Fragmentary* 174).[12] In 'The Inoperative Community', Nancy objects to the conception of community as 'lost' and capable of being 'regained or reconstituted' (9). He explains in this respect: 'always it is a matter of a lost age in which community was woven of tight, harmonious, and infrangible bonds and in which above all it played back to itself, through its institutions, its rituals, and its symbols, the representation, indeed the living offering, of its immanent unity, intimacy, and autonomy' (9). Of course, the notion of a community that is 'lost' but might be 'regained' goes hand in hand with a nostalgic longing for such an 'intimate' bond, and Nancy, furthermore, maintains that this concept of a 'lost community' is intrinsically Christian. The writings of the Romantics Rousseau, Schlegel and Hegel illustrate, Nancy claims, that community 'is understood as communion, and communion takes place, in its principle as in its ends, at the heart of the mystical body of Christ' (10). Bataille breaks with this tradition of thought and thus, Nancy maintains, he 'has gone farthest into the crucial experience of the modern destiny of community' (16). Withdrawing from 'communitarian enterprises', with which Nancy

[12] The relationship between Nancy and Heidegger lies beyond the scope of the present chapter, even though it could be made to bear on it since Bataille's relationship to Heidegger is itself interestingly ambivalent. See, for example, Esposito 112–134.

primarily refers to Acéphale but certainly also to the College of Sociology and all the previous 'communities' in which Bataille participated, Bataille, according to Nancy,

> . . . came to understand the ridiculous nature of all nostalgia for communion, he who for a long time – in a kind of exacerbated consciousness of the 'loss' of community, which he shared with a whole epoch – had represented archaic societies, their sacred structures, the glory of military and royal societies, the nobility of feudalism, as bygone and fascinating forms of a successful intimacy of being-in-common with itself. (17)

Taking into account the context of this quotation in 'Inoperative Community', 'the ridiculous nature of all nostalgia', for Nancy, is paradigmatically illustrated by Acéphale, the puerile idea of a secret society based on a human sacrifice.[13] More generally, however, nostalgia is 'ridiculous' because, according to Bataille, 'community' is 'impossible' and it consequently never was nor will ever be. Yet, in the passages that illustrate Bataille's attitudes towards the female, childhood, primitive peoples and workers, Bataille indeed betrays a certain nostalgia for the 'animality' he associates with female nudity, for the 'insufficiency' he discerns in the laughter of children, for the 'sacrifices' and 'orgies' of primitive peoples, and for the 'feeling of *immanence*' he experiences in the proximity of 'workers'. This nostalgia testifies to a stubborn remainder, in Bataille's writings, of a metaphysics of the subject, which Nancy analyses in slightly different terms. Nancy discerns a tension between, on the one hand, Bataille's notions of 'ecstasy' and 'sovereignty', which, he argues, are despite everything still related to the 'individual', single being, and, on the other hand, 'community', to which adhere connotations of 'equality' and 'justice'. This tension, Nancy grants, is necessary insofar as it prevents the full realisation and thus totalisation of 'community' (20). Yet, Nancy asserts that Bataille did not fully succeed in maintaining such a tension, but that his thought instead increasingly neglected 'community' and focused on the individual being, particularly later, from *Sovereignty* onwards (21-2). Already in *Inner Experience*, however, according to Nancy, such a tendency can be discerned. He argues that when Bataille is concerned with the 'fusion of the subject and the object', Bataille is led back 'to the core of a constant thematic in speculative idealism', and hence, 'what disappears,

[13] See Leslie Hill's comments on Maurice Blanchot's response to Nancy's criticism of Acéphale in this passage of 'Inoperative Community' (202-3).

or rather *what cannot appear* is both the *other* and *communication*' (Nancy 23, emphasis in original). Even in eroticism, even in Bataille's 'community of lovers', Nancy maintains, there remain 'a subject and an object – where the subject, moreover, is always the man, and the object always the woman . . .' (24). Bataille's thought resembles 'speculative idealism', with which Nancy more than likely primarily refers to Hegel, to the extent that 'ecstasy' or 'sovereignty' can be understood as always the 'ecstasy' or 'sovereignty' of a subject, and as resulting from the sublation of the relationship between subject and object, self and other. Thus, Bataille's *Summa* would follow a logic that does not significantly differ from Hegel's gradual approximation of human consciousness to God in *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[14] Such a reading of Bataille's 'philosophy' of 'community' could start, for instance, from a consideration of the similarities between Bataille's concept of individual 'insufficiency' and the Christian notion of original sin.

To avoid falling back into a 'metaphysics of the subject' that, according to Nancy, in Bataille's case enters through his concern with the relationship between subject and object, Nancy introduces his concept of 'finitude', which is significantly inspired by Heidegger's notion of 'being-toward-death' (Nancy 14; James, *Fragmentary* 117; James, 'Interrupted' 338-9; Jiménez Heffernan 25-6). Furthermore, in a similarly Heideggerian vein, this time drawing on Heidegger's 'being-with', Nancy conceives 'community' as 'being-in-common' (Nancy xxxvii). Thus, while Nancy adopts the 'language of worklessness' ('inoperativeness') that ultimately derives from Maurice Blanchot but that also centrally informs Bataille's writings on 'work' or 'project', he embarks on 'a rehabilitation of what remains to some extent at least a Heideggerian problematic, namely, fundamental ontology', Jason Kemp Winfree observes (176). This Heideggerian focus and a related, simultaneous move away from Bataille increases in later texts by Nancy (Bernasconi 11).[15] Already in 'The Inoperative Community', Nancy primarily considers existence as *Dasein* rather than as 'inner experience'. Yet, significantly, in *Inner Experience*,

[14] For a detailed discussion of the complex relationship between Bataille and Hegel, see Gemerchak.

[15] As, for instance, Giorgio Agamben's *Coming Community* and Roberto Esposito's *Communitas* illustrate, a Heideggerian approach to the question of community not only characterises Nancy's subsequent texts but many of the later contributions to the philosophical discussion of 'community'.

Bataille explicitly distances himself from Heidegger and the latter's question of being, not least since Heidegger, like Sartre and, it needs to be added, like Nancy, is a 'philosopher' (*IE* 111). Bataille quotes Heidegger: '"*Our existence* [unseres Dasein]," says Heidegger, *" – in the community of researchers, teachers, and students – is determined by knowledge*"' (square brackets in original). He, then, comments:

> *Undoubtedly in this way stumbles a philosophy whose meaning should be linked to a human existence determined by inner experience . . . . This less to indicate the limit of my interest in Heidegger than to introduce a principle: there can be no knowledge without a community of researchers, nor any inner experience without a community of those who live it*. (*IE* 31, italics and square bracket in original)

Here, Bataille 'links' and compares but at the same time unequivocally distinguishes between Heidegger's philosophy and his interests: '*human existence determined by inner experience*'. He implies that nothing, no 'knowledge' and no community that is based on knowledge, can adequately replace, account or compensate for the nonknowledge of inner experience and the 'community' to which it gives rise. Despite what Bataille maintains here, this certainly and clearly also reveals the 'limit', not just of his 'interest' in Heidegger but more fundamentally, of the commensurability of the two thinkers. Likewise, since Nancy significantly follows Heidegger's path, the limit that separates Bataille from Heidegger also distinguishes him from Nancy. Nancy reveals a problem or a weakness of Bataille's reflections on 'community' but he does so, like Sartre, from the 'outside', without having 'lived' 'inner experience'. Nancy's account of Bataille's thought, thus, inevitably is also a misinterpretation or a misrepresentation. This can be witnessed, for example, in the fact that, on the one hand, Nancy agrees with and embraces Bataille's suspicion of 'work' or 'project', which is eventually a suspicion of teleology, while, on the other hand, he compares an element of Bataille's thought to 'speculative idealism', which is fundamentally teleological. Yet, rather than critically examining the reasons for or nature of this contradiction, Nancy all but welcomes Bataille's 'relapse' into 'speculative idealism' because it represents an opportunity for introducing his ideas.

In the same year as 'Inoperative Community' appeared, and in response to it, Maurice Blanchot, Bataille's intimate long-term friend, published *The Unavowable Community*. Whereas Nancy tries to solve the problems he discerns in Bataille's

approach to 'community' with Heidegger's help, Blanchot turns to Emmanuel Levinas's ethics. Similarly to Nancy, Blanchot thus introduces an element that is foreign to Bataille's thought. Moreover, as various critics have remarked, many of the differences between Nancy and Blanchot, consequently, can be considered in terms of differences between Heidegger and Levinas, that is, in terms of a disagreement about the nature of the relationship between ontology and ethics.[16] At the beginning of *Unavowable Community*, Blanchot repeatedly refers to Nancy and agrees with him on many points, but, as James remarks, Blanchot at the same time also 'reproaches' Nancy (*Fragmentary* 190). He does so by implying that the tenets on which he and Nancy agree are also shared by Bataille, and that Nancy's criticism of Bataille is consequently misdirected. Specifically, Blanchot maintains, in opposition to Nancy, that, 'leaving aside a few ambiguous sentences', Bataille did not conceive community as 'fusional fulfillment in some collective hypostasis' (qtd. Nancy in Blanchot), but rather as 'absent' or 'impossible' (Blanchot 3, 7). Blanchot admonishes:

> One must never forget that what counts for [Bataille] is less the state of ravishment where one forgets everything (oneself included) than the demanding process that realizes itself by bringing into play and carrying outside itself an existence that is insufficient and that cannot renounce that insufficiency, a movement that ruins immanence as well as the ususal forms of transcendence. (7)

Blanchot's emphasis on Bataille's 'bringing into play' of existence in this passage questions the postulation of a kind of teleology in Bataille's writings that underlies Nancy's comparison of Bataille's thought with 'speculative idealism'. Thus, Blanchot maintains that just like Nancy and himself, Bataille did not conceive 'community' as the product or result of 'work', nor as 'communion', that is, as a 'heightened', not to say 'sublated', ideal unity of people (Blanchot 7-8, 10-1).

Acéphale, according to Blanchot, illustrates well the fundamental 'absence' of 'community' on which Bataille's notion of 'community' is based, and Blanchot thus challenges Nancy's verdict on the secret society as a community governed by

[16] On the differences between Nancy's Heideggerian and Blanchot's Levinasian approach to the question of 'community', see Bernasconi (especially 8–12) and Hole 104–110, but also Hill 200-1, Bird 3, and James *Fragmentary* 188-9.

naïve nostalgia. 'Was it absurd?', Blanchot asks, following Nancy, with regard to Acéphale and the plan of staging a human sacrifice, and he maintains:

> Yes, but not only absurd, for it meant breaking with the law of the group, the law that had constituted it by exposing it to that which transcended it without that transcendence being other than the group's i.e., to the outside which was the intimacy of the group's singularity. In other words, the community, by organizing and by giving itself as project the execution of a sacrificial death, would have renounced its renunciation of creating a *work*, be it a work of death, or even the simulation of death. (14 italics in original)

The problem that the 'failure' of Acéphale illustrates is the problem Bataille also articulates in *Inner Experience*, namely that the escape from project is always also a project (*IE* 52, 63-4). According to Blanchot, Acéphale succeeded, at least to some degree, to escape from 'project' as long as it was based on the 'imminent' possibility of the 'impossible', of that which fundamentally lies outside the realm of 'work', namely death or sacrifice.[17] He writes: 'The Acéphale community could not exist as such, but only as imminence and withdrawal: imminence of a death closer than any proximity; prior to withdrawal of that which did not permit one to withdraw from it' (15-6). The imminence of death, in the form of the idea of a human sacrifice, 'unites' the members of Acéphale but only by relating them primarily to the 'nothingness' that the imminent death of one of them signifies. Furthermore, this 'imminence' can only be maintained for some time, after which the idea of the sacrifice has to be realised or abandoned, and in either case the 'proximity' to 'nothingness' is lost. Acéphale illustrates the 'absence' of community insofar as, while it existed, the ties between its members were only of secondary importance, the result of their 'proximity' to the 'nothingness' of death, while its dissolution rendered this 'absence' all the more palpable. 'Acéphale', Blanchot writes, 'was the shared experience of that which could not be shared . . .', and here another aspect of Acéphale ties in, namely its secrecy (15). The secrecy surrounding Acéphale, Blanchot suggests, is not based on an arbitrarily, and perhaps childishly, imposed interdiction to speak about it but on the impossibility of discursively communicating

[17] Connor considers that perhaps the idea of a human sacrifice 'was never meant to be put into practice' (116). Yet, explicitly acknowledging this would, of course, have ruined everything.

its 'shared' experience.[18] For Blanchot, Kristin Hole explains, '[community] is given meaning from a relation to the other', and as a result of this, community 'lies in a sphere beyond representation'. It is 'unavowable' (Hole 105). Significantly, the idea that 'community' is 'unavowable' is nothing new. In the *Summa*, Bataille repeatedly states that it is impossible to communicate discursively about 'community', and Hill shows that Blanchot even borrows the word 'unavowable' directly from Bataille's *Method of Meditation* (Hill 208; *IE* 171). By contesting the notion that Acéphale was merely 'ridiculous' and instead focusing on the significance of its secrecy, and by entitling his reply to Nancy *The* Unavowable *Community*, Blanchot emphasises this point, which Nancy neglects. This is important, because it can be argued that Nancy's oversight significantly compromises his account of 'community'. Insofar as Nancy primarily considers 'community' as 'inoperative' and presents this 'worklessness' as possibility, rather than as negativity, as the 'unavowable', he risks employing this 'worklessness' in the service of 'work'. The escape from project is also a project. Thus, as James recognises, Blanchot asks '. . . whether the motif of unworking does not perhaps always imply a prior work or operativity. If this is so Nancy's invocation of "unworking" might in fact be always taking as its starting point the notion of community as work or project' (*Fragmentary* 189-0). Consequently, one could argue that Nancy just repeats, in slightly different form, the mistakes he locates in Bataille's writings.

Blanchot and Bataille met in 1941, and it can therefore be said with certainty that Blanchot did not participate in Acéphale (Surya 311). Yet, Surya argues that from 1941 onwards Bataille and Blanchot formed a kind of community, and Blanchot also implies this in *Unavowable*. Surya writes:

> . . . this absence of community, given as the sole community accessible to mankind, would ultimately open between Blanchot and Bataille the possibility of communication (since communication can only be justified by the impossibility of any community). In fact if two people ever really did establish communication, they were Bataille and Blanchot. (314)

[18] Kendall recognises this in his Bataille biography when he writes: 'Acéphale . . . conceived itself as a secret society, less in the sense that its activities were kept secret from those who were not participants than in the strict sense that it was a society *of secrets*, a group founded on mysteries about which *one could not speak*' (*Bataille* 132, emphases in original)

In *Unavowable*, Blanchot distinguishes between the concerns of Acéphale and *Inner Experience*, while he also unmistakably relates them. *Inner Experience* continues the investigation into 'community' that already drove Acéphale. '[W]hat was in play' in Acéphale, he writes, 'demanded to be taken up again in the paradoxical form of a book' (Blanchot 17). *Inner Experience*, the book, is 'paradoxical' because, like Acéphale, it is concerned with what fundamentally escapes discourse. Yet, in contrast to approaching the impossible through death or sacrifice, *Inner Experience* relates to it through ecstasy. 'One can write that word . . . only by putting it carefully between quotation marks', Blanchot observes with respect to 'ecstasy', 'because nobody can know what it is about, and, above all, whether it ever took place: going beyond knowledge, implying un-knowledge, it refuses to be stated other than through random words that cannot guarantee it' (18-9). Bataille was painfully aware of these difficulties, and he comments on the contradiction of writing a 'work' on what escapes discourse throughout the *Summa*. In *Inner Experience*, for instance, in a statement that sheds an interesting light on the many incomplete and unwritten texts Bataille announced, he observes: 'Almost every time, if I attempted to write a book, fatigue would come before the end. I slowly became a stranger to the project that I formed. . . . I escape myself and my book escapes me . . .' (*IE* 62).[19] Why Bataille nevertheless continued with the books of the *Summa* can be derived from an interesting passage of *On Nietzsche*:

> So little am I addressing hostile readers that I require others to *figure me out*. Friendly eyes alone suffice for seeing far enough. Only friendship urges the discomfort caused by the statement of a firm truth or a goal. . . . the words I write nauseate me and seem empty. I am not writing to preach. *It would seem right if I could only be understood at the price of profound friendship*. (*ON* 143-4, emphases in original)

Bataille writes against all odds because he hopes that he will be understood intuitively rather than discursively.[20] He only writes for 'friends', and Nancy, just like Sartre, is probably not among them. This quotation is as unequivocal a *volo* as one can find in the *Summa*. Blanchot, on the other hand, understands Bataille. In

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[19] For more remarks by Bataille on the difficulties of 'writing', see *IE* 43, 65, 118, 129, 205; *G* 35, 50, 84, 104–6, 238n8; *ON* 49, 136, 143-4.

[20] In an older translation, Bruce Boone renders the first sentence as: 'I'm so lacking any inclination to write for the unfriendly that, from the rest, the others, I ask *intuitive* understanding' (*Boone* 144).

Unavowable, he describes a 'literary community':[21] '. . . a small number of friends, each one singular, and with no forced relationships between them, form it in secret through the silent reading they share, becoming conscious of the exceptional event they are confronted with or dedicated to' (20). Importantly, this 'literary community' is still 'impossible' or 'absent'. The 'friends' are 'each one singular' and 'with not forced relationships between them'. The 'community', moreover, is 'secret' and 'silent'. Later Blanchot writes that the 'reader' he has in mind 'cannot know what he knows, and . . . knows more than he knows. He is a companion who gives himself over to abandonment, who is himself lost . . .' (23). Just like Acéphale, according to Blanchot, the 'literary community' only exists as 'loss' or 'withdrawal'. Tellingly, moreover, Blanchot conceives this 'literary community' as a 'community' among 'friends', and he thus invokes the concept of 'friendship', just like Bataille in the quotation above. This raises the question of what 'friendship' means for Bataille and Blanchot. 'For Bataille', Blanchot concisely explains, 'friendship' is 'friendship for oneself all the way to dissolution' (22). Bataille repeatedly maintains in the *Summa* that 'friendship' is primarily friendship of humanity for itself (*G* 123; *ON* 12). It is the acceptance of the fundamental 'insufficiency' that defines human beings, the resistance to the temptation of trying to become 'everything' in response, and the open exposure of this 'insufficiency' instead. Bataille writes in *Guilty*: 'The friendship of the *saint* is a trust that knows it has been betrayed. This is the friendship that a man has for himself, knowing that he will die, that he will be able to intoxicate himself with death' (*G* 36, emphasis in original). Thus, 'friendship' denotes an acceptance of and reconciliation with the 'nothingness' that lies at the centre of every human being. It is, in Blanchot's words, a 'relation without relation' that 'discovers the unknown we ourselves are' (25). Significantly, the 'literary community' based on friendship that Blanchot describes is not just a theoretical

[21] With the term 'literary community' Blanchot presumably responds to what Nancy in *The Inoperative Community* calls 'literary communism'. To a considerable extent the differences between 'literary community' and 'literary communism' can be understood in terms of the differences in emphasis between Nancy's 'inoperative' community and Blanchot's 'unavowable' community. In other words, Nancy's 'literary communism' conceives community primarily as 'workless' but eventually nevertheless realisable, while Blanchot's 'literary community' is fundamentally 'impossible'. See, for example, Ian James on Nancy's 'literary communism' (*Fragmentary* 200).

possibility, or impossibility, but Blanchot refers to an actual experience (21). From 1941 onwards, Bataille organised two reading groups that discussed passages of his then work-in-progress, *Inner Experience*. Blanchot was the only participant who attended both groups, and, Surya reports, the discussions that unfolded in those groups were mainly dialogues between Bataille and Blanchot (316).[22] Blanchot's influence on the *Summa*, particularly on *Inner Experience* and *Guilty*, is accordingly considerable and frequently explicitly acknowledged.

1.6 The *Summa* and the Late Modernist Epic

Bataille's 'philosophy' of 'community' paradigmatically illustrates the paradox of the late modernist epic, namely the aim of imagining a non-totalitarian communal totality. Bataille attempts to achieve this through the notion of existence as immanent totality, and in doing so he blurs the boundary between the human and the rest of existence. At the same time, however, Bataille is centrally concerned with the human condition, with consciousness and its limits, and consequently also reinforces the distinction between the human and the non-human. Only human beings are capable of inner experience, of becoming sovereign, of entering into 'communication', and consequently the 'community' Bataille envisages is a 'community' of humanity, even though it also includes the non-human. This idea of humanity as unified and whole is intriguing and likely results from the aim of imagining a kind of 'community' beyond any particular ideology. In Bataille's writings, the notion of a 'universal' humanity can be detected at least from *Contre-Attaque* onwards, and the 'communities' imagined in the following three epics are also, in different ways, based on notions of humanity as totality. According to Mellors, late modernists endorse totality, while they are conscious of twentieth-century totalitarianism and distance themselves from the totalitarian politics of their immediate predecessors. Even though Bataille's productive period temporally overlaps with those of canonical modernists, such as Pound, Yeats or Eliot, against whose politics late modernists position themselves, and even though Bataille does not establish any

[22] Surya and Kendall slightly disagree about the details of these two reading groups and their relationships to the 'Socratic College' Bataille and Blanchot organised (Surya 316-7; Kendall, *Bataille* 164-5).

connection between his writings and Anglophone modernism, he can be considered a late modernist insofar as his 'philosophy' of 'community' is a response to the rise of European fascism. Bataille embraces immanence as reaction against the transcendental nationalism of National Socialism, and he states this explicitly in *On Nietzsche*, as he observes in a section entitled 'August 1944': 'this war is a war of transcendence against immanence. The defeat of National Socialism is related to the isolation of transcendence, Hitler's illusion forcefully unleashed through the movement of transcendence' (*ON* 156). In contrast to the Germans, who 'exude transcendent mediocrity', the American soldiers who arrive in France and signify the defeat of Nazi Germany are epitomes of 'immanence':

> The look of these American men, their clothes, their gear is pleasant to me. These men from overseas seem more self-contained, more whole than we.
>
> . . . . The 'immanence' of the Americans is undeniable (their being is in itself and not beyond). (*ON* 159)

This 'immanence' of the American soldiers is contagious and manifests itself in the carnivalseque atmosphere of their arrival: 'I went out and found tanks surrounded by a crowd, almost like a fairground, but more animated' (*ON* 159). 'The crowd brought flags, flowers, champagne, pears, tomatoes, and put the children up on the tanks five hundred meters from the Germans' (*ON* 160).

The central dilemma of the late modernist epic can be articulated on a more abstract level as the fundamental impossibility of the notion of an absolutely immanent totality. This impossibility represents the centre around which the exchanges between Sartre and Bataille, and between Nancy and Blanchot revolve, while these dialogues also illuminatingly reflect on different realms on which this impossibility impinges. Schematically, while Sartre and, to a lesser degree, Nancy argue that the notion of existence as immanent totality represents a transcendental ideal because it is impossible to conceive totality as absolutely immanent, Bataille and Blanchot maintain that it is possible to entertain the notion of an immanent totality by embracing the 'impossible', be it in the form or under the name of negativity, heterogeneity, nonknowledge, absence, abyss, chance or the like. The differences between Sartre and Nancy, and Bataille and Blanchot, thus, eventually come down to different conceptions of negativity. According to Bataille and Blanchot, negativity is intransitive. It is an absolute lack, pure nothingness, and as

such it lies at the centre of as well as outside and beyond everything. It cannot be seen, grasped, described or contemplated but only experienced. Here, again, the *volo* Bataille's thought entails enters the picture. Bataille and Blanchot submit to the *volo*. They are prepared to abandon the laws of discourse, reason and logic, the laws of metaphysics as a whole, and hence, it is possible for them to imagine a 'community' of or in pure nothingness. This 'community', for Bataille and Blanchot, embraces everything, the totality of existence of which the individual that has transcended its individuality or subjectivity forms a part. As a result of its absolute inclusiveness, the totality of existence, according to Bataille and Blanchot, represents a non-totalitarian communal totality. Sartre and Nancy, however, in different ways or to different degrees, refuse the *volo*, discount the possibility of an absolute negativity, and argue that the *volo* establishes Bataille or the subject in a position of authority. In Bataille's 'philosophy', according to them, then, the subject, or Bataille specifically, gives in to this desire to be everything, to the will to autonomy. The 'community' Bataille imagines, consequently, according to Sartre and Nancy, is not absolutely inclusive, but exclusive and disconcertingly totalitarian. This problem of the notion of an immanent totality that unravels in the exchanges between Sartre, Bataille, Nancy and Blanchot is also of significance with regard to the epic as literary 'work' that aims at representing the entirety of a 'community' and that thus aspires to becoming 'the book of the world'. The *volo* amounts to a paradigm shift, like the theoretical attainment of absolute autonomy of the work of art or like the 'tip over' from epistemology to ontology that McHale describes as the central characteristic of 'limit modernism', and hence it is helpful to think of the differences between Sartre and Nancy, and Bataille and Blanchot as differences of perspective. While Bataille and Blanchot undergo a transition and enter a new kind of experience, Sartre and Nancy contemplate and assess the latters' position from without. Bataille's 'philosophy' of 'community' shares with late modernist texts this ontological ambivalence, while its focus on the question of 'community' relates it to the epic tradition. Interestingly, with respect to the criticisms Lukács and Bakhtin level against the epic, Tucker observes a difference or disagreement that is analogous to the ones described in this chapter between Bataille and Sartre, and Nancy and Blanchot. Tucker reflects: 'The epiphobe, seeing the continence of epic from outside, is struck by the exclusiveness

on which its defining cultural fusion depends; the epiphile, reading instead from within, is struck by how inclusive the system is, and of how many different constituents' (16). Thus, the problem of totality that reaches a peak or impasse in Bataille's thought and late modernist literature is a problem that conceivably particularly impinges on the epic genre. It not only affects conceptions of 'community' and the subject or individual but also discourse and literary form. This becomes particularly apparent in Sartre's interpretation of *Inner Experience* as philosophical work, which neglects or misinterprets the literary qualities and open form of Bataille's text.

2. David Jones's *The Anathemata*

> Crossed the church of Saint-Roch. Before the giant, golden, hazy image of the sun, a movement of gaity, of childish humor and rapture. Further on, I looked at a wooden balustrade and I saw that the room was unkempt. I touched, on a whim, one of the banisters: the finger left a mark in the dust. (Bataille, *IE* 46)

2.1 Introduction

David Jones's *The Anathemata* was published in 1952 by Faber and Faber. It is, after *In Parenthesis*, Jones's second literary work and his last one that can be considered complete, even though its subtitle reads, 'fragments of an attempted writing'.[1] In its eight sections of varying lengths and its nearly 200 pages, *The Anathemata* travels through history and prehistory, and features a bewildering range of subjects and references. It is accordingly difficult to summarise the content or trajectory of the poem, but the poem can be described in terms of its aim. *The Anathemata* represents Jones's main response to what he perceived as a crisis in contemporary civilisation. Jones argues that contemporary technocracy, as he often calls it, dangerously neglects all activities that do not serve an immediate, quantifiable or profitable end, such as the arts or religion. This, he argues, resulted in 'The Break', which refers to a separation of the present from the past and thus to a loss of tradition, origin, or 'common background'. With *The Anathemata,* Jones attempts to counteract this development and to restore the continuity between past and present. In section two, the present chapter briefly considers the question of the genre of *The Anathemata* because critics' assessments of the form of Jones's poem and Jones's own statements concretely illustrate what the introduction to this dissertation has considered at a more general level, namely the hesitation and unease with which the genre of the epic is often encountered in the twentieth century. Problems of form, however, are

[1] After *The Anathemata*, Jones only published *The Sleeping Lord and Other Fragments* (1974). Posthumously, further fragments of Jones's poetry were published by Harman Grisewood and René Hague in *The Roman Quarry and Other Sequences*.

closely related to content, and this connection is based on Jones's cultural and aesthetic theory, which will be considered in section three. Jones's theory of culture, art and religion betrays his predilection for typology, and section four discusses the central role typology plays in *The Anathemata*. The loss of historical continuity and of a 'common background', to which 'The Break' refers, however, is inherently linked to the loss of a 'social continuity' in the present, and section five hence considers the relationships between the typological poetics of *The Anathemata* and notions of 'community' in Jones's poem. Section six, finally, summarises why *The Anathemata* could be considered a late modernist epic poem and establishes some connections between *The Anathemata* and Bataille's 'philosophy'.

2.2 The Question of Genre

Noticeably often literary critics are puzzled by the question of the genre of *The Anathemata*. While many agree that Jones's poem does not constitute an epic, they feel equally compelled to acknowledge its close ties to the epic tradition and repeatedly compare it to canonical epic poems. Already in the first book-length study of Jones's work, for example, David Blamires maintains that *The Anathemata* is not an epic poem because it lacks both a narrative and an epic hero, but he admits at the same time that the epic 'is, probably, after all, the genre to which [Jones's] work is most nearly akin' (195-6). Other critics have argued along nearly identical lines. Thus, Thomas Dilworth concedes in his extensive study of Jones's poetry *The Shape of Meaning in the Poetry of David Jones* that *The Anathemata* 'repeatedly identifies itself as epical', but he insists that since it lacks a narrative it is not an epic (*Shape of Meaning* 152). Similarly, Neil Corcoran identifies in Jones's work an 'epic quality' and an 'epic inclusiveness', but argues that Jones's poem is emphatically not an epic poem because its material is altogether too private, 'drawn not from any traditional "deposits", but from the accidents of David Jones's own life and circumstances' (104, 106, 110). Samuel Rees is slightly more cautious. He does not unconditionally describe Jones's poem as an epic, yet repeatedly compares it to the *Aeneid* and concludes his discussion of *The Anathemata* with the assertion that, '[i]n intention and scope Jones's poem is truly epic and might be said to rival in ambition Milton's attempt to "justify the ways of God to Men"' (97-8). In his commentary on *The*

Anathemata, W.H. Auden occupies an interestingly ambiguous position. While it is entitled, 'A Contemporary Epic', he cannily distances himself from this label in the concluding paragraph, merely stating that, 'Mr. Jones has set out to write a poem which *should* be at once epic, contemporary, and Christian' (71, my emphasis). Finally, Kathleen Henderson Staudt agrees that it might be challenging to label *The Anathemata* an epic. Yet, in comparison to the above critics, she takes a more assertive and daring position, arguing that if *The Anathemata* does not conform to the norms of epic,

> we need a better critical definition of modern epic, as distinguished from traditional epic, so we can talk about the kinds of qualities *The Anathemata* shares with works such as Ezra Pound's *The Cantos*, William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*, Charles Olson's *Maximus*, Basil Bunting's *Briggflatts*, and other longer poems of this century. (*Turn of Civilization* 191)

From his letters and essays, Jones emerges as a scrupulous and modest thinker. Plausibly, it is due to such character traits that the closest Jones comes to describing *The Anathemata* as epic is in a draft of a blurb he once sent to T. S. Eliot, in which he writes that his poem 'in a sort of way . . . presumes to be a *kind* of epic' (Jones qtd. in Dilworth, 'T.S. Eliot and David Jones' 74, emphasis and ellipsis in Dilworth). It would be difficult to surpass the hesitancy with which Jones here associates *The Anathemata* with the epic tradition. However, from the beginnings of the composition of his second long poem, Jones expresses doubts regarding the form of his work in progress, and these doubts, tellingly, concern aspects of his poem that distance it from the epic tradition. In a letter to Harman Grisewood dated 31 May 1938 and thus written around the time Jones started working on his second long poem, Jones complains:

> I don't know if any of it is any good. . . . But [*In Parenthesis*] was chained to a sequence of events which made it always a straightforward affair, whereas this effort is, I fear, about 'ideas', the *one* thing I have always disliked in poetry. . . . it seems all you can do is to ramble on about the things you think about on the whole all the time, and that is what I think this is about.

In the same letter, Jones further remarks:

> I see now why chaps write about 'separate' things in short poems – to wit, odes to nightingales and what not – but it seems to me that if you just talk about a lot of things as one thing follows on another, in the end

> you *may* have made a shape out of all of it. That is to say, that shape that all the mess makes in your mind.[2] (*Greatcoat* 86, emphases in original)

Jones is troubled by the fact that his poem is 'about ideas' and that it consequently lacks a narrative. This feature, as Jones remarks, distinguishes his work in progress from his first poem, *In Parenthesis*, but it also separates it from classical epics. However, in the very same letter Jones also betrays the encyclopaedic, all-inclusive and synthesising or totalising intention the present dissertation considers one of the central characteristics of the modern or modernist epic. Jones hopes that, eventually, he 'will have made a shape out of all of it', out of 'a lot of things'.

In 1938 and until 1945 Jones did not think of his second literary work as *The Anathemata* but he referred to it as *The Book of Balaam's Ass* (Jones, *Greatcoat* 86, 91, 117). Fragments of *Balaam's Ass* that considerably differ from *The Anathemata* have been published in *The Sleeping Lord and Other Fragments*, during his lifetime, and posthumously in *The Roman Quarry and Other Sequences*. However, Jones's correspondences between 1938 and 1945 clearly suggest that much of what he had initially written under the title *The Book of Balaam's Ass* eventually found its way into *The Anathemata* (*Greatcoat* 86–130). This impression is further corroborated in the 'Preface to *The Anathemata*', where Jones states that *The Anathemata*,

> had its beginnings in experiments made from time to time between 1938 and 1945. In a sense what was then written is another book. It has been rewritten, large portions excluded, others added, the whole rearranged and considerably changed more than once . . . . What is now printed represents parts, dislocated attempts, reshuffled and again rewritten intermittently between 1946 and 1951. ('Preface' 14-5)

Continuities between early drafts of sections of *The Anathemata* and the finished poem can be and have been studied thanks to manuscripts stored at the National Library of Wales (see, for instance, Goldpaugh; Miles). Interesting continuities, however, can also be found between Jones's 1938 letter to Grisewood and 'The Preface to *The Anathemata*'. In the 'Preface', written in 1951, just as in his 1938 letter, Jones is concerned with the task and problem of 'making a shape', as he acknowledges at the beginning that '. . . one is trying to make a shape out of the very things of which one is oneself made' ('Preface' 10). The notion of 'ideas', which, in

[2] In a letter sent to Grisewood roughly seven months later Jones reiterates his worries about the form of his new work and the fact that it is 'about "ideas"' (*Greatcoat* 89).

the letter, is coupled to the problem of 'making a shape', enters the preface later, when Jones compares the structure of the poem to the workings of his mind. He explains: 'In a sense the fragments that compose this book are about, or around and about, matters of all sorts which, by a kind of quasi-free association, are apt to stir in my mind at any time and as often as not "in the time of the Mass"' ('Preface' 31). The 'things' or 'ideas' that, in the letter, simply 'follow' each other here are organised by 'quasi-free association', and this perhaps, to some extent, solves the problem of achieving a 'shape'. However, more interesting is that in the 1938 letter Jones is embarrassed by the importance of 'ideas' to his poem, while the preface, written thirteen years later, can be read as one long argument on why, for Jones, no other kind of poetry is possible anymore. The reasons for this need to be sought in Jones's cultural and aesthetic theory, which is discussed in the next section.

In 1940, Jones gained interest in the *Aeneid* through the work of classics scholar W. F. Jackson Knight, and this specifically suggests that from early on in the composition of his second long poem Jones was inspired by the epic tradition. In a 1940 letter to Grisewood Jones praises Jackson Knight's *Cumaean Gates: A Reference of the Sixth Aeneid to the Initiation Pattern*, published in 1936. In particular, Jones values in Jackson Knight's interpretation and elucidation of the *Aeneid* how the latter 'combine[s] real slap-up scholarship with a nose for the pattern and eternal correspondences of this with that . . .' (*Greatcoat* 95). *Cumaean Gates* is informed by the Jungian notions of archetypes and the collective unconscious, which becomes already clear on the first page, where Jackson Knight explicitly refers to Jung and writes:

> The greatness and originality of a genius may even consist in power to find contacts farther back in time, beyond the reach of others, and to evoke latent stores of feelings and of meaning in the collective mind of the present, just because his power penetrates deeply into the unconscious memory of the race. That is how symbols and patterns have permanent vitality . . . (1)

This passage echoes with the last sentence of Jackson Knight's book, which Jones particularly liked: 'Vergil needed the old beliefs, in order to glean his brain; they had gone to make humanity of the present and the future, whose high prophet he was, bound to know and say what others could only be' (176). Jones writes to Grisewood: '. . . the final sentence about proper poets having "to *know* and *say* what others could

only *be*" – that's the thing in a nutshell – that's the cat's whiskers (I should not have thought it *possible* to express the truth about "the artist" so exactly and with such simplicity) – it's incredible and very exhilarating' (*Greatcoat* 95, emphases in original). Jones's substitution of 'Virgil' with 'proper poets' in Jackson Knight's sentence is telling. *Cumaean Gates*, Jones writes to Grisewood, 'bears very much on the thing I'm trying to write', and the partial quotation from Jackson Knight's book, indeed, suggests that with his second literary work, Jones tried to follow in the footsteps of Jackson Knight's Virgil (Jones, *Greatcoat* 95). By sounding and portraying 'the unconscious memory of [his] race', Jones aims at becoming the 'genius' for his time and culture that, according to Jackson Knight, Virgil had been for Augustan Rome. Indeed, an intriguing connection between Virgil, or rather Aeneas, and Jones, between the *Aeneid* and *The Anathemata*, can be gleaned form the very beginning of Jones's poem. The first page of the poem opens with the title 'The Anathemata', which is followed by an epigraph in Latin, written in capital letters as if it was engraved in stone: 'TESTE DAVID CVM SIBYLLA' (*A* 49). This, René Hague explains, is a quotation of *Dies Irae*, 'the Sequence (a poem sung or said immediately before the Gospel) in masses for the dead . . .' (1). Dilworth translates the Latin as 'as David and the Sibyl testify', and he adds that 'David' is 'the psalmist prophet', while the Sibyl is 'the Sibly of Cumae' (*Reading* 120). The Sibyl of Cumae, Jackson Knight summarises at the beginning of his book, prophesies Aeneas's future and guides him to the world of the dead (2-3). Considering that Jones, according to his letter to Grisewood, is primarily interested in how Jackson Knight reveals 'the pattern and eternal correspondences of this with that', and how Virgil, according to Jackson Knight, is capable of '[finding] contacts farther back in time, beyond the reach of others, and to evoke latent stores of feelings and of meaning in the collective mind of the present', 'David' in the Latin epigraph certainly also refers to David Jones himself, which once again testifies to his epic ambitions. Like Aeneas, who descended into the underworld with the help of the Sibyl, and like Virgil in the *Aeneid* according to Jackson Knight, Jones aims at re-establishing a connection with the past. Why such a task has become a necessity Jones explains in the preface to his poem, which summarises much of his cultural and aesthetic theory. However, before turning to such questions, it is interesting to

consider that Jones is not the first to follow Aeneas's footsteps into the underworld. In *Inferno*, Dante embarked on the same journey, with Virgil as guide. Thus, from the very beginning, even before the first line of the poem itself, *The Anathemata* inscribes itself unmistakably within an epic tradition.

2.3 Jones's Cultural and Aesthetic Theory

In his interpretation of *The Anathemata*, Neil Corcoran insightfully remarks that Jones's poem needs to be understood as Jones's 'ultimate response' to what he considered a profound crisis in contemporary civilisation (2). Thus, *The Anathemata* is inherently related to Jones's theory of art, religion, history and culture, which he chiefly develops in his essays. Some of these essays were published collectively in 1959 in a volume entitled *Epoch and Artist* and others posthumously, in 1978, in *The Dying Gaul and Other Writings*. A considerable number of the essays published in these two collections were written during the time Jones worked on *The Anathemata* or in the years immediately following its publication, and in the preface to *Epoch and Artist* Jones accordingly presents the essays as part of an overarching project or interest that includes *The Anathemata* ('Preface by the Author' 17). Since *The Anathemata* represents a reaction to certain circumstances, some of the difficulties the poem encounters constitute its *raison d'être*. In the preface to *The Anathemata*, Jones presents these difficulties as the loss of a 'common background', which, he argues for instance, made it necessary to supplement his poem with countless and often substantial footnotes. He writes:

> . . . we are not all equally familiar with the deposits. . . . There have been culture-phases when the maker and the society in which he lived shared an enclosed and common background, where the terms of references were common to all. It would be an affectation to pretend that such was our situation today. . . . I have, therefore, glossed the text in order to open up 'unshared backgrounds' . . . ('Preface' 14).

Thus, in general terms, *The Anathemata* is concerned with the retrieval of a 'common background'. In fact, Jones believes that all and everything 'man'[3] does is

[3] Jones, Williams and Olson consistently use 'man' and third person masculine pronouns to refer to humankind, and they also always think of the poet or artist as 'man'. It would have been a distortion to use terms such as 'humanity' or 'humankind' in place of generic 'man', or to use gender-neutral pronouns to refer to

related – 'If one is making a painting of daffodils what is *not* instantly involved?', he asks rhetorically a little earlier in the preface – but that such connections have become ever more obliterated ('Preface' 10, emphasis in original). In the preface, he argues that in the nineteenth century, this weakening of connections, or this receding of a 'common background', reached a critical point, which he identifies as 'The Break'. Thereafter something important had been lost, something quintessentially human. Jones explains:

> . . . in the nineteenth century, Western Man moved across a rubicon which, if as unseen as the 38th Parallel, seems to have been as definitive as the Styx. . . . But it was not the memory-effacing Lethe that was crossed; and consequently, although man has found much to his liking, advantage, and considerable wonderment, he has still retained ineradicable longings for, as it were, the farther shore. ('Preface' 16)

In the preface to *In Parenthesis*, Jones's poem on his experiences as soldier during the First World War, Jones illustrates this change with reference to the inventions of modern warfare, as he writes: 'We feel a rubicon has been passed between striking with a hand weapon as men used to do and loosing poison from the sky as we do ourselves. We doubt the decency of our own inventions, and are certainly in terror of their possibilities' ('Preface to *In Parenthesis*' 36-7). Erik Tonning primarily associates Jones's 'sense of a thoroughgoing civilizational break' with his traumatic war experiences, which is certainly plausible from a biographical and retrospective point of view (Tonning 34). Theoretically, however, the First World War as individual 'event' cannot account for 'The Break', if only because Jones locates the latter already in the nineteenth century.

Rather, Jones's notion of 'The Break' is closely related to a distinction on which his whole theory of art, religion, culture and history is based, namely to the dichotomy between the 'utile' and the 'gratuitous'.[4] The 'utile', according to Jones, refers to 'man's functional contrivances and to the contrivances of animals and the processes of nature' ('The Utile' 180). It refers to the works of man to the extent that they serve a defined purpose or are made to achieve a specific goal, and it has

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'artist' or 'poet'. However, the present dissertation distances itself from this practice through the use of quotation marks in such cases.

[4] It is difficult to determine the precise origin or source of this distinction, and different critics accordingly trace it back to different influences or stages of Jones's life. See, among others, Miles 13, Schwartz 304–6, and Robichaud 105.

consequently chiefly one criterion, as Dilworth explains, namely 'efficiency' ('Antithesis and Unity in The Anathemata' 68; 'T.S. Eliot and David Jones' 78). The 'gratuitous' or the 'extra-utile', conversely, includes those works that do not serve a specific end, that are, in Jones's words, 'intransitive' and only 'done for a sign' ('Art and Sacrament' 149; 'Use and Sign' 178). Jones maintains that the 'utile' and the 'gratuitous' are opposing tendencies that coexist at all times and in all societies, are always reconciled in 'man', and in any given culture or civilisation reach an equilibrium ('Art and Sacrament' 176; 'Use and Sign' 177–9; 'Art in Relation to War' 145, 157). In any given culture or civilisation, that is, except his own, for contemporary technocratic civilisation, Jones believes, excessively and to an unprecedented degree fosters the 'utile' at the expense of the 'gratuitous' ('Art and Sacrament' 144 and 173; 'Art in Relation to War' 157; 'Notes on the 1930s' 44-5; 'Past and Present' 139). This complete dominance of the 'utile' is coextensive with 'The Break', and insofar as Jones dates its beginnings to the nineteenth century, it can be identified with the emergence and growth of post-industrial technology and science. It is illuminating, in this respect, that, in the prefaces to his two poems quoted above, Jones associates 'The Break', on the one hand, with progress but, on the other, also with awe and even outright 'terror'.

'The Break' has various, closely interrelated consequences. Firstly, it denotes the separation of the present from a past tradition, from a cultural deposit or even origin. Thus it signifies the historical isolation of the present, but also the dissolution of a cultural tradition, the disappearance of connections or continuities between different sources or materials that together constituted the foundation of a culture. Secondly, as a consequence of the loss of such a 'common background', 'The Break' also refers to the isolation of the individual in the present. Jones's contemporary technocratic civilisation is a society of individuals. He observes, for instance, that if artists manage to create anything at all in these adverse times it tends to be '. . . idiosyncratic and personal in expression and experimental in technique, intimate and private rather than public and corporate', and he maintains that this 'tradition of the individual artist . . . could only *be* in our sort of civilization' ('Muses' 98 and 100, emphasis in original). Thirdly, 'The Break' threatens the individual human being itself, for as its consequence, the faculties of the 'gratuitous' and the 'utile', which

previously had been ‘married’ in ‘man’, are ‘divorced’ (‘Art and Sacrament’ 176; ‘Use and Sign’ 179). This stultification of the human being is reflected in the nearly exclusively utile works of contemporary technocracy, which Jones accordingly describes as ‘sub-human’ in quality (‘The Utile’ 181-2). These ‘breaks’ that result from, or constitute, ‘The Break’ represent the difficulties with which *The Anathemata* tries to come to terms and they are the reason why Jones’s poem could not have been narrative, and could only have been ‘about ideas’. His own ‘ideas’ were all with which Jones was left. Beyond these artistic challenges, however, the reduction of human works and activities to the ‘utile’, the ‘sub-human’, represents a serious threat to humanity as a whole. Jones writes: ‘If the “significatory” were wholly eliminated in every detail of our daily lives . . . . there would *be* no “us”. We would appear as some genus other, if not some other species’ (‘Use and Sign’ 184, emphasis in original). ‘Significatory’, here, is a synonym for ‘gratuitous’, for Jones defines the ‘gratuitous’ as everything that is ‘done for a sign’ (‘Use and Sign’ 178).

This relationship between ‘mankind’ and the ‘gratuitous’ is of central interest and requires further elucidation. The ‘gratuitous’ is an exceedingly broad category, which becomes particularly evident when Jones describes it as what is ‘done for a sign’. By this, he means that unlike self-sufficient, purpose- and end-directed activities, the meaning or significance of the ‘gratuitous’ does not lie in the activities themselves but somewhere else, somewhere beyond them. Jones repeatedly provides short catalogues of ‘signs’ to illustrate their diversity and ubiquity. Thus he writes, for example: ‘We stroke cats, pluck flowers, tie ribands, assist at the manual acts of religion, make some kind of love, write poems, paint pictures . . .’ (‘Preface to *In Parenthesis*’ 37; see also ‘Art and Sacrament’ 166-7; ‘Use and Sign’ 182–4). Yet, heterogeneous and widespread as Jones’s ‘signs’ may be, in his writings, ‘art’ and ‘religion’ are privileged instances of the ‘gratuitous’ and they accordingly significantly determine its meaning and connotation. Jones came in touch with Catholicism as a soldier during the First World War, and he converted to it in 1921 at Ditchling Common under the influence of Eric Gill (Alldritt 34-5 and 52). After the war and until 1921, Jones attended the Westminster School of Art, and Jones’s appreciation of the close relationships between art, religion and the ‘gratuitous’, as he maintains himself, can be traced back to these years of his life (‘Art and

Sacrament' 171). The influence of Jones's Catholicism on his cultural and aesthetic theory can be witnessed in the repeated identification of the ultimate significance of the 'gratuitous' with the divine. Thus, he writes for instance in 'Art and Sacrament', an extensive essay in which he is concerned precisely with this relationship between art and religion: 'A sign must be significant of something, hence of some "reality", so of something "good", so of something that is "sacred". That is why I think that the notion of the sign implies the sacred' ('Art and Sacrament' 157). Likewise, Jones's association of the 'gratuitous' with the human is based on his Christian faith. He maintains that 'man' is unavoidably tied to the 'gratuitous', because 'man' is 'a rational animal with a supernatural end' ('Art and Sacrament' 145; see also 147). In other words, corporeality associates 'man' with 'animals' and distinguishes him from 'spirits' or 'angels', while 'his' soul distinguishes 'him' from the former and likens 'him' to the latter ('Art and Sacrament' 166-7). The material and immaterial dimensions that coincide in 'man' also coexist in the 'gratuitous', in material signs, or activities involving material signs, with immaterial significance. Jones reflects that, according to some theologians, the creation of the world itself was a 'gratuitous' act and that art, that is 'gratuitous' creations, consequently 'reflects' the creation of the world ('Art and Sacrament' 153). Yet, through their 'gratuitous' creations, human beings even more immediately 'reflect' Jesus, God become man. In this respect, Jones was particularly influenced by Jesuit theologian Maurice de la Taille, whose work he encountered at Ditchling (Schwartz 344). De la Taille maintains that the Last Supper is an 'unbloody' immolation that is completed with the 'bloody' one on the Cross, and that the Last Supper and the Crucifixion together, consequently, constitute one sacrifice (231-2). The Eucharist, although distinct from the Last Supper and the Crucifixion with regard to the individual celebration of the sacrament, is part of this sacrifice with respect to the sacrificial victim, Christ, for the bread *is* the Body of Christ (de la Taille 236). In other words, the transubstantiation instituted in the Last Supper, from a Catholic perspective, represents the paradigmatic instance of sign-making, the paradigmatic 'gratuitous' act. This dimension of the Last Supper comes to the fore in a sentence by de la Taille of which Jones was particularly fond, for de la Taille maintains that with the transubstantiation, Christ 'placed himself in the order of signs . . .' (212). Jones

perceives an 'analogy' – and he is exceedingly careful to describe this relationship as nothing more than an 'analogy' – between the transubstantiation of the Eucharist and 'the whole gamut of "making"', that is, art and all kinds of 'gratuitous' activities ('Art and Sacrament' 171).

Yet, Jones's Catholic approach to the 'gratuitous' and the nature of 'mankind' is two-edged. The close relationship Jones establishes between 'sign', 'art' and 'sacrament' does not exclusively result in a 'religious' interpretation of the 'gratuitous', but, conversely, also in more 'secular' notions of 'sacrament' and 'religion'. In fact, Jones entertains an exceedingly broad understanding of 'religion' and 'sacrament' that, on the one hand, enables him to subsume all kinds of human 'making' under these headings, but, on the other hand, results in the suspension of the strictly theological meanings of these terms (see 'Art and Sacrament' 155, 157, 160-1). Throughout his essays, indeed, Jones frequently uses 'sign' and 'sacrament', 'significatory' and 'sacramental' synonymously and absolutely equivalently. Jones's theory of art, culture, religion and history, thus, betrays two competing perspectives: a Christian, or more precisely Catholic, perspective according to which the 'gratuitous', which defines 'mankind', is based on the Passion, and a secular, 'anthropological' perspective, according to which the Sacrament, and religion more broadly, is one manifestation among others of the intrinsic relationship between the human and the 'gratuitous'. The anthropological perspective is emphasised, for example, in the following passage of 'Art and Sacrament', in which Jones distances himself from theology:

> . . . theologians, both Protestant and Catholic, *take it for granted* that a sign-making of some sort was initiated in the Upper Room and that that sign-making was, in some sense, meant to be repeated. So that our query is anterior to, or apart from, those strictly theological questions. It is, in fact, an anthropological rather than a theological question, for we are not here considering the truth about the Sacrament but are noting only that *men make sacraments*. ('Art and Sacrament' 163, emphases in original)

Sign-making, or the making of 'sacraments', here is primarily related to an inquiry into 'human nature' ('Art and Sacrament' 145). A similar subordination of religious to secular interests can be observed in a passage of the 'Preface', where Jones writes about 'The Break': 'When in the 'twenties we spoke of this Break it was always with reference to some manifestation of this dilemma *vis-à-vis* the arts – and of religion

also, *but only in so far as religion has to do with signs, just as have the arts*' ('Preface' 16, my emphasis). Thus, Jones presents the central role religion plays in his thought primarily as derivative of his interest in the 'gratuitous' more broadly.

The duality of a Christian or Catholic and a secular or 'anthropological' perspective is of central importance to the ensuing interpretation and discussion of *The Anathemata*. However, it is also of significance beyond the argument of the present chapter or even dissertation, because Jones scholars so far have tended to approach Jones's works chiefly through his Catholicism, and there is consequently no work to date that adequately considers Jones's secular or 'anthropological' interests in the 'gratuitous', including religion. In *At the Turn of a Civilization: David Jones and Modern Poetics*, Staudt illustrates this well, for she, indeed, challenges the interpretations of critics like Dilworth, who portray Jones, among other things, as 'an apologist for Christianity'. Staudt maintains that 'Jones's poetics rests . . . on his belief that sign-making is a fundamental human impulse, and that this basic quality of human nature is expressed in the works of poets and artists', and she thus momentarily relativises the importance of Christianity to Jones's work. Yet, only one paragraph later the centrality of Christianity is restored, because Staudt remarks that 'Jones's order of signs is tied ultimately to a Christian transcendental order and is defined in terms taken from the Catholic Christian tradition' (*Turn of Civilization* 28; see also 85-6). In the recently published *Divine Cartographies*, W. David Soud illustrates this tendency even better. Soud observes, for example, that Jones's theory of culture 'expresses a more ecumenical, even humanistic, perspective than some of his associates would share . . .', that 'Jones expands the definition of sacrament beyond the confines of Catholic doctrine in order to formulate his own aesthetic', and that '[t]he range and force of Jones's sacramental analogies [the analogy between the Eucharist and 'gratuitous' works or activities] blur the boundary between the sacred and the profane' (105, 108, 117; see also 113). Yet, despite all these remarks that correctly qualify the centrality of Christianity in Jones's work, Soud establishes at the beginning of his discussion that 'to frame *The Anathemata* as anything other than a deeply Catholic poem is to do violence to the work' (99). These conflicting statements beautifully illustrate, firstly, the tension between a 'Catholic' and a 'secular' perspective that can be located in much criticism and also

in Jones's writings themselves, and secondly, the readiness with which the Catholic perspective or interpretation is capable of absorbing the 'anthropological' or more secular perspectives or interpretations. Soud illustrates this exceptionally clearly, for he even observes that 'critics of *The Anathemata* have tended to gravitate towards one or the other of two approaches . . .', which '. . . partly reflects the polarity of more Christian and more anthropological readings of the text' (124). Yet, rather than exploring this divide, he attempts to join it by arguing that '[t]here is in fact no real conflict between those readings; they simply emphasise different levels of what is in fact a binary structure', and it is not surprising which side of this structure eventually presides. Soud presents the 'binary structure' of Jones's poem as 'juxtaposition of a narrative, "diachronic" superstructure and a theological, "synchronic" deep structure [that] serves a definite purpose: to recover a sense of history as theophany by mapping the relation between historical time and eternity' (130). Thus, the conflict between 'Christian' and 'anthropological' interpretations is not really a conflict at all because the secular, 'narrative, "diachronic" superstructure' is absorbed by the Christian, 'theological, "synchronic" deep structure', as history becomes 'theophany', 'eternity' swallows 'historical time', the profane is given a religious interpretation, and individual 'gratuitous' acts and artefacts are understood as imperfect, distant repetitions of the transubstantiation. Soud establishes and describes a classic, dialectical relationship between the 'anthropological' and the 'Christian' readings of *The Anathemata*, between 'time' and 'eternity', which is sublated into the 'Christian', 'eternal' dimension. In this regard, the whole conflict or problem described here, the initial undecidability between a religious and a secular perspective and the eventual reassertion or return of the former, is reminiscent of the problem of late modernism, of its reliance on conceptions of 'totality' despite itself, which Mellors recognises, or of the return of 'universalism' that Esty describes.

However, this is not to say that Soud and all critics who primarily consider Jones as Christian artist are wrong, but that they neglect an important dimension of Jones's work. One chief reason for this neglect is undoubtedly that Jones himself frequently subordinates the secular to the religious, as will be seen shortly, and why he does so can easily be guessed. Once converted, Jones remained a Catholic for the rest of his life and many of his intimate friends were Catholics, as well. Unreservedly

comparing art and 'signs' generally to the sacred and religious, or, worse even, subsuming religion together with other 'signs' under the general heading of the 'gratuitous', would amount to blasphemy. Hence, Jones insists in 'Art and Sacrament', for example, that the relationship he establishes between the 'gratuitous' works of 'man' and the Eucharist is merely one of 'analogy' ('Art and Sacrament' 170-1, 175; see also 'Democracy' 95-6). However, the caution with which Jones reiterates this argument betrays his awareness of the slipperiness of the terrain. Just as Jones relates religion to the 'gratuitous', he also frequently establishes connections between Christianity and pagan mythology, which can become problematic for the same reasons. It is telling, in this regard, that Staudt observes how Jones's use and understanding of mythology caused a distinct 'uneasiness' in his friend and fellow Catholic René Hague (*Turn of Civilization* 85).

The dichotomy between the 'gratuitous' and the 'utile' is of central importance to the whole of *The Anathemata* and it accordingly repeatedly surfaces throughout the poem. Section four, entitled 'Redriff', for example, presents an exchange between a sea captain and Ed Bradshaw, Jones's maternal grandfather, who worked as 'mast-maker and ship-wright' (Hague 147). The sea captain, representing the 'utile', asks Bradshaw to carry out some repairs and to do so swiftly, for which he would be financially rewarded (*A* 118). To this Bradshaw reacts with indignation and replies that he would not rush and consequently compromise the quality of his work for anything (*A* 118–21). Bradshaw, Dilworth writes, 'embodies the type of the artist' (*Reading* 142). Similarly, 'Keel, Ram, Stauros', section six, reflects on how one and the same piece of wood could be used as ram or as cross, that is, to 'utile' or 'gratuitous' ends, respectively (*A* 176–9; see Dilworth, *Reading* 159). Yet, the 'gratuitous', particularly its intimate bond to 'mankind', plays a particularly prominent role in the first section of Jones's poem, 'Rite and Fore-Time'. For a considerable part of 'Rite and Fore-Time', *The Anathemata* enquires into the earliest appearance of human beings, and it fundamentally links this to the earliest instances of 'gratuitous' artefacts. A footnote explains that, '[t]he first examples of visual art so far (1940) discovered date from about 20,000 BC', and Jones's poem accordingly wonders: 'Twenty millennia (and what millennia more?) / Since he became / man master-of-plastic' (*A* 59n1, 59). This represents the beginning

of a small investigation that starts around the year 20,000 BC and moves further into the past. The first point of reference is the Venus of Willendorf, as *The Anathemata* asks:

> Who were his *gens*-men or had he no *Hausname* yet
> no *nomen* for his *fecit*-mark
> the Master of the Venus?
> whose man-hands god-handled the Willendorf stone
> before they unbound the last glaciation . . . (*A* 59, italics in original)

'Whose man-hands god-handled the Willendorf stone', Hague remarks, is 'as clear an affirmation as one could wish of the reflection in human artefacture of the divine creation' (46). At least as interesting, however, is that the poem is here also concerned with the question of 'community', which rises with the emergence of the 'gratuitous' and thus of 'mankind'. With the crossing of the boundary that separates 'mankind' from animals or with the movement from the prehuman to the human, concepts such as tribe, race or family become pertinent, and the poem consequently assumes the existence of some sort of 'community' to which 'the Master of the Venus' belonged, whether a 'clan' or 'tribe' as '*Hausname*' would imply or a larger formation, such as a 'race', 'nation' or 'people', as the Latin '*gens*' would suggest. 'Who else?', *The Anathemata* then asks, that is, who else was an early 'master-of-plastic'? In response to this question, it moves to the inhabitants of the Lascaux caves, who, a footnote adds, lived roughly around the same time as the 'Master of the Venus':

> And see how they run, the juxtaposed forms,
> brighting the vaults of Lascaux; how the linear is wedded
> to volume, how they do, within, in an unbloody manner,
> under the forms of brown haematite and black manganese
> on the graved lime-face, what is done, without,
> far on the windy tundra
> at the kill
> that the kindred may have life. (*A* 60)

While the previous section alluded to the analogy between human and divine creation, here the analogy between human 'sign-making' and the Sacrament plays a central role, as Jones unmistakably alludes to de la Taille when he considers how the Lascaux paintings portray in an 'unbloody manner' what happens 'without'. Now, 'Rite and Fore-Time' recedes further back in time to 'Neanderthal man of 40 to

60,000 BC', as it reflects on how they left behind signs of religious rituals even though anthropologists do not regard them 'as direct ancestors of ourselves' (*A* 61n2). No other, even earlier, example of 'gratuitous' 'sign-making' is considered after this, but the poem ponders in more general terms how far into the past it might be possible to go and still to encounter evidence of the 'gratuitous' and consequently of the presence of 'mankind':

> The mimes deploy:
> anthropoid
> anthropoi.
> Who knows at what precise phase, or from what floriate green-room, the Master of Harlequinade, himself not made, maker of sequence and permutation in all things made, called us from our co-laterals out, to dance the Funeral Games of the Great Mammalia, as, long, long, long, before, these danced out the Dinosaur? (*A* 63)

'[T]he world's a stage', Jones's poem reads a couple of lines earlier, and, as Hague observes, this metaphor is here continued (52). The question asked here is the same as before: when did human beings appear? When did 'anthropoid' (human-like) become 'anthropoi' (men)? When did God, 'the Master of Harlequinade, himself not made, maker of sequence and permutation of all things made', single out some creatures and endow on them the capacity for 'gratuitous' creation, thus making them 'human'? '[D]ance' and 'Funeral Games', here, of course, are again instances of the 'gratuitous'. Even though *The Anathemata* has now reached the uncertain beginnings of human evolution, it travels even further back in time and describes the evolution of the earth, the formation of rivers and mountains (*A* 66–72). Thus, it moves from 'Rite' to 'Fore-Time', and it does so, it becomes clear later, only to arrive at the beginning of time, and with this to arrive at what conditions the 'gratuitous' from the very beginning. Christ is now presented as 'the New Light' that shines '[f]rom before all time' (*A* 73):

> As down among the palaeo-zoe
> he brights his ichthyic sign
> so brights he the middle-zone
> where the uterine forms
> are some beginnings of his creature.
> Brighter yet over the mammal'd Pliocene
> for these continuings
> certainly must praise him:
> How else, in his good time

should the amorous Silvy
to her sweetest dear
her fairest bosom have shown?

How else we?
or he, himself?
whose name is called He-with-us
because he did not abhor the uterus. . . . (*A* 74-5)

The 'ichthyic sign' is 'the Christian symbol of the fish', as Hague explains, and it is, thus, the sign of Jesus. This sign, or the 'New Light' as which Jesus is figured here, shines from before all time, from before the Paleozoic Era, and it shines also through the Mesozoic Era ('the middle-zone') and the Tertiary Era ('the mammal'd Pliocene') (Hague 72-3). If it was not for the presence of this light from before all time, the poem rhetorically asks, how else would it be possible to act 'gratuitously', like 'the amorous Silvy' and her 'dear', who woo each other? More fundamentally even, how else could 'mankind' be, how else could Jesus have become? This argument, which is developed over about seventeen pages and reaches a considerable degree of complexity through the countless examples and references with which it is embellished, Jones advances in 'Art and Sacrament' in much simpler terms, as he states: '. . .what was accomplished on the Tree of the Cross presupposes the sign-world and looks back to foreshadowing rites and arts of meditation and conjugation stretching back for tens of thousands of years in actual pre-history' (168).

Thus, the 'gratuitous' joins all of 'mankind' from its earliest beginnings to the present, while the 'utile' reduces, impoverishes, separates and divides, and results in 'The Break'.[5] Jones's association of the 'gratuitous' with continuity and synthesis also informs his conception of 'art'. More than once, he reflects, for example, that at the root of the term 'art' might lie the notion of 'fitting together', and in the preface to *The Anathemata*, he similarly maintains that '[t]he arts abhor any loppings off of meanings or emptyings out, any lessening of the totality of connotation, any loss of recession and thickness through' ('Autobiographical Talk' 29-0; 'Art and Sacrament' 152; 'Preface' 24). This raises the question of how *The Anathemata*, in its times of adversity, is meant to recover or re-establish a continuity with the past and consequently also a social 'continuity' between people in the present. In 'Art and

[5] Jones further comments on the relationship between temporal or historical continuity and sign-making in 'Use and Sign' (see especially 181).

Sacrament', Jones repeatedly explains that 'signs', 'show forth', 're-present' and 'recall'. He writes, for instance:

> . . . if, as we aver, man's form-making has in itself the nature of a sign, then these formal realities . . . must, in some sense or other, be *signa*. But of what can they possibly be significant? What do they show forth, re-present, recall or, in any sense, reflect? It would seem that the forms . . . [shown] forth can be typic only of that archetypal form-making and ordering implicit in the credal clause *per quem omnia facta sunt*. ('Art and Sacrament' 159-0, italics in original; see also 163, 164, 174)

Jones here suggests, again, that human 'sign-making' ultimately 'reflects' divine creation, the creation by the One '*per quem omnia facta sunt*', and 'signs', that is, gratuitous acts and artefacts, consequently, establish connections or continuities to these very first of acts. However, they also establish relationships to other 'signs', which, in turn, also ultimately refer to the divine creation. The Last Supper and the Eucharist, as has been explained, are particularly significant instances of such 'signs', and Jones reinforces the relationship between the 'gratuitous' and the Last Supper or the Eucharist precisely by presenting gratuitous acts or activities as signs that 'show forth', 're-present' and 'recall'. This becomes particularly clear in a footnote of *The Anathemata*, in which Jones quotes Gregory Dix, who explains the precise significance of 'anamnesis'. 'Anamnesis' is the kind of 'remembering' to which Christ instructs his disciples during the Last Supper, when he tells them: 'This is my body which is given for you, this do in remembrance of me' (Luke 22:19). Gregory Dix, as quoted by Jones, writes:

> It (anamensis) is not quite easy to represent accurately in English, words like 'remembrance' or 'memorial' having for us a connotation of something *absent* which is only mentally recollected. But in the scriptures of both the Old and the New Testament *anamnesis* and the cognate verb have a sense of 'recalling' or 're-presenting' before God an event in the past so that it becomes *here and now operative by its effects*. (Dix qtd. in *A* 205n1, emphases in The Anathemata)

The 'recalling' and 're-presenting' Jones associates with 'signs' generally can be found in this quotation, and the full extent of the 'analogy' – to use Jones's word – between the 'gratuitous' and the transubstantiation thus also becomes clear. In the Eucharist, Christ is 'recalled' or 're-presented', that is, according to Catholic doctrine, literally made present again, and the Eucharist consequently does more than refer to something else. It brings back, 'shows forth', another reality. Jones,

Corcoran observes with respect to *The Anathemata*, '. . . wishes an analogous intensity for the recallings that comprise his own work' (86). Thus, is it possible to answer, in theory at least, the question of how *The Anathemata* is meant to re-establish the lost connection with the past: it is meant to bring back the past or the lost 'common background', to re-present it, to 'show [it] forth'. It is significant, in this respect, that Jones writes in the preface to his poem, as quoted above, that he wants to '*open up* "unshared backgrounds" . . .' ('Preface' 14, my emphasis). This 'opening up' is an act of revelation. Later in the same preface Jones writes: 'My intention has not been to "edify" . . . nor, I think, to persuade, but there is indeed an intention to "uncover"; which is what "mystery" does, for though at root "mystery" implies a closing, all "mysteries" are meant to disclose, to show forth something' ('Preface' 33). The 'uncovering' or 'showing forth' of 'mysteries' Jones describes here is the same as the 'showing forth', 'recalling' or 're-presenting' of the Sacrament and it is thus also closely related to the workings of 'signs'.

Jones's invocation of 'mysteries' in the preface is intriguing, not only because it indicates the kind of activity involved in the 'uncovering' but also because it suggests much about that which is 'uncovered'. Yet, the above quotation is, arguably, as close to mysticism as Jones comes. He feels evidently uneasy in proximity to this notion, as the consistently applied quotation marks indicate, and yet he still refers to it. In his discussion of *The Anathemata*, Soud repeatedly and convincingly portrays Jones as a markedly exoteric artist. He maintains that Jones 'considered mystical aspirations spiritually dangerous for all but the extraordinarily graced or gifted, and doubted that he or anyone he knew could understand or achieve mystical consciousness' (121). In a letter dated 1927 and quoted by Soud, Jones writes: 'I loathe the word mystic – it might mean anything – anyway, I mean by it here that human being who is more *directly* in union with God than are most of us – for most, of course, rightly and properly, have to be content with loving God *through* created things' (*Greatcoat* 45; see also Soud 121). Jones believes, then, that 'union with God' is less likely achieved internally than through the 'gratuitous', and specifically through that in 'gratuitous' acts or artefacts which transcends the individual. Hence also, Jones advocates 'objectivity' in art. '[T]he workman must be dead to himself while engaged upon the work', he writes in the preface to *The*

Anathemata, for example, 'otherwise we have that sort of "self-expression" which is as undesirable in the painter or the writer as in the carpenter, the cantor, the half-back, or the cook' ('Preface' 12). Soud maintains that Jones's ideal of artistic objectivity derives from his engagement with the thought of Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain, with which Jones initially came in touch while living at Ditchling (Soud 107-8, 134).[6] That which transcends the individual in 'gratuitous' acts or artefacts, and consequently that through which the individual who cultivates the 'gratuitous' might be able to achieve a 'union with God', is the immaterial dimension of 'signs'. In *Art and Scholasticism*, in relation to 'art', Maritain identifies this immaterial dimension with 'beauty'. He writes, for instance: 'The beautiful is what gives joy, not all joy, but joy in knowledge: not the joy peculiar to the act of knowing, but a joy super-abounding and overflowing from such an act because of the object known. If a thing exalts and delights the soul by the bare fact of its being given to the intuition of the soul, it is good to apprehend, it is beautiful' (19). According to Maritain, Rowan Williams maintains, art exposes 'the "excess" of the material environment', and this 'excess' is here identified with beauty (53). Beauty exceeds the individual work of art and results in the beholder in an excessive joy, 'a joy super-abounding and overflowing', a joy that transports the soul. This 'excessive', transcending and transcendental beauty, of course, is eventually identified with God, who, Maritain writes, 'is beautiful by Himself and in Himself, absolutely beautiful' (25). In 'Art and Sacrament', Jones describes the 'beauty' of art, similarly to Maritain, as 'an objective beauty which the activity of art has made to shine out . . .' ('Art and Sacrament' 152-3). One of the artists who, according to Jones, best succeed in making such objective beauty 'shine out' is James Joyce, who was, like Jones, influenced by Thomist philosophy. Jones writes: 'It was from the *particular* that [Joyce] made the *general* shine out. That is to say he was

[6] In 1923 St. Dominic's Press at Ditchling published the first English translation of Maritain's *Art et Scholastique* under the title *The Philosophy of Art*. This translation became an integral part of the daily life of the guild and for many of its members nearly 'a second bible' (Clayton 27; MacCarthy 161). In 1930, a second translation of *Art et Scholastique* was published, which is entitled *Art and Scholasticism*. According to Bernard Bergonzi, it is based on 'a revised and expanded version of the French original' (89). The following references are to the 1930 translation because it is better accessible than *The Philosophy of Art*.

quintessentially "incarnational"' ('Notes on the 1930s' 46, emphases in original; see also 'James Joyce's Dublin' 304). Maritain's notion of a transcendental, 'absolute' beauty and the model of Joyce, who, according to Jones, succeeds in conveying it through 'the particular' influenced Jones's poetics. 'It is axiomatic that the function of the artist is to make things *sub specie aeternitatis*', he writes in the preface, and adds that '. . . only what is actually loved and known can be seen *sub specie aeternitatis*' ('Preface' 24).

It is impossible to determine objectively whether *The Anathemata* succeeds in retrieving a 'common background' and thus in re-establishing a continuity with the past by 're-*presenting*', rather than just representing, it – whether, in other words, *The Anathemata* ultimately succeeds in 'showing forth' universal beauty or in letting the 'general' 'shine out'. Whether or not, or how, *The Anathemata* is successful in these respects cannot be objectively investigated because, similarly to the transubstantiation, this entails a leap of faith or a *volo*, to use the notion Connor introduced in the context of Bataille's 'mysticism'. However, it is possible to examine the manner in which *The Anathemata re*presents the past and how, in doing so, it establishes continuities between the present and the past, and between 'signs'. In the preface, as already quoted, Jones describes the manner in which *The Anathemata* establishes links and connections as 'a kind of quasi-free association' ('Preface' 31). With this rather vague assertion, however, he downplays the highly systematic poetics of his work, which is above all typological.

2.4 The Typological Poetics of *The Anathemata*

Typology, also called 'figuralism', was initially developed by the Church Fathers.[7] It was believed that certain episodes or persons of the Old Testament, so-called 'types' or 'figures', predict and are fulfilled in episodes or persons of the New Testament, which are termed 'antitypes' or 'fulfilments'. However, soon after its beginnings the horizon of typological interpretations was extended beyond the two Testaments. At least from the Middle Ages onwards prefigurations of biblical events and persons were located in classical history and mythology (Ziolkowski 348), while already St.

[7] As Staudt remarks, two particularly useful discussions of typology are Auerbach's 'Figuralism' and Frye's *Great Code* (Staudt, *Turn of Civilization* 196n13).

Augustine, according to Erich Auerbach, posits antitypes to types discovered in the Bible in the present or future. With regard to the transformation of typology from a hermeneutic approach to the Bible to an open-ended interpretation of history, Auerbach writes:

> . . . in certain earlier writers but more definitely in Augustine, the confrontation of the two poles, figure and fulfillment, is sometimes replaced by a development in three stages: the Law or history of the Jews as a prophetic *figura* for the appearance of Christ; the incarnation as fulfillment of this *figura* and at the same time as a new promise of the end of the world and the Last Judgement; and finally, the future occurrence of these events as ultimate fulfillment. (41; see also Frye, *Great Code* 85 and 91)

No matter the specific form any particular type or antitype assumes, then, the ultimate antitype is always Christ or God (Ziolkowski 355; Auerbach 59-0 and 72), in whom the analogical relationship between type and antitype is grounded and to whom it eventually refers. Typology, thus, is inherently transcendental and teleological. Northrop Frye expresses this memorably when he observes: 'Typology points to future events that are often thought of as transcending time, so that they contain a vertical lift as well as a horizontal move forward' (*Great Code* 82).

Thus, for example, when de la Taille maintains that the Last Supper is an 'unbloody' immolation that predicts and is fulfilled in the 'bloody' sacrifice on the Cross, this is a paradigmatic instance of Christian typology. However, typology informs *The Anathemata* not only via the teachings of de la Taille and various critics have commented on the central role typology plays in Jones's poem (see, for example, Dilworth, *Shape of Meaning*; Staudt, *Turn of Civilization*). William Francis Wilborn, likely the first scholar to examine this subject, even goes as far as to argue that '[i]n *The Anathemata* . . . not only is the typological method instrumental, it is also the major subject matter of the poem . . .' (84). *The Anathemata* features countless individual and more or less conventional examples of typology. The beginning of 'Middle-Sea and Lear-Sea', section two, for instance, presents defeated Hector as a type of Christ:

> his beauties made squalid, his combed gilt
> a matted mop
> his bruised feet thonged
> under his own wall. (*A* 84)

The similarities between Christ and Hector are evident in the context of the poem, but to drive the analogy home, Jones, in a footnote, even quotes from the second book of the *Aeneid* that relates Hector's 'defilement', and he maintains: 'All this inevitably recalls . . . passages in the Prophets and also in the narrative of the Passion itself and in subsequent devotional writings, concerning the indignities suffered by the Redeemer . . .' (*A* 84n5). However, beyond such individual typological interpretations, the structure of *The Anathemata* as a whole illustrates the central role figuralism plays in Jones's poem. For example, from the second half of section two, 'Middle-Sea and Lear-Sea', until section six, 'Keel, Ram, Stauros', *The Anathemata* describes various sea voyages and the captains in charge. With regard to these sections, Dilworth remarks:

> . . . different ships sail in different historical periods, but the sailing is symbolically continuous because of typological commonality between crews, especially captains and lookouts, and contiguity of routes. The general direction of sailing is westward through the Mediterranean, up the English coast and into the Thames to London. (*Reading* 131)

Continuity between the different voyages is achieved, on a structural level, because at the end of 'Middle-Sea and Lear-Sea' the ship on approach to Britain encounters bad weather and gets lost. The second section closes with the questions: 'Did he berth her? / and to schedule? / by the hoar rock in the drowned wood?' (*A* 108). The grammatical subject of these questions, of course, is the captain, and sections three to six all open with possible arrivals of the captain, or a captain, in Britain, even though they are all located in different historical periods. Thus, 'Angle-Land', section three, opens: 'Did he strike soundings off Vecta Insula?' (*A* 110). 'Vecta Insula', Hague elucidates, is the Roman name for the Isle of Wright (130). 'Redriff', section four, offers an alternative: 'Or / did he make the estuary?' (*A* 118). At the beginning of 'The Lady of the Pool', section five, which takes place in London, the poem asks, 'Did he meet Lud at the Fleet Gate? Did he count the top-trees in the anchored forest of Llefelys / under the White Mount?' (*A* 124), while section six begins with the question: 'Did he hear them bawling a Frigg-day's ichthyophagous feast at the Belling Gate?' (*A* 170). Thus, from section three to six, *The Anathemata* considers different hypothetical arrivals in Britain but the initial questions – 'Did he berth her? / and to schedule?' – are not answered until the last lines of 'Keel, Ram, Stauros', when the poem notes with respect to another captain: 'He would berth us / to

schedule' (*A* 182). This structure is typological, not only because the different captains resemble each other and can be considered various types of an archetypal sea captain, but primarily because, according to 'classical' Christian typology, the church is often figured as ship whose captain is Christ. In *The Anathemata*, this image is for the first time already developed early in 'Rite and Fore-Time', and it is taken up again throughout 'Keel, Ram, Stauros' (*A* 52; Hague 27-8). Jones succinctly explains the significance of the image of the church as ship, and thus also of the recurring subject of the sea voyage, in a footnote:

> What is pleaded in the Mass is precisely the argosy or voyage of the Redeemer, consisting of his entire sufferings and his death, his conquest of hades, his resurrection and his return in triumph to heaven. It is this that is offered to the Trinity . . . on behalf of us Argonauts and of the whole argosy of mankind . . . (*A* 106n2)

In typological terms, the Mass, on the one hand, represents the antitype of Christ's Passion, and, on the other hand, a type that will be fulfilled at the end of time. However, in Jones's poem, this voyage sequence, which stretches over about ninety pages, is bracketed by another typological structure. The first half of 'Middle-Sea and Lear-Sea' and the beginning of section seven, entitled 'Mabinog's Liturgy', measure the time that elapsed between the years stretching from the Annunciation to the Passion, and various earlier historical and mythological events (*A* 84–94, 185–190). Through the chronological continuity to which it thus draws attention, *The Anathemata* relates the earlier events to Christ's life, but it also extends this continuity beyond the point of the Crucifixion up to Jones's own time, chiefly through allusions to Jones's present. A lengthy passage of 'Mabinog's Liturgy' illustrates well the continuities or connections between historical events, Christ's life, and Jones's time:

> In the seven hundred and eighty-third year of the Urbs,
> the Mother, fourteen years since the recovery of the
> Eagles, forty-two come the 7th before the Ides of July
> since they decreed
>
> Peace in Our Time
>
> the whole world expectant of war.
>
> TiberiusClaudiusNeroCaesar
>
> voted the tribune's powers for the
> first time twenty-five years since; his fourth term consul
> nine years gone.

West-rites *defensor*
conservator of provinces
in the fifteenth of his pontificate.
Father of his country, world-*soter*
for four years now on his palmy beach
but to speak once yet
as if from the City to the World.
Lucius Ælius Sejanus
Senior office, combined command
(Castra Praetoria). Chief law-officer (criminal jurisdiction)
outside the City.
Co-ordinator of groupings:
civil, military
security, secret.
(*A* 185-6)

It is impossible to elucidate here all the allusions and references of this section, but neither is it necessary. The beginning of this excerpt relates the Passion to the foundation of Rome. Jones explains in a footnote: 'I have supposed the Incarnation to have been in 5 BC or 4 BC that is AUC 749 or 750, and have followed the tradition that our Lord was in his thirty-third or thirty-fourth year at the time of the Passion' (*A* 184n8). Hence, Christ was crucified in the seven hundred and eighty-third year after the foundation of Rome. Jones's contemporary world enters these considerations when the poem, shortly afterwards, reflects that the Passion also took place forty-two years before it was 'decreed / Peace in Our Time'. Once again, Jones's footnote is instrumental, as he clarifies that 'Peace in Our Time' refers to, 'the senatorial decree of July 19, 13 BC, authorizing the building of the Altar of Peace on the Field of Mars at Rome to commemorate the conclusion of war in the West and to symbolize the Augustan pacification of the World' (*A* 186n1). 'The whole world expectant of war', however, unmistakably also refers to Jones's contemporary world, and Dilworth remarks that the phrase 'Peace in Our Time' is also 'an ironic echo of Neville Chamberlain's famous statement in 1938 upon returning from the Munich Conference' (*Reading* 161). Indeed, Jones's explanatory note to this passage continues with the observation that, '[t]here have been Temples of Peace built in our time also', which Corcoran considers 'laconic, but very knowing, and, in its quiet, grim irony, profoundly revealing of the quality of English feeling during the first months of the war' (33). The analogies between ancient Rome

and Jones's own time continue as the poem considers that Tiberius Claudius Nero Caesar, Augustus's successor, received the title of tribune twenty-five years before the Passion. Dilworth establishes a connection to contemporary politics by maintaining that Tiberius's ascension to tribune and 'de facto emperor' represented 'a cynical misuse of republican institutions – the implied modern parallel being the transformation of republican Germany into Nazi dictatorship' (*Reading* 161). The parallelisms between ancient Roman and twentieth-century politics now become slightly more concrete. The following few lines describe Tiberius, who, Jones explains, retired in AD 26 on Capri, 'his palmy beach', but who was 'to speak once yet', namely to have Lucius Ælius Sejanus eliminated (*A* 186n2). Sejanus, Dilworth explains, was Tiberius's 'protégé', who grew extremely powerful after the latter's retirement (*Reading* 162). *The Anathemata* associates Sejanus with the Nazis. 'Behind "Co-ordinator of groupings"', Hague explains, 'lies . . . the Nazis' *Gleichschaltung*', and he maintains that there is no better symbol than Sejanus for 'the ruthless power-politician with his S.S. . . . , secret police, treason trials and endless plottings . . .' (209-10). An allusion to the SS could also be suspected in the alliteration 'security, secret'. Generally, however, it is interesting how, in this excerpt, the lines of the poem become increasingly fragmented, impoverished, or, one could perhaps say, 'utile', as the long run-on lines of the beginning eventually end in the four juxtaposed adjectives: 'civil, military / security, secret'. Dilworth extends the parallelism between Sejanus and Tiberius, and the Nazis, for he maintains that Sejanus's assassination also 'recalls Hitler's murder of Ernst Roehm . . . – Roehm's power having derived form his control of the Nazi SA as Sejanus's power derived from his control of the Praetorian Guard' (*Reading* 162). *The Anathemata*, thus, establishes typological relationships between Jones's contemporary world and previous historical epochs. These relationships, however, are all ultimately based on connections between the given historical periods and the Passion, even if these connections have retreated into the background in the above interpretation, because the entire digression into ancient Roman politics is motivated by the calculation of the time that separates the events considered from the Passion. Thus, while the relationships between ancient Rome and twentieth-century Europe illustrate 'the horizontal move forward' that Frye attributes to typology, the ultimate

reference to the Passion corresponds to its 'vertical lift'. Together with the episodes of the sea voyages, these parts of *The Anathemata* that date the Passion illustrate well the extent to which large, section-crossing structures of Jones's poem are informed by typology.

So far, all the examples of typology always ultimately referred to God or Christ and they were consequently all typical instances of Christian typology. Yet, *The Anathemata* also features cases of typology that are removed from theology. For instance, the connections, established above, between *The Anathemata* and *The Aeneid*, and likewise between Jones and Virgil or Aeneas, can also be considered typological, but less in a Christian sense. By the same token, *The Anathemata* repeatedly establishes typological relationships between London, ancient Rome and Troy. The presence of Troy in Jones's poem could refer to Homer, but Blamires argues that '[t]he significance of Troy in *The Anathemata* owes more to Vergil than to Homer, though it owes a great deal too to Geoffrey of Monmouth . . .' (204-5). In *The Anathemata*, but also in his essays, Jones often establishes and emphasises links between Britain and the Romans that sometimes even reach back to Troy (see, for instance, *A* 56-7 and 133-4; 'Crown'; 'Welsh Poetry'). 'Angle-Land', section three, in particular, is concerned with the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain and the resultant expulsion of a large part of the Romano-British population, which fled to what is today known as Wales. The relationships Jones establishes between Britain, ancient Rome and Troy could have been informed by Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain*, as Blamires suggests, but Jones, who frequently openly acknowledges his sources and influences, displays but lukewarm sentiments towards Monmouth (see 'The Arthurian Legend' 204; 'The Myth of Arthur' 223–6; 'Dragon' 110-1). Furthermore, Blamires's rather vague and unsubstantiated assertion notwithstanding, critics, so far, have not considered Monmouth's influence on Jones particularly noteworthy. Hence, the typological connections *The Anathemata* forges between ancient Rome and contemporary Britain or Europe can more likely be traced back to Jones's engagement with Oswald Spengler, whose *The Decline of the West* he perused in the early forties and thus at the time he was working on *The Anathemata* (*Greatcoat* 115–7; Staudt, 'Decline of the West' 445). According to Spengler's cyclical model of history, phases of culture are succeeded by periods of

civilisation and vice versa. Concretely, Spengler distinguishes between the Classical and the Western world and maintains that Classical 'culture' turned over into a 'civilisation' in the fourth century whereas in the Western world this happened in the nineteenth century (Spengler 32). Jones adopted from Spengler terms, such as 'culture', 'civilisation' or 'technics', and notions, such as cultural lateness or decline, while Spengler's distinction between 'culture' and 'civilisation' undoubtedly also informed Jones's dichotomy between the 'gratuitous' and the 'utile'. However, Jones also critically questioned Spengler's work.[8] Since Spengler postulates two distinct cultural cycles, it is possible to compare corresponding stages in those cycles, and the 'civilisational' or culturally 'late' counterpart of Jones's twentieth century in the Classical cycle, according to Spengler, are the Romans. Spengler maintains:

> Considered in the spirit of analogy, [the period 1800-2000] appears as chronologically parallel – 'contemporary' in our special sense – with the phase of Hellenism, and its present culmination, marked by the [First] World-War, corresponds with the transition from the Hellenistic to the Roman age. *Rome*, with its rigorous realism – uninspired, barbaric, disciplined, practical, Protestant, *Prussian* – will always give us, working as we must by analogies, the key to understanding our own future. (26, emphases in original)

This passage illustrates well that Spengler must have fostered Jones's typological imagination. Like Jones in his essays, Spengler here speaks of 'analogies' that can be established between the cycles. Moreover, Spengler's speculation that understanding the patterns of history will be useful for 'understanding our own future' must have appealed to Jones, just as he valued in Jackson Knight's 'Jungian' approach to *The Aeneid* how the latter reveals '. . . the pattern and eternal correspondence of this with that . . .' (*Greatcoat* 95).[9] Crucially, however, typology, by this stage, has lost its theological significance and has become what could, in allusion to Jung, be called

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[8] For discussions of the relationship between Jones and Spengler, see, for example, Miles Chapter 3; Staudt, 'Decline of the West'; and Edwards. For Jones's critical engagement with Spengler, see Jones's 'Art in Relation to War'.

[9] Interestingly, Kate Edwards maintains that Jones went well beyond Spengler with the correspondences he established between ancient Rome and the twentieth-century. She argues: While Spengler insisted on the idea of repeated patterns of human behaviour, he also sharply divided each of his "High Cultures" . . . . Jones, by contrast, allows for much greater interaction between culture-phases . . . so took the notion of repeated cycles to a different level by allowing for a clear line of inference between the worlds of Ancient Rome, Celtic Britain or Shakespearean England, and twentieth-century Europe' (72)

'arche-typology', but what will here be termed 'twentieth-century typology'. Twentieth-century typology, like its Christian counterpart, also establishes continuities between different times, events or persons, yet these relationships are differential and immanent, rather than teleological and transcendental.

According to an illuminating essay by Theodore Ziolkowski, four 'factors' necessitate a rethinking of typology in the twentieth century (349–52). Firstly, typology was increasingly considered a literary device, rather than a key for accessing mystical truth. Secondly, the teleological aspect of typology, the establishment of Christ as the ultimate antitype and end of history, increasingly came under attack. Thirdly, a growing understanding of myth, which Ziolkowski associates with 'the emergence of folklore, anthropology, mythology, and history of religion as areas of systematic study', challenged the privileged status of the Bible (350). Finally, Ziolkowski notices a 'new awareness of typological thinking' in many twentieth-century writers, who consciously and explicitly employ typology (352). While Jones's interests in 'folklore, anthropology, mythology and history of religion' can be discerned in nearly everything he wrote, and while it is also beyond doubt that he employed typology consciously in *The Anathemata*,[10] the first two of Ziolkowski's 'factors', which are concerned with the distancing of typology from Christian theology, require further commentary. It has been amply shown by now that Jones's poem is frequently centrally concerned with Christ, or Christianity more generally. However, the coexistence, in *The Anathemata*, of Christian and twentieth-century typology is closely related to the duality of Jones's Catholic and anthropological perspective. Jones's interest in anthropology needs to be considered in the context of the changing and increasing understanding of myth from the late nineteenth century onward that, according to Ziolkowski, represents one of the factors that contributed to the 'revaluation of typology' in the twentieth century (350). The result of systematic studies of myth, such as James Frazer's *Golden Bough*, Ziolkowski notes, 'was gradually to reduce Jesus, at least for the non-devout,

[10] Jones rarely explicitly writes about typology. As Staudt observes, the subject surfaces in Jones's essay on Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (*Turn of Civilization* 30-1). Yet, the extent of Jones's erudition, precisely in folklore, anthropology, mythology and theology make it utterly implausible that he would employ a typological poetics unconsciously or accidentally.

to a figure with no greater mythic validity than any other figure in myth, legend, or literature' (351). This decentring of Christ and the consequent loss of a transcendental foundation is characteristic of twentieth-century typology. In contrast to some of his Catholic friends, as explained above, Jones has no qualms about placing Christianity side by side with mythology and ancient history. In fact, in 'The Myth of Arthur', he expresses disapproval of those Christians who try to separate radically Christianity from 'Greek thought' and 'mystery cults' ('The Myth of Arthur' 234). In *The Anathemata* the relationship between mythology and Christianity is frequently clear and the former is presented as a figure of the latter, but sometimes an interesting ambiguity emerges that begs the question of which is type and which antitype. In such moments the teleological narrative of Christian typology is replaced by a differential relationship. One such instance can be found, for example, in the following lines of 'Mabinog's Liturgy' that consider the Annunciation:

> thirty-four years and twenty-one days
> since that germinal March
> and terminal day
> (no drought that year)
> since his Leda
> said to his messenger
> (his bright *talaria* on)
> *fiat mihi*. (*A* 188-9, italics in original)

Disregarding the audacity necessary to compare the Annunciation and Leda's rape, and focussing solely on the typology at work in these lines, it is not unequivocally clear which is the type and which the antitype, if the convention that mythology predicts the Bible is not taken for granted. The present passage reverses the relationship between mythology and the Scripture that traditional typological readings establish. It does not relate a mythological story or character to a part of the Bible but it compares a Biblical character, Mary, *to* the mythological figure Leda.[11] Likewise, '*talaria*' does not portray Hermes or Mercury as Gabriel, but vice versa, Gabriel as Greek or Roman messenger god. Interestingly, Jones mentions the myth of Leda and the Swan also in 'Art in Relation to War' in a related context. With regard to art generally, he maintains: 'For remember, what is signified must be

[11] For a homologous example, see the comparison of Christ to Percival in *The Anathemata* (225).

always much the same, whatever the diversity of means. It is always Leda and always the Swan. It is always this "admirable commerce" which is the "subject" of art' ('Art in Relation to War' 142). '[T]he "subject" of art' is always Leda and the Swan because, like the Incarnation, it signifies the synthesis of the material and immaterial realms so characteristic of 'man' and 'his' artefacts. However, Jones does not maintain here that Leda and the Swan more paradigmatically or immediately illustrates this synthesis than the Incarnation, for 'this "admirable commerce"', of course, refers to the Incarnation. If Leda and the Swan had taken precedence over the Incarnation, Jones would merely have inverted the hierarchical relationship between mythology and the Bible of conventional Christian typology. However, here, the relationship between mythology and Christianity is differential rather than hierarchical. Leda and the Swan, like the Incarnation and like a theoretically unlimited number of myths, tales, rituals and events, according to Jones, signifies the truth about art and by extension about 'human nature'. Consequently, if the relationship between Leda and the Swan and the Incarnation can still be considered typological, it is here an example of typology without Frye's 'vertical lift'. God, the transcendental foundation of the analogical relationship between type and antitype, is replaced by a 'truth' immanent in humanity. In other words, Christ is not 'the truth' revealed in human artefacts, but Christianity is one manifestation, among others, of a truth of 'human nature'.

A passage in 'The Lady of the Pool' perhaps most evocatively expresses the differential, unstable, even dynamic relationship between mythology and Christianity that challenges the primacy of the latter and presents them both as merely different phases of the history of humanity. Throughout the fifth section, Elen Monica, a medieval lavender seller who offers her wares along the Thames, enumerates churches of London and she emphasises that several of these churches, and the city as a whole, are built on grounds that were already sacred to the Romans and the Celts (*A* 127, 160–4). This foundation on which London is built, however, is exceedingly insecure, Elen Monica remarks to a captain to whom her entire monologue is primarily addressed:

> Though there's a deal of subsidence hereabouts even so:
> gravels, marls, alluviums
> here all's alluvial, cap'n, and as unstable as these old annals

that do gravel us all. For, captain:
even immolated kings
be scarce a match for the deep fluvial doings of the mother.
But leastways
best let sleepers lie
and these slumberers
was great captains, cap'n:
tyrannoi come in keels from Old Troy
requiescant.
For, these fabliaux say, of one other such quondam king
rexque futurus.
. . . . . .
So of these let's say *requiescant*
till the Sejunction Day!
For should these stir, then would our Engle-raum in this
Brut's Albion be like to come to some confusion!
You never know, captain:
What's under works up.
I will not say it shall be so
but, captain, rather I would say:
You never know! (*A* 164)

Even though these lines are set in the late Middle Ages and are spoken by Elen Monica they are capable of revealing much about Jones's twentieth-century approach to typology. '[*R*]*exque futurus*', Jones's footnote indicates, refers to King Arthur (*A* 164n2). A dead king whose return is anticipated, Arthur, of course, functions as a figure of Christ, in accordance with conventional Christian typology. Furthermore, Christ's centrality is reinforced in these lines by the reference to the Last Judgement – 'till the Sejunction Day' (Hague 187) – and by the repetition of the scriptural '*requiescant*'. Yet, like the foundations on which the London churches are built, such a Christian interpretation is unsettled by 'the deep fluvial doings' of mother earth, who thwarts the eschatological narrative. It is due to mother earth that Elen Monica lacks all certainty and anxiously hopes that the dead will rest in peace until the end of time. Thus, these lines paradigmatically illustrate the unreconciled tension between Christian and non-Christian references and the disappearance of a secure, transcendental foundation characteristic of twentieth-century typology. Rather than offering another particular example of twentieth-century typology, *The Anathemata* here succinctly expresses its central principle, namely the differential relationship between 'types'. 'What's under works up' concisely summarises this principle, but it also evokes a particular twentieth-century discipline in which typology plays a

significant role and in which Jones took great interest: psychoanalysis.[12] 'One thing at least the psychologists make plain', Jones remarks in 'Art and Sacrament', 'there is always a recalling, a re-presenting again, anaphora, anamnesis' ('Art and Sacrament' 167). For Ziolkowski, Freud, specifically *Totem and Taboo*, which Jones read, illustrates 'the new *consciousness* of typological thinking' that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century and influenced various fields (351). More significantly, however, the juxtaposition of Christian and non-Christian material in *The Anathemata* aligns Jones's poem with late nineteenth- and twentieth-century works like *The Golden Bough* or *Totem and Taboo* and illustrates that Jones's engagement with Christian theology can be considered in the context of the contemporary development of anthropology and related fields of study.

It has been shown that *The Anathemata* establishes continuities between the present and the past, and between 'signs', by means of typology. However, the chronological continuity between present and past and the 'semiotic' continuity between 'signs' reconstitute the 'common background' and are thus inherently related to a 'social' continuity between people in the present. The continuity of 'sign-making' gives rise to a 'community' of 'sign-makers'.[13] The question to ask, then, is to what kind of 'community' the typological poetics of *The Anathemata* gives rise, and since *The Anathemata* is informed by two different kinds of typology, it comes as no surprise that there can also be discovered two different kinds of 'community'.

2.5 The Transcendental Christian 'Community' and the 'Community' of Humanity

In *The Mystery of Faith*, de la Taille writes with respect to the transubstantiation and the consequent transformation of Christ into a 'symbol':

> What is there beyond the Lord, beyond the Christ, what is there great and grand enough, august and sacred enough, that he should use himself to be its symbol? There is ourselves, you and I, the Christians of the whole world; ourselves, but assuredly united to Christ, aggregated to Christ, incorporated in Christ, one in Christ; there is the Christ living in us and we living on his life. This is why Christ in his own person wished to

[12] For Jones's engagement with psychoanalysis, see, for instance, *Greatcoat* 131–141.

[13] In 'A Christmas Message', Jones reflects on the 'communal significance' of the 'gratuitous' (170).

> become a sacrament, in order to be the efficacious sign of all that. He placed himself in the order of signs, in the order of symbols, to have the joy of symbolizing and, by symbolizing it, of building up the mystical Body of which we are the members. The Body formed in the womb of the Virgin Mary and carried upon the Cross, the Body glorified in the heavens, is in the Eucharist the sacrament of that mystical Body which is made up of the Christ and of us, of the Head and of all his members communicating with him in the unity of the same life . . . (211-2)

De la Taille here presents the Body of Christ as the Body of the entire Christian community, and in doing so he, again, employs typology. Every Christian is a 'type' of Christ – 'there is the Christ living in us' – and the figure of Christ, in turn, is a 'type' of the entire Christian community. The rhetorical figure of Christ as the body of the Christian community is an example of the figure of the body politic, which is closely related to typology because it is a synecdoche: the part represents the whole, a particular member functions as 'type' of the whole community and vice versa.[14] Furthermore, the Christian community described by de la Taille precisely corresponds to the kind of community that, according to Jean-Luc Nancy in 'The Inoperative Community', is always already imagined as 'lost' and as capable of being restored. This, Nancy argues, is community '. . . understood as communion, and communion takes place, in its principle as in its ends, at the heart of the mystical body of Christ' (10). As quoted in the previous chapter, Nancy writes about this kind of community: '. . . always it is a matter of a lost age in which community was woven of tight, harmonious, and infrangible bonds and in which above all it played back to itself, through its institutions, its rituals, and its symbols, the representation, indeed the living offering, of its own immanent unity, intimacy, and autonomy' (9). The close similarities between the kind of community Nancy describes here and the kind of community for which Jones yearns in and through *The Anathemata* become apparent in the preface, when Jones remarks, as quoted above: 'There have been culture-phases when the maker and the society in which he lived shared an enclosed and common background, where the terms of reference were common to all' ('Preface' 14).

[14] Frye refers to the body politic as 'royal metaphor' and considers its relationship to typology (*Great Code* 87–91, 98-9).

The Anathemata begins with the celebration of the Eucharist and it thus opens precisely with a community of communion, such as de la Taille and Nancy describe. The first lines of Jones's poem read:

> We already and first of all discern him making this thing other. His groping syntax, if we attend, already shapes:
> ADSCRIPTAM, RATAM, RATIONABILEM . . . and by pre-application and for *them*, under modes and patterns altogether theirs, the holy and venerable hands lift up an efficacious sign. (*A* 49 emphasis and ellipsis in original)

The Anathemata, thus, presents a particular congregation, introduced as '[w]e', at a particular although unspecified place and time. A priest, referred to only by the third person singular pronoun, takes the host from the altar, 'lift[s] [it] up' and 'makes [it] other' by turning the bread into the 'efficacious sign' of Christ's Body. Yet, the colon in line two indicates a shift in perspective. Before the colon, the persona is part of the specific congregation, while 'he' distances himself from it and considers it from without after the colon. The '[w]e', consequently, becomes '*them*' and 'their'. This is not an act of exclusion, however, but a widening of perspectives that further increases shortly afterwards, as the poem considers how, through the ritual of the mass, the community of the present congregation forms part of a much wider community:

> This man, so late in time, curiously surviving, shows courtesy to the objects when he moves among, handles or puts aside the name-bearing instruments, when he shows every day in his hand the salted cake given for this *gens* to savour all the *gentes*. (*A* 50 italics in original)

'This man' is again the priest, and the lateness described here is the Spenglerian cultural lateness of the twentieth century. However, the community of the particular congregation of the beginning is now extended and does not anymore only include the people present but all the '*gentes*', past, present, and presumably also future. Through the celebration of the Eucharist, the present community enters into continuity with all other communities that celebrated and celebrate the Eucharist, and also with all other communities that, through all kinds of sign-making, are eventually connected to the Eucharist and the Passion. This all-inclusive gesture is echoed towards the end of Jones's poem, when it considers the Crucifixion and by extension also again the Eucharist:

On Ariel Hill, on Sion tumulus
on Uru Mound, in Salem cenacle
in the white Beth-El
according to the *disciplina*
of this peculiar people
in accord with the intentions
of all peoples
and kindreds
et gentium, cenhedloedd, und Völker
that dance
by garnished *Baum*
or anointed stone.
Here, in this place
as in Sarras city
(where the maim was ended
at the voyage-end)
in his second Ephrata
here in the *upper* cave of bread
between his creatures again his Body shows.
(*A* 241-2, italics in original)

In accordance with de la Taille's teaching, *The Anathemata* is here again concerned with the typological relationship between the Crucifixion '[o]n Ariel Hill, on Sion tumulus', that is, on Calvary, and the Last Supper 'in Salem cenacle'. Both of these were occasions when God assumed form, when 'his Body show[ed]'. Yet, they are not the only occasions of this kind. Hague explains that 'this peculiar people' refers to the Jewish people and that the Eucharist, when it was instituted, 'followed the ritual of the Jewish Passover' (259). Thus, Crucifixion, the Last Supper and the Eucharist are related to the Passover, but they are also associated with the rites and rituals of all peoples 'that dance / by garnished *Baum* / or anointed stone'. Jones uses the Latin '*gentium*', the Welsh '*cenhedloedd*' and German '*Völker*', he explains in a footnote, because '[t]ogether these three elements . . . compose "the West": we are Germans, Latins, Celts and can apprehend only in a Latin, Germanic and Celtic fashion' (*A* 241n2). However, even though neither the Celtic nor the Germanic people, nor the Romans, for the most part, were Christian, God's Body also 'shows' in or through their rites. The underlying argument here is the same as in 'Rite and Fore-Time', namely, that the Crucifixion '. . . presupposes the sign-world and looks back to foreshadowing rites and arts of meditation . . .' ('Art and Sacrament' 168). Christianity is thus presented as a transcendental 'community' that unifies, and, more importantly, even absorbs all other Western peoples. This transcendental community

is eventually based on the figure of Christ, who, particularly in 'Rite and Fore-Time', is presented as both 'inside time' and 'out of time' (*A* 53).

Whereas Jones's transcendental Christian 'community' transcends historical time, it is geographically centred in Europe, as his note on the Latin, Celtic and Germanic peoples indicates. In the context of twentieth-century literature, the idea of a Europe unified by Christianity is probably most familiar from the writings of T. S. Eliot. For instance, in 'The Unity of European Culture', Eliot explains what he understands under 'European culture' as follows: '. . . I am talking about the common tradition of Christianity which has made Europe what it is . . . . It is in Christianity that our arts have developed; it is in Christianity that the laws of Europe have – until recently – been rooted. It is against a background of Christianity that all our thought has significance' (122). Yet, rather than to Eliot, Jones's notion of a transcendental Christian 'community' can be traced back to the historian Christopher Dawson and, more generally, to a loosely formed group of Catholic intellectuals and artists with which Jones associated himself in the late nineteen twenties and throughout the thirties, and in the context of which Jones initially met Dawson (Robichaud 104-5).[15] Aidan Nichols considers this group, which is frequently called the 'Chelsea Group', '[t]he most important Catholic salon of the period' (30). The 'Chelsea Group' included, among other people of importance to Jones, Christopher Dawson, Eric Gill, Harman Grisewood, and once even Jacques Maritain, and it was connected to the publications *Order*, *Essay in Order*, *The Colosseum*, and, after the Second World War, *The Changing World*. Jones contributed engravings to the first two publications and an essay to *The Changing World* (Ward 42–46; Burns 44–52; Robichaud 105–7).[16] Opposing 'parochialism', 'ecclesiastic materialism', 'modern religion', and more broadly modernisation, or, in Burns's words, 'the Reformation, the age of Revolution and Industrialism', the 'Chelsea Group' advocated a Catholic renewal and the unification of Europe through Catholicism (Burns 44-5, 52; Robichaud 105-6). This agenda and its similarities to the transcendental Christian

[15] In fact, as Eliot openly acknowledges in *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, Dawson exerted a great influence on his thought, as well. Additionally, Dilworth maintains that Jones's 'cultural theory' influenced Eliot's criticism and not vice versa ('T.S. Eliot and David Jones' 78-9).

[16] The essay is 'Art and Democracy', which is discussed below.

'community' of *The Anathemata* can particularly clearly be discerned, for instance, in the following excerpt of a 'Glossary' added to the *Colosseum* issue of March 1935. Under the heading 'Sectarianism', a writer of *The Colosseum*, presumably Bernard Wall, explains:[17]

> Sectarianism is the existence in a society or in a culture of parallel groups basing their lives on different and exclusive philosophies. It is the cause of the suspicions, animosities and misunderstandings which are leading a once-united Western culture to its own destruction. There is but one remedy to this disastrous sectarianism, a return to the unifying factor from which its past unity sprang, the Catholic Church. ('Glossary' 6; see also Ward 47-8)

It is impossible not to associate the transcendental Christian 'community' of *The Anathemata* with the image of Western culture reunited under the Catholic Church offered here.

Yet, the notion of a West united through Catholicism is politically suspect, particularly considering the historical and political context of the thirties, because it is conservative, reactionary and totalising. Jones's transcendental Christian 'community' reduces the 'other' to the same and is driven by anti-modern sentiments, by his opposition to the dominance of the 'utile'. In *David Jones: Myth-Maker*, Elizabeth Ward at length discusses the intricate relationship between the politics of the 'Chelsea Group' and European fascism, and she maintains that Jones's connection to this group is of significance even though 'he always remained detached, by temperament as much as by conviction', because 'under [its] influence, the latent political content of his thinking at last rose, almost tangibly, to the surface' (56, 43). Ward acknowledges that the 'Chelsea Group' cannot be accused of fascism but she criticises its members for betraying a 'prejudice in favour of right-wing European political movements' (52, 54). The 'Chelsea Group', according to Ward, associated democracy with the general corruption of the West, of which technology or increasing secularisation represent other aspects, and as a result of this they tended toward fascism. Ward quotes Grisewood, who describes the 'Chelsea Group' as '*avant-garde* in a rightist, Catholic, European style' and she repeatedly polemically

[17] *The Colosseum* was edited by Bernard Wall, whose name appears on the cover. However, the editorials of *The Colosseum* are not signed with a name but only with 'Colosseum' and so is the 'Glossary' of the March 1935 issue.

refers to the group's 'political extremism' (Grisewood qtd. in Ward 46; Ward 55, 59). Ward implicates Jones in this 'extremism' as follows:

> [Jones's] sense of the diminishing value of the 'sign' or symbol in contemporary life . . . was an effective equivalent of their sense of the threat to values of order, authority and tradition posed by modern civilisation . . . . Fundamental to both positions was the notion of crisis and a common view of the present as taken over by the utilitarian imperatives of technology. Both mistrusted . . . the scientific or materialist intellect and developed in reaction to it a curious mixture of primitivism and medieval rationalist styles of thought. . . . Both had recourse, in their cultural despair, to Catholicism . . . . Both interpreted recent history in terms of a starkly-drawn confrontation between absolute systems of value: religious and secular; elitist and populist; gratuitous and utilitarian; symbolic and technocratic. . . . Form and content merged in a common, dualistic, anti-technological myth of immense proportions. (56-7)

With respect to Jones's poetry, Ward particularly objects to what she here considers the 'starkly-drawn confrontation between absolute systems of value' and the 'dualistic, anti-technological myth', in other words, to Jones's typologising, schematising thought.[18] Ward puts her finger on an important and potentially damaging aspect of Jones's work, and, to some extent, she is right. Her case appears particularly strong in uncharacteristically careless moments in Jones's writings, such as in his review of Hague's translation of *The Song of Roland*, published in 1938, where Jones reflects on the contemporary disintegration of Europe and the possibility of a Catholic unification, and remarks: 'It is, conceivably, for a baptized Führership that we may yet have cause to pray . . .' ('Roland Epic' 100). Yet, Jones's relationship to fascism is more complicated than this quotation might suggest, and when Ward accuses the 'Chelsea Group' of 'political extremism' or when she describes Jones's poetry as possibly '[having] emerged from and contributed to a "pre-fascist" consciousness in inter-war English Catholic circles . . .', she can be accused of schematisation herself (Ward 59). Accordingly, Ward's presentation of Jones as reactionary 'myth-maker' has been criticised numerous times (see Dilworth, "Fascism"; Staudt, *Turn of Civilization* 20–6; Staudt, 'Recent Criticism' 416–20; Whitaker 472–87). In *British Catholics and Fascism*, Tom Villis relativises the relationship between the 'Chelsea Group' and fascism, and he argues that it is

[18] Ward repeats this argument throughout her book. See, for instance, pages 21, 42, 57, 129, 135, 138, 140–2, 151–4.

possible to challenge Ward's portrayal of Jones as proto-fascist with a simple assertion: 'Sympathy for and interest in fascism does not make one a fascist, but it often . . . demonstrates the extent of the revolt against liberal democracy of which fascism was merely one manifestation. Despite the anti-imperial and anti-totalitarian aspects of his poetry, David Jones was very much part of this revolt' (176). Villis understands the attraction fascism exerted on numerous Catholic circles in interwar Britain foremost as an aspect of the contemporary crisis and criticism of liberal democracy (Villis 1, 5-6).

In the most elaborate attempt to defend Jones against the charges of fascism, the essay 'David Jones and Fascism', Dilworth quotes at length from an unpublished essay Jones wrote on Hitler in 1939. Dilworth's essay is unmistakably defensive and apologetic, and it is at least slightly suspicious that, unlike other initially unpublished material, Jones's Hitler essay has not been published so far, not even by Dilworth on the occasion of his essay. Dilworth summarises the first six pages of Jones's essay and then provides 'an edited version of the rest of the typescript with elipses [*sic*] marking omissions, which shorten the text without distorting its meaning' (Dilworth, 'Fascism' 147-8). Nevertheless, the parts of Jones's essay that are quoted and Dilworth's commentaries provide some interesting insights about Jones's attitude towards German fascism. In particular Jones's Hitler essay shows him, for the most part, as a sceptical and differentiating observer of the international political scene. For instance, Jones eloquently problematises Britain's condemnation of war, as he writes:

> If some of us in this country, being of a certain kind of class, are 'free' in so many ways, and enjoy a humane and tolerant existence, are able to pursue our individual preferences, it is largely because our ancestors so gathered the world's wealth, so established by the application of armed and economic pressure, the British thing in the world . . . that we, who can, live almost the lives of pure spirits and have almost forgotten the hard, brutal, realistic, unscrupulous, spade-work that has made our humane and tolerant virtues possible of growth . . . . but it would be extremely unintelligent of us . . . not to see clearly that this 'emancipated' world of ours has been historically made possible by acts of brutality and aggression, the destruction of cultures, the infliction of wrong. . . . It took a lot of gangster-work and breaking of heads and hearts to rear the stately homes of England . . . (Jones qtd. in Dilworth, 'Fascism' 149-0)

Thus, Jones argues that Britain's condemnation of war is hypocritical because of its own violent colonial past, which is a fair observation and morally a commendable position. Jones's anti-imperialist stance can also be observed in *The Anathemata*, such as in 'Middle-Sea and Lear-Sea', when the poem refers to '. . . us / whose robbery is conterminous with empire' (*A* 85). However, at the same time, Jones seems to maintain that Britain has to look the other way because war might be the only way by which Germany can 'emancipate' itself and attain a 'freedom' comparable to Britain's. Ward observes that an 'impulse to celebrate "the element of conquest" as "a prerequisite of culture" runs as a disturbing motif through Harman Grisewood's autobiography' (53). As the above considerations show, Jones does not approve of 'conquest', yet his position might resemble Grisewood's insofar as he considers the possibility that war could be a way to better times, that it could give rise to 'culture'. In 'Art in Relation to War', another unpublished essay by Jones, dated 1942-43 and 1946, Jones maintains for instance: '. . . as artists, we cannot deny, in as far as any art still resides in war, that the art of war is capable, at all events, of a form-creating quality' ('Art in Relation to War' 132). The creation of 'form', the 'making' of a 'shape', is clearly something desirable for Jones, and something he associates with culture. Moreover, the conception of war as art is troublingly reminiscent of the Nazi aestheticisation of politics. In any case, after the war, Jones admitted that he '. . . got that Nazi thing wrong', and even Ward concedes that his attraction to fascism is based on '. . . ignorance rather than informed sympathy for Nazi goals' (Jones qtd. in Dilworth, 'Fascism' 156; Ward 55). Dilworth further explains and contextualises Jones's affinity for fascism. He argues that, as a result of Jones's experiences with First World War propaganda, Jones did not believe media reports of Nazi brutalities before and during the war, and he adds that Jones sided with fascism because in the thirties, to him, '. . . the alternative to fascism seemed to be international Communism – which, he knew from certain Ukrainian emigrees, surpassed pre-war fascism in brutality' ('Fascism' 155-6). *The Anathemata*, Dilworth maintains, is anti-totalitarian and anti-fascist, which has already been shown above with regard to the references to Chamberlain ('Peace in Our Time'), and to Tiberius and Sejanus. With respect to these lines of Jones's poem, Dilworth convincingly argues that Jones's '. . . frequent allusions to fascism

as representative of inhuman, totalitarian politics is doubtlessly partly compensation for his own early failure to see in fascism a potential for the appalling evils which were revealed to the world during and after the Second World War' ('Fascism' 158). However, Dilworth also considers that Jones might have been wrong about the Nazis '. . . because of a mythic, quasi-apocalyptic vision of history which reconciled him to the possibility of fascist political and military success' ('Fascism' 156). Essentially, this is Ward's argument, only Dilworth does not consider Jones's 'mythic, quasi-apocalyptic vision of history' condemnable *per se*. Conceivably, with respect to the war and pre-war period, this vision could be pardoned, or at least explained, by invoking Jones's ignorance at the time. Yet, the notion that the Second World War could give rise to a new culture, which is part of his mythic vision, still informs *The Anathemata*, and this is slightly problematic. In the following lines of his poem, Jones juxtaposes the Crucifixion and the Second World War and, thus, endows the world war with a redemptive potential:

> *Munera*
> of Liber, poured
> of Ceres, broken.
> Not desert-rites, nor nomad-*liberi*.
> Levites! the new rite holds
> is here
> before your old rites begin.
> Here.
> Where?
> Here when?
> Here at the spoil-dump
> at a war's term
> where the high-flyer stalls
> after his concentric
> and exact reconnaissance.
>
> Not every year is the salvage of so many inhabited places made legitimate loot. Not at every time are the cosmocrats as prodigal or the bleached bodies so man, as now, in this place.
> In the waste land
> at jackal-meet
> at the division of the spoils
> with his hands stretched out
> he continues.
>
> Failing

(finished?) West
your food, once.
Upon a time
the Daughter's torch
Demeter's arch
extinguished
down
in our streets
where is corn and wine? (*A* 230–2, italics in original)

This excerpt considers how the Christian rites, the Eucharist in particular, both represent a continuation of ancient rituals and retrospectively condition them. Wine, the *'*[*m*]*unera* / of Liber', is poured, and the host, '[*m*]*unera* / . . . of Ceres', is broken during the Eucharist, the 'new rite', which in some way even preceded the 'older rites'. The Last Supper and the Eucharist signify what happened on Calvary, 'at the spoil-dump' (Hague 252). However, with the next lines, with the introduction of the subject of war and military vocabulary – 'exact reconnaissance' – Calvary is related to the Second World War, and from now on, this correspondence is further explored. Hague, who does not comment on the contemporary relevance of these lines, explains that 'cosmocrats' refers to the Roman authorities and that they are 'prodigal' because they murdered Jesus, 'the supreme man' (Hague 252). Yet, considering the publication date of *The Anathemata*, these lines undoubtedly also consider the casualties of the Second World War. 'Cosmocrats', thus, refers just as clearly to international leaders and the 'bleached bodies' cannot fail to invoke the victims of concentration camps. With the next stanza the poem turns further to twentieth-century Europe. It considers how once, around the time of the Crucifixion, the host was a valid sign and sign-making thus still a possibility, while 'now', during this culturally impoverished period, the 'gratuitous' ever more disappears. However, through the interrogatory mode the poem keeps open the possibility of a cultural renewal after the war. Even though the middle section can be interpreted as presenting a bleak picture of the recent conflict, the hope persists in these lines that something positive could ensue from the war, just as Christianity was born from the Crucifixion. This suggestion of a 'silver lining' of the war is suspect, particularly if it comes so soon after the war and, moreover, from somebody who had flirted with fascism. In these lines, Jones's mythological vision got the better of him. Yet, it is at least possible to try to explain why Jones juxtaposes the Crucifixion and the Second

World War. On the one hand, the notions of cultural decline and rebirth testify again to the influence of Spengler's cyclical account of history. Spengler maintains that nothing can be done to prevent the cycle of culture and civilisation from taking its course, and Jones normally fundamentally disagrees with Spengler's fatalism (Jones, 'Art in Relation to War' 137-8, 158-9; Miles 37; Staudt, *Turn of Civilization* 129; Staudt, 'Decline of the West'). Here, however, Jones might have let his interpretation of the Second World War be coloured precisely by such a determinism. On the other hand, the search of the good in the bad is also profoundly Christian, and passages such as these support Wilborn's interpretation of Jones's poem as, among other things, a theodicy (96).

Jones's notion of a transcendental Christian 'community' is politically and ethically problematic because it amounts to an absolute imposition of a Catholic theological ideal. The 'universal', to use Jones's words, is not made to 'shine out from the particular', but the particulars are coerced into a universalising framework ('James Joyce's Dublin' 304). This totalising aspect links Jones's transcendental Christian 'community' with totalitarianism. After the war, as Dilworth shows, Jones realised his mistake, became more sensitive to totalitarian politics, and tried to compensate for his misjudgements. Jones's essay 'Art and Democracy', published in 1947 even though the subtitle reads '*Reflections written down in London, Winter* 1942-3', can be considered such a compensation ('Democracy' 85, italics in original). In this essay, which Jones wrote because he was asked 'to write something down about "art" in relation to "democracy"', Jones argues that even though not all 'men' are treated equally in reality, they are 'created equal' insofar as they are all 'creative beasts' ('Democracy' 85, 87). Thus, Jones repeats the argument of 'Art and Sacrament', according to which 'man' is inevitably tied to the 'gratuitous', but he gives it a political twist.[19] Jones writes: 'Man is "created equal" in the sense that all men belong to a form-creating group of creatures – and all men have unalienable rights with respect to that equal birthright – beyond that, equality fades and all is uncertain' ('Democracy' 90). In this essay, Jones uses the term 'art' broadly, to refer to all of 'man's' creations, which lets him conclude that 'the terms "man" and "artist" can be said to be interchangeable: Man is the only artist and only artists are

[19] In fact, 'Art and Sacrament' was published eight years after 'Art and Democracy'.

men' ('Democracy' 94). The chief function of 'democracy', according to Jones, is securing this 'birthright' of 'man', 'man's' freedom to exercise 'his' 'gratuitous' disposition, and thus, by extension also securing the fundamental 'equality' among all 'men'. Jones writes: 'Art is the distinguishing dignity of man and it is by art that he becomes dignified, and "democracy" means nothing, or means only something bad, if it misconceives the right of man to exercise his distinctive function as man, i.e. as artist . . .' ('Democracy' 89). In his contemporary time, however, according to Jones, 'democracy' does not fulfil this function, or fulfils it only insufficiently, for he remarks:

> Modern state-directed man is necessarily asked to subordinate his personal rights and his family rights because of some temporary situation – 'for the duration' as we used often to say in 1914-18 – but this increasing subordination is likely to be not only for the duration of a war or a series of wars, but for the duration of our kind of civilization. ('Democracy' 93)

Thus, Jones considers the contemporary dominance of the 'utile' in terms of what various influential thinkers have called the 'state of exception', and therefore in terms reminiscent of totalitarian or absolutist political systems. In response to this, 'Art and Democracy' is specifically concerned with the rights of individuals, and it thus represents a reorientation from universalising frameworks to the particular human being, or at least to the relationship between the particular being and the general system or ideology.

'Art and Democracy' was published as the first of three leading articles in the first issue of *The Changing World*, the successor of *The Colosseum* that Wall edited after the war, and this, in itself, is significant. Ward and Villis agree that *The Colosseum* paradigmatically illustrates how Catholic circles, and the 'Chelsea Group' specifically, increasingly identified with right-wing radical politics in the years before the Second World War (Ward 45-6; Villis 121). In fact, *The Colosseum* had not been from its beginnings on the side of fascism. It ran from March 1934 until the outbreak of the war and initially, the 'mission' of the review was spiritual rather than political. In the 'Glossary' quoted above, for instance, political systems are not considered as ends in themselves, but their function is to help members of a society achieve their spiritual destiny (Wall, 'Glossary' 4-5). 'Like *Order*', Villis explains, '*Colosseum* saw the disorder of the world as stemming from spiritual rather than

material roots' (122). Only over the years, Wall increasingly sided with fascism, which he came to see as 'the least bad of all the options', and this found unmistakable expression in the pages of his review (Villis 131). As a result of his connections to the 'Chelsea Group' it is not possible to exclude Jones from this trend, yet it is interesting to notice that in contrast to *Order*, *Essays in Order*, and *The Changing World*, he never contributed anything to *The Colosseum*. To all appearances, *The Changing World* represents an attempt to reverse the change of focus from a concern with the fate of individuals to totalitarian politics that irrefutably compromises *The Colosseum*. The title of Jones's essay, in this respect, already sends clear signals, and his argument that 'democracy' needs to guarantee 'the right of man to exercise his distinctive function as man . . .' represents a return to the notion that political systems primarily need to serve the individual. In the editorial, Wall echoes Jones's essay, in particular the argument that the rights of the individual are threatened, as he reflects on '. . . how totalitarian our thinking tends to be nowadays as well as how even "traditionalists" think of things in terms of the mass, of "society" rather than in the terms of the lives of persons and of what is true' ('Editorial' 7). However, in contrast to what could be expected, neither Wall nor Jones advocates a straightforward individualism in response, and both are still concerned with 'unity' or 'community' on a European, even a universal level. Wall observes in the editorial: 'It is striking testimony to the unitary characteristics of "civilisation" or "culture" that in spite of the barriers the separated peoples have similar preoccupations. . . . The crisis in every serious sense is universal' ('Editorial' 5-6). Similarly to Wall in these lines, Jones's 'Art and Democracy' can be interpreted as imagining a 'universal' 'community' irrespective of political or religious conviction. Insofar as Jones postulates in his essay a 'foundational equality' among all human beings, he envisages a universal 'community' of humanity, a 'community' of 'man-the-artist'. Unlike the transcendental Christian 'community', this 'community' is not based on a transcendental ideal, such as the Christian God, that is located beyond all human beings, but on a quality that is, according to Jones, by definition shared by all human beings.

The notion of a 'community' of humanity that is implicit in 'Art and Democracy' can also be discerned in *The Anathemata*, and the dichotomy between

the transcendental Christian 'community' and the 'community' of humanity in Jones's poem is inherently related to the dichotomy between the two kinds of typology that have been described above. The 'community' of humanity is based on the anthropological conception of 'man' as inevitably linked to the 'gratuitous', of 'man' as inevitably an 'artist', which is illustrated by Christianity but also by countless other human habits or activities. This 'community' of humanity is not as clearly or pervasively present in Jones's poem as the transcendental Christian 'community', conceivably because it could be considered heretical. Yet, it is implicit in passages that are based on twentieth-century typology. In addition to the passages of Leda and the Swan, and 'The Lady of the Pool', discussed above, the final lines of *The Anathemata* intriguingly express the notion of a human 'community'. *The Anathemata* ends as follows:

> He does what is done in many places
> what he does other
> he does after the mode
> of what has always been done.
> What did he do other
> recumbent at the garnished supper?
> What did he do yet other
> riding the Axile Tree? (*A* 243)

Jones's poem here returns to the celebration of the Eucharist with which it opens and to which it repeatedly turns throughout. It could, thus, be maintained that the end of *The Anathemata* is firmly rooted in Christian theology, and this Christian focus even seems to grow stronger from line to line, as the final words portray Christ as the centre of the universe. Jones writes in an essay: 'In the course of writing *The Anathemata* I had occasion to consider the Tree of the Cross as the axial beam round which all things move' ('Crown' 39). Yet, Jones's anthropological interest could be brought back into focus by remarking with Heather O'Donoghue how the final lines '[lock] tight the analogy of the Cross and Yggdrasill', and by extension the analogy of Christ and Odin, that, as O'Donoghue shows, is prepared and elaborated over a considerable part of Jones's poem (O'Donoghue 183–6). However, even more interesting, in the present context, is an aspect of these last lines that so far, to my knowledge, has escaped all commentary. While the celebration of the Eucharist at the beginning of *The Anathemata* memorably portrays the 'making other' involved in the sacrament, these final lines are conspicuously dominated by 'doing'. This

difference between 'making' and 'doing' needs to be understood in relation to the distinction between 'making' and 'action' that Maritain establishes in *Art and Scholasticism*, in accordance with Aristotle, and with which Jones was familiar (Robichaud 143). 'Action', according to Maritain, consisting in 'the *free* use . . . of our faculties or in the exercise of our free will . . .', is not directed towards 'truth', but only to 'the good of man' (Maritain 5, emphasis in original). Maritain writes: 'Action is thus ordered to the common end of all human life and it has a part to play in the perfection peculiar to the human being. The sphere of action is the sphere of Morality or of human good as such' (5). 'Making', by contrast, is '*productive action*', which Maritain also summarises under 'Art'. It is independent of the transient world of morality and has as its own rule only 'the good of the work'. Hence, making '. . . establishes the *artifex*, artist or artisan, in a world apart, cloistered, defined and absolute . . .' (6, emphases in original). Maritain's distinction between 'action' and 'making' is complex and would require further commentary. Yet, in the present context, it must suffice to emphasise that while 'action' is primarily related to the human being, 'making' is associated with a realm beyond the human. Maritain writes, for example: 'Art has no concern with our life, but only with such-and-such particular and extra-human ends which in regard to Art are an ultimate goal' (12). The difference between 'making' and 'action' emerges clearly when the beginning of *The Anathemata* is contrasted with its end. Consecrating the host, the priest in the opening scene 'makes' it 'other', and 'lifts up' the sign it has become. Thus, the 'making other' establishes a vertical axis and is entirely directed towards a transcendental realm. In contrast to this vertical connection with which Jones's poem opens, the end establishes horizontal relationships between human beings. In the last lines, the priest during the mass is united with the whole of humanity, and what he does has significance, not necessarily because his acts ultimately refer to the transcendental ground of the divine, but simply because he follows an age-old tradition that has a meaning on its own:

> He does what is done in many places
> what he does other
> he does after the mode
> of what has always been done.

The difference, here, is between a religious ritual and a fundamentally human practice that can assume various forms. Now, 'action', the 'sphere of Morality', in Maritain, is still related to God. He writes: 'Prudence is the queen of the moral virtues . . . because Prudence measures our acts in their relation to an ultimate end which is God Himself . . . .' (6). Just as he does with the concepts of 'sacrament' and 'religion', however, Jones in 'Art and Sacrament' strips 'Prudence' of its strictly theological meaning, maintaining, for instance: '. . . we *all* are committed to a Prudentia of sorts' ('Art and Sacrament' 147, emphasis in original; see also 'Art and Sacrament' 146–8). For Jones, 'Prudentia' refers to any kind of principle that motivates human action, not exclusively to moral goodness, and it thus primarily testifies to 'man's' freedom of will, which results from 'his' being a rational animal. Hence, at the end of *The Anathemata*, Jesus 'recumbent at the garnished supper', and the priest, who '. . . does what is done in many places', illustrate precisely this truth about human nature that disposes or even compels human beings to sign-making. It is this intrinsic quality that unites Jesus and the priest with the whole 'community' of humanity from its earliest beginnings to the present.

Unlike the transcendental Christian 'community', the 'community' of humanity is not based on a transcendental ideal but on a quality arguably immanent in all human beings. The difference between the transcendental Christian 'community' and the 'community' of humanity in *The Anathemata* can be conceived with respect to the 'common background', whose recovery is defined as the aim of the poem in the preface. This 'common background' is either identified primarily with Christianity or with the human proclivity for 'sign-making'. The 'community' of humanity is more inclusive, more open and therefore less dangerous from a political or ethical point of view. Yet, it is still totalising. It still conceives the whole of humanity through a particular conceptual framework, and this particular conceptual framework still privileges some human beings over others. The difference to the transcendental Christian 'community' is mainly that this privileging is not, or at least not conspicuously, religiously or politically motivated. In 'Art and Democracy', as quoted above, Jones considers the 'foundational equality' of all human beings by describing them all as 'artists', and he specifies, indeed, that '. . . the word artist is here used in its fundamental sense and not in its restricted modern

sense' ('Democracy' 90, 86). Yet, the 'modern' meaning of 'artist' inevitably intrudes, and the artist, in its 'restricted modern sense', consequently, is more paradigmatically 'man' than other 'men'. Moreover, in Jones's writings, the artist par excellence is frequently the poet, and the poet is, consequently, more readily capable of accessing the past and re-establishing the 'common background' than other artists or 'men'. Thus, even Jones's ostensibly egalitarian 'community' of humanity reveals a hierarchical structure. In the preface to *The Anathemata* Jones distinguishes the art of the poet, for instance, as follows:

> The 'arts' of, e.g., the strategist, the plumber, the philosopher, the physicist, are no doubt, like the art of the poet, conditioned by and reflective of the particular cultural complex to which their practitioners belong, but neither of these four arts, *with respect to their several causes*, can be said to be occupied with the embodiment and expression of the mythus and deposits comprising that cultural complex. Whereas the art of poetry, even in our present civilizational phase . . . is, in some senses, still so occupied. ('Preface' 19, emphasis in original)

The poet is the only one who can still give expression to the foundation of a culture and he is consequently endowed with a status similar to a prophet or priest, which is familiar from the works of other modernists, such as Ezra Pound or T.S. Eliot.[20] However, to some extent Jones needs to be distinguished from such modernist poet-prophets, for frequently it seems that he assumes such a position despite himself (Schwartz 369-0). Jones is often concerned with the responsibilities of the poet rather than with 'his' rights or power. In his essay 'Past and Present', for example, he describes the poet as 'rememberer' and concludes that '[t]he artist is not responsible *for* the future but he is, in a certain sense, responsible *to* the future' ('Past and Present' 141). Jones uses 'artist' and 'poet' interchangeably in this context. Similarly, in the preface to *The Anathemata*, he challenges the notion that the artist is '. . . a seer or endowed with the gift of prophecy' and instead describes 'him' as '. . . a kind of Servus Servorum [that is, a servant or slave of servants or slaves] to deliver what has been delivered to him . . .' ('Preface' 35). Jones's awareness of the poet's duty or responsibility is also described by Hague in the collection of Jones's letters he edited. Hague remarks that he was surprised to see in Jones's letters how much attention the latter paid to the reception of his work, and then explains:

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[20] For the role of the poet as priest or prophet in Pound's or Eliot's works, see, for example, Walker 84, Margolis 21, and Kojecký 97-8.

> it soon became clear to me that this was not due to any vanity or self-esteem, but entirely to his conviction of the poet's mission, that his work is both a private and a public worship. He was, therefore, most anxious to know that he was understood, and would . . . take great pains to explain himself, and would be immensely grateful when a friend or stranger found some key to what the poet feared might remain a puzzle . . . (Hague in Jones, *Greatcoat* 154)

Hague's description of Jones's work as 'a private and a public worship' again relates him to a priest. Yet, the anxiety to be understood that Hague describes, just like the sense of responsibility and duty expressed in the previous quotations, suggests that if Jones conceived of the poet as a figure of authority, he believed that 'his' power worked primarily bottom-up, not top-down. This does not make Jones's 'community' of humanity any less totalising or hierarchical, but it distinguishes Jones's poetry, at least to some degree, from the works of modernist poet-prophets, like Pound or Eliot.

2.6 Jones and Bataille: *The Anathemata* as Late Modernist Epic Poem

With *The Anathemata*, Jones aims at restoring contemporary technocratic civilisation to the state of an organic 'community'. While this preoccupation with the foundation, or reconstitution, of a 'community', among other features, such as the ties to the Virgilian epic tradition, characterises *The Anathemata* as epic, the manner in which it tries to achieve this goal defines it as late modernist. Jones's poetics is late modernist because of its duality of and undecidability between a Catholic and secular, 'anthropological' perspective, which finds expression in *The Anathemata* in two kinds of typology and two models of 'community'. The Catholic perspective, based on the transcendental truth of God, gives rise to traditional Christian typology and the notion of a transcendental Christian 'community', while the anthropological perspective presupposes a 'truth' of humanity that underlies 'twentieth-century' typology and functions as basis of a 'community' of 'humanity'. In accordance with Mellors's account of late modernism, Jones's 'community' of 'man-the-artist' can be interpreted as attempt at conceiving 'community' as totality but without recourse to transcendental, universalising categories. Yet, in this respect, Jones does not go as far as Bataille, because in contrast to Bataille's 'community' of or in nothingness, Jones's 'community' of 'humanity' is still based on a 'truth' that can be known, revealed and represented. The 'common background' that is meant to reveal itself to

the reader through the typological poetics of *The Anathemata* in quasi-epiphanic moments is either the 'truth' of God or the 'truth' about 'human nature', and it is thus based either in theology or rationalism. Thus, Jones's poetics is still firmly rooted in metaphysics, while Bataille's 'philosophy' pushes against its limits. Hence, also, Bataille does not seek epiphanies, which presuppose a subject, but ecstasy, which transcends subjectivity. As the epigraph to this chapter illustrates, when Bataille sees a church in the sun, he is moved to 'rapture', when he touches dust, he realises that his life itself amounts to nothing more than a speck of dust in the universe. However, when Jones considers the half-empty, neglected churches of his contemporary civilisation, as he does at the beginning of *The Anathemata*, he perceives beneath their 'sterile ornaments' and 'dead symbols' a living truth that can be revealed and understood (*A* 49, 50). This difference between Bataille and Jones can also be considered by comparing and contrasting Jones's dichotomy between the 'gratuitous' and the 'utile' with Bataille's exceedingly similar distinction between expenditure and utility. Both dichotomies testify to aversions to the values and ideals of modernisation, and both Jones and Bataille oppose the 'utile' and utility, respectively, to humanity. Jones maintains that 'utile' works are of 'subhuman' quality, while Bataille maintains that utility relegates human beings to the status of a tool or thing. Yet, while Jones opposes the utile because he identifies the gratuitous with human nature, Bataille's disapproval of utility is intimately related to his aversion to project and teleology, and to the conception of the human being as subject. Thus, again, while Bataille pushes against the limits of metaphysics, Jones is firmly located within.

3. William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*

> The vast wreck of humanity never ceases to drift along a river deaf to the sound of our words: suddenly, the sound of a waterfall . . .
> (Bataille, *G* 17, ellipsis in original)

3.1 Introduction

Williams never read *The Anathemata*, but he knew about it and recommended it to Pound in a letter in 1954: 'There's a Welsh poet named Jones to whom we have just given, by we I mean the National Institute of Arts and Letters, the Loines award. It's a poem. Believe me, if you want something tough but rewarding, tackle that. . . . I've forgotten the name of the work but it was too much for me' (*SL* 325). Jones won the Loines award for *The Anathemata*, Margaret Glynne Lloyd explains, and, hence, Williams must have had this poem in mind (81). The five books of Williams's *Paterson* were published in 1946, 1948, 1949, 1951, and 1958, respectively. Thus, Williams wrote and published the first four books while Jones worked on *The Anathemata*. Initially, Williams's plan for his magnum opus only included four books, yet already while he was working on Book IV he started playing with the idea of a fifth book, and during the last years of his life he even worked on Book VI (McGowan ix–xii). This raises the question of whether Books I to V all enjoy the same status. Some critics only consider the first four books and several treat Book V as a special case. Yet, the present chapter argues that the open or unfinished form of *Paterson* is a central feature of Williams's poem, and consequently that the addition of a fifth and even of a possible sixth book cannot be ignored without doing *Paterson* an injustice. In a letter to his publisher, quoted at the end of Christopher McGowan's 'Preface' to *Paterson*, Williams comments on Book V and the open-endedness of his poem: 'After *Paterson, Four* ten years have elapsed. In that period I have come to understand not only that many changes have occurred in me and the world, but I have been forced to recognize that there can be no end to such a story I have envisioned with the terms which I had laid down for myself' (qtd. Williams in McGowan xv). As in the case of *The Anathemata*, the 'story' of *Paterson* is

exceedingly difficult to summarise, but Williams's own attempts at providing an overview are intriguing and helpful. An 'Author's Note' in the first edition of Book I states: 'This is the first part of a long poem in four parts – that man in himself is a city, beginning, seeking, achieving and concluding his life in ways which the various aspects of a city may embody . . .' (*P* 253n). A note on the dust jacket of the first edition of Book III implicitly modifies and elaborates on the relationship between the city and 'man', while it offers an enigmatic summary of the poem's chief objective:

> *Paterson* is a man (since I am a man) who dives from cliffs and the edges of waterfalls, to his death – finally. But for all that he is a woman (since I am not a woman) who *is* the cliff and the waterfall. . . .
>
> The brunt of the four books of *Paterson* . . . is a search for the redeeming language by which a man's premature death . . . might have been prevented. (*P* 279n)

'Paterson' is the city of the Passaic Falls in New Jersey that represents the main setting of Williams's poem. 'Paterson', however, is also a quasi-mythological giant on whose back the city is built, and next to whom lies a female giant. Furthermore, Dr. Paterson is a physician and poet, like Williams himself, who could be considered the main persona of the poem. Finally, 'Paterson', of course, also refers to the poem itself. Book I introduces the giant Paterson, who '. . . lies in the valley under the Passaic Falls', and it portrays Dr. Paterson in his city alongside its other inhabitants (*P* 6). In Book II, Dr. Paterson goes on a Sunday walk in the park of the city and encounters a leisure crowd. Book III describes a library fire, a storm, and a flood that devastated parts of the city. Book IV, opening with an 'An Idyll' located in nearby New York and featuring an important part on Marie Curie, revisits themes developed in the previous three books and tries to draw them together. Book V continues to elaborate on and complicate previously developed motifs and topics while it presents Dr. Paterson as an old man. Throughout the poem the city and its history surface through inclusions of historical documents, while the task and difficulties of writing also represent recurring concerns. The present chapter starts with a consideration of *Paterson* as an American epic poem. Section two argues that it is crucial to interpret *Paterson* as American epic because Williams was devoted to establishing an independent American literary tradition. Williams's aversion to past literary traditions and his aim of producing works that are in touch with the present can be related to broader concerns and interests that are reflected in the poetics of *Paterson*.

These are considered in section three. In the course of section three, however, the tension or conflict characteristic of late modernist poetics emerges, namely the postulation of a metaphysical Absolute and the simultaneous questioning or rejection of this notion. The manners in which Williams tries to overcome this tension, and its philosophical and political implications are considered in section four.

3.2 *Paterson* as American Epic Poem

In her discussion of *Paterson* as a 'modern epic', Lloyd illustrates with various examples that whereas Williams's poem is frequently rather uncritically described as an epic, numerous critics who explicitly address the question of genre consider it necessary to qualify this categorisation (Lloyd 243-4). These critics '. . . conclude that an epic cannot be written today in what they consider to be a society of "historical and spiritual dislocation"', Lloyd maintains, because they '. . . adhere to traditional, prescriptive attitudes toward the nature of epic . . .' (249). Yet, Lloyd convincingly shows that Williams frequently relates *Paterson* to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, that he '. . . thought of the poem as belonging to an "epic" tradition', that he engages with various epic conventions, and that already '[f]rom the outset . . . the reader is encouraged to think of the poem in terms of the epic tradition . . .' (245, 260). This situation of a poet who actively engages with epic traditions and of critics who miss or ignore this as a result of certain preconceptions is already familiar from the reception of *The Anathemata* and need not be further described with respect to *Paterson*.[1] Yet, with *Paterson* a new factor enters the present discussion of post-1945 epic poetry, for Williams's poem is not only an epic, but more specifically an American epic. Williams resolutely committed himself to fostering a distinctively American literary tradition, and in this context, the composition of an American epic poem represents a foundational effort whose significance must not be underestimated. 'To succeed', Mike Weaver writes, 'would be to replace the effigy of Europe with the living image of a local culture' (16).

Not surprisingly, then, *Paterson* is in an inherently ambivalent relationship to the classical epic tradition. Since Williams conceived it as an epic poem it relies on

[1] For a detailed discussion of the relationship between *Paterson* and epic, and of critics' evaluations of *Paterson* as epic, see Lloyd 241–284.

and continues European epic traditions, but since it is an American epic, and since Williams staunchly believed that American culture must emancipate itself from European influences, *Paterson* has to appropriate, and consequently to some degree misuse and deny, the literary heritage without which it could not exist. According to Lloyd, Williams's use of epic conventions in *Paterson* precisely serves this double purpose of invoking and fundamentally transforming the classical epic tradition. She writes: '. . . Williams uses the familiar aspects of traditional epic as a vehicle for his novel intention, to facilitate a recognition of the new, and, as he wrote on a worksheet for the poem, to carry "the old genius of Hellas into new channels"' (260). The end of Book IV clearly illustrates the ambivalent relationship between *Paterson* and the ancient epic tradition, particularly in conjunction with two comments Williams made in relation to this passage. At the end of Book IV, Dr. Paterson emerges from the sea after a swim and walks westward, inland:

> Wiping his face with his hand he turned
> to look back to the waves, then
> knocking at his ears, walked up
> to stretch out flat on his back in
> the hot sand . there were some
> girls, far down the beach, playing ball.
>
> –must have slept. Got up again . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . . Climbing the
> bank, after a few tries, he picked
> some beach plums from a low bush and
> sampled one of them, spitting the seed out,
> then headed inland, followed by the dog
> (*P* 202)

Williams comments on the end of Book IV: '. . . we come to the sea at last. Odysseus swims in as man must always do, he doesn't drown, he is too able but, accompanied by his dog, strikes inland again (toward Camden) to begin again' ('Statement' xiv). Here, Williams associates Dr. Paterson with Odysseus and consequently emphasises the connections between his poem and Homer's epic. Indeed, in Williams's poem Dr. Paterson is repeatedly presented as a modern-day Odysseus not unlike Leopold Bloom. '[H]e is an Odysseus', James E. Miller writes, 'who travels at home, his highest adventure a Sunday walk in the part, a dunking in the ocean near the shore' (135). Bloom comes particularly to mind in the above lines as a result of the

emphasis placed on trivial, instinctive, and especially corporeal acts, such as the wiping of the face, the knocking at the ears, the touching of the hot sand, or the spitting out of the seed (see also *P* 29-0). Nevertheless, Homer's Odysseus is the ultimate model, and Dr. Paterson's look 'back to the waves' is a nod in Homer's and Odysseus's direction before he 'head[s] inland', according to Williams, '. . . (toward Camden) to begin again'. Thus, even though the above statement primarily draws attention to the connection between Dr. Paterson and Odysseus, the notion of a distancing, a turning away or re-invention is also present. This latter tendency prevails in a commentary on the same passage in *The Autobiography of Williams Carlos Williams*:

> In the end man rises from the sea where the river appears to have lost its identity and accompanied by his faithful bitch . . . turns inland toward Camden where Walt Whitman, much traduced, lived the latter years of his life and died. He always said that his poems, which had broken the dominance of the iambic pentameter in English prosody, had only begun his theme. I agree. It is up to us, in the new dialect, to continue it by a new construction upon the syllables. (*Autobiography* 392)

The allusion to Whitman implicit in the reference to Camden in the first statement is here spelt out. If Paterson is still an Odysseus at all according to this interpretation, he is an Odysseus who turns his back on Homer and follows Whitman. In conjunction with the two elucidations by Williams, the last pages of Book IV thus nicely illustrate the ambivalent relationship between *Paterson* and the European epic tradition.

Yet, Williams's relationship to his American predecessors is as ambivalent as his relationship to the European literary tradition. The above quotation already illustrates that Williams acknowledges Whitman's importance, while he distinguishes himself from him. Whitman '. . . had only begun his theme', and '[i]t is up to us . . . to continue it . . .'. Such qualified endorsement, certainly, betrays Williams's 'anxiety of influence'. Miller maintains, for example, that '. . . in his drive to discover the new, Williams could not give over his allegiance totally to any poet of the past – not even Whitman' (J. E. Miller 130). In this respect, however, Williams is highly typical. Pound, Crane and Williams alike, Jeffrey Walker observes, '. . . found in Whitman not only a project for the American poet to pursue but also a specific manner from which they wished to distance themselves or that

they regarded as merely a rough beginning' (Walker 4). Nevertheless, the specific terms on which Williams accepts and rejects Whitman are of interest. According to Williams, Whitman broke with the European literary tradition through his language and his verse form, and in principle, Williams welcomes these beginnings of a distinctively, indigenous American literary tradition. 'Whitman created the art in America', Williams plainly declares, for example, in an early essay, and he emphasises elsewhere that it was 'the American idiom' that '. . . governed Walt Whitman in his choice of words' ('America, Whitman' 1; 'American Idiom' 250). For Williams, *Leaves of Grass* is accordingly emphatically a book of 'American poems', written from 'an American viewpoint' ('Leaves of Grass' 836). Whitman's new, open 'free verse' replaced the traditional, in Williams's opinion, out-dated and, for American poetry, inadequate verse forms of 'English' literature, and this supersession was for Williams of aesthetic but also of immense, political significance. English verse forms, Williams believes, simply cannot result in good American poetry. 'It may be', he speculates, 'that the essential pace of the English and the American languages is diametrically opposed each to the other and that that is an important factor in the writing of poetry . . .' ('Leaves of Grass' 837). Besides such linguistic differences, however, Williams maintains that particular verse forms are inherently related to the social and cultural contexts in which they emerged. Hence, he associates 'traditional' English verse forms with hierarchical forms of government, and consequently diametrically opposes them to the American ideal of democracy. For example, he establishes a relationship between 'the language used among cultured Englishmen' and what he calls 'the Establishment', and maintains, '"The Establishment," fixed in its commitments, has arrived at its last stand: the iambic pentameter, blank verse, the verse of Shakespeare and Marlowe which give it its strength . . .' ('American Idiom' 250-1). In his essay 'Letter to an Australian Editor', he argues more provocatively: 'The forms of the past, no matter how cultivated, will inevitably carry over from the past much of the social, political and economic complexion of the past. And I insist that those who cling basically to those forms wish in their hearts for political, social and economic autocracy' ('Australian Editor' 10). However, while Williams openly acknowledges his debts to Whitman for breaking with the tradition of English verse and with everything this entails, he

fundamentally objects to Whitman's 'free verse'. '"[F]ree verse" is a misnomer', he argues in 'America, Whitman, and the Art of Poetry', and scathingly adds: 'Free verse merely means verse whose proper structure escapes a man's efforts to control it' ('America, Whitman' 1). 'Free verse' is a 'misnomer', because Williams believes that all verse 'must be governed', as he writes later in the same essay, and while Whitman's 'invention' represents an important beginning, he was simply not up to the task ('America, Whitman' 2).[2] 'Whitman's so-called "free verse" was an assault on the very citadel of the poem', Williams accordingly proclaims, and similarly: '. . . in your search for freedom – which is desirable – you must stop somewhere, but where exactly shall you stop? Whitman could not say' ('Leaves of Grass' 836, 840). Hence, Williams aims at building on Whitman's beginnings in American literature, but also at replacing his 'free verse' with a more adequate verse form.

According to Williams, the antithesis of Whitman's and his own indigenous, American poetry is the international, sophisticated poetry of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Williams frequently directly opposes his and Whitman's works to Eliot's, while his attitude to Pound is more complex. He felt betrayed by Eliot, and famously writes in his *Autobiography*:

> Then out of the blue *The Dial* brought out *The Waste Land* and all our hilarity ended. It wiped out our world as if an atom bomb had been dropped upon it and our brave sallies into the unknown were turned into dust.
>
> To me especially it struck like a sardonic bullet. I felt at once that it had set me back twenty years, and I'm sure it did. Critically Eliot returned us to the classroom just at the moment when I felt that we were on the point of an escape to matters much closer to the essence of a new art form itself – rooted in the locality which should give it fruit. I knew at once that in certain ways I was most defeated.
>
> Eliot had turned his back on the possibility of reviving my world. And being an accomplished craftsman, better skilled in some ways than I could ever hope to be, I had to watch him carry my world off with him, the fool, to the enemy.
>
> If with his skills he could have been kept here to be employed by our slowly shaping drive, what strides might we not have taken! We needed him: he might have become our adviser, even our hero. By his walking out on us we were stopped, for the moment, cold. (*Autobiography* 174)

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[2] This is a basic argument Williams repeatedly rehearses in his essays. See, for example 'On Measure' 339-0; 'Australian Editor' 11; 'Weather' 218-9; 'Leaves of Grass' 840.

According to Williams, Eliot is the traitor of the project to establish an American poetic tradition, a tradition 'rooted in the locality'. Instead of supporting this cause, the talented poet left the United States and its fledgling poetry scene for 'the enemy', for Europe and its literary classics that are and, thanks to him, further will be studied in the classrooms. Eliot had a choice, Williams writes in 'The Poem as Field of Action': '1. Join the crowd, adding his blackbird's voice to the flock . . . or 2. To go where there was already a mass of more ready distinction . . . , already an established literature . . .' ('Field' 285). '[O]ur own position', Williams vehemently declares in the same essay, '. . . is *not* that of Mr. Eliot' ('Field' 285, emphasis in original). Williams is aware that the works of a new literary tradition cannot attain the same degree of sophistication as those of much older and more mature literatures, on which Eliot builds. Accordingly, he writes in 'Field of Action': 'It is as though for the moment we should be profuse, we Americans; we need to build up a mass, a conglomerate maybe, containing few gems but bits of them – Bazilian brilliants – that shine of themselves, uncut as they are' ('Field' 284-5). Groundwork is necessary, and Williams distinguishes his poetic activities from Eliot's: 'We're not putting the rose, the single rose, in the little glass vase in the window – we're digging a hole for the tree – and as we dig have disappeared in it' ('Field' 286). The introduction of *Paterson* at the very beginning of the poem as, among other things, '*a reply to Greek and Latin with the bare hands*' needs to be understood in precisely this context (*P* 2, emphasis in original). It presents *Paterson* as a self-consciously crude, improvised reaction against the academicism and classicism of contemporary poetry like Eliot's.

Williams is not as fierce a critic of *The Cantos* as he is of *The Waste Land*, conceivably, among other reasons, because he was friendly with Pound for many years and, like many artists, could not completely escape the latter's charm (see, for instance, W. C. Williams, *Autobiography*). In a review of Pound's 'A Draft of XXX Cantos', for example, Williams notices that while Pound uses 'modern speech', his verse '. . . is patterned *still* after classic meters . . .' ('Excerpts from a Critical Sketch' 107, emphasis in original). Yet, in contrast to what could be expected, given this criticism and his condemnation of Eliot's equally 'classical' poetry, Williams finds much to commend in *The Cantos* (see also 'A 1 Pound Stein'; 'Pound's Eleven New

'Cantos'). Nevertheless, Williams did not approve of Pound's emigration to Europe and of his rootless poetry, either. In a 1921 essay Williams, for example, critically remarks: 'Pound ran to Europe in a hurry. It is understandable. But he had not sufficient ground to stand on for more than perhaps two years. He stayed fifteen' ('Yours, O Youth' 35). Yet, more than anywhere else, in Williams's 'Letter to an Australian Editor' Pound, rather than Eliot, is the chief representative of American expatriate artists. Published in 1946, and thus both in the same year as Book I of *Paterson* and at a time when Pound had lost much of his reputation, 'Letter to an Australian Editor' can be interpreted as conscious attempt by Williams to free himself once and for all of Pound's influence. Williams refers to Pound's radio broadcasts in Italy during the Second World War and to his situation in St. Elizabeth's Hospital ('Australian Editor' 8-9). His assertion, in this context, that '. . . those who cling basically to [the forms of the past] wish in their hearts for political, social and economic autocracy' is laden with significance, for it does not just generally or superficially condemn the 'classicism' of modernists like Pound, but concretely implies a relationship between Pound's poetics and his totalitarian politics. In *The Tale of the Tribe*, Bernstein observes that,

> . . . Williams was forced to acknowledge that Pound's actual practice . . . effected a decisive breakthrough in the very direction he had always marked as his own. . . . Pound had learned how to incorporate into verse precisely those American documents and histories that Williams himself had hitherto been able to utilize only in his prose meditations. (199)

Yet, Bernstein also shows that Williams considered problematic Pound's '. . . root "perceptions," the relationship between poet and world, upon which *The Cantos* were grounded . . .' (200). Hence, Bernstein emphasises that while *Paterson* is undoubtedly influenced by *The Cantos*, it also constitutes an 'anti-*Cantos*': '. . . a text designated no so much to *apply* Pound's lesson to a particular setting, but rather to *contest* the fundamental priorities, the entire hierarchy of values, celebrated in *The Cantos*' (200, emphases in original; see also 220–4). In *Bardic Ethos*, Walker challenges Bernstein's interpretation of *Paterson* as an 'anti-*Canto*s' and argues that Williams, like Pound and like Whitman, assumes the authoritarian position of a 'sacerdotal' poet. According to Walker, the disagreement between Williams and Pound does not primarily concern the role or position of the poet in the world, but rather the means by which the poet can most successfully realise his function as

social or cultural leader. At stake in Williams's criticism of Pound, accordingly, is not the 'entire hierarchy of values', Walker maintains, but rather the question of the most adequate or successful 'poetic technique' or 'rhetoric' (157, 160). Both Bernstein and Walker draw attention to central aspects of Williams's poetry, and the question of whether or how Williams succeeds in composing an epic that resists the 'totalitarian temptation' (Moretti) represents the focus of the discussion of section four. At the moment, however, it is less important whether Williams succeeded in revising Pound's 'hierarchy of values' than that he criticised it, for in doing so he clears for himself a place in the tradition of the American epic between Whitman and Pound. Thus, with *Paterson*, Williams aims at appropriating the classical epic tradition and at writing an epic that is as American as Whitman's poetry, but whose verse is more structured than the latter's. Pound's *Cantos* represents a promising model in this respect, but in addition to Pound's internationalism, the egotism and authoritarianism of his poetic persona represents a significant problem of whose ethical and political implications Williams shows awareness.

3.3 The Poetics of *Paterson*

Williams did not develop as systematic a poetic theory as did Jones, but his writings betray several recurring and interrelated concerns that directly determine his poetics and are of central importance to *Paterson*. His aversion to the inadequate, 'archaic' forms of English language and literature and his affirmation of a distinctively American culture in its stead illustrate a general suspicion Williams held towards fixed forms and universalising frameworks of all kinds, in response to which he emphasises process, provisionality, particularity and immediate experience. Williams expresses this preoccupation memorably in *Paterson* in his famous dictum, 'No ideas but in things' (*P* 6, 9). He believes that established forms and orders, be they conventional verse forms, specialised discourses, or forms of government, interfere with individuals' direct experience of 'reality', and thus isolate and estrange them. In *The Embodiment of Knowledge*, a collection of notes Williams wrote between 1928 and 1930 that was published only posthumously, Williams argues:

> . . . the whole world has been and is blinded now by the effects of Science and Philosophy from birth up. Science is a deceit; Philosophy a

> sham; these are not life, but a scum over it through which we see torturedly. . . .
>
> . . . these (science and philosophy) come between men and men, men and women. . . .
>
> . . . . Until it has gradually come to be more and more [a] subtle film catching us all. A gross bar between [us and] life, such as a Greek slave had – we suppose. Until DEMOCRACY – has come, which is a thin, scientifically, philosophically perfect film, we can just see through enough. Flexible as collodion, as invisible as an electric sheet. Tough, universal – a magic lining between men everywhere and their desire. Even into the laws. That is why money is desired more than ever. To buy off. . . . (*EK* 26-7, square brackets in original)

Thus, 'Science' and 'Philosophy', fields of experts, rather than revealing a 'truth', according to Williams, obstruct the direct experience of 'life', obscure reality, and separate individuals. They represent a 'film' that entraps everybody. Democracy is exactly such a 'film', as well, but it is even more insidious than the latter two because, while 'Science' and 'Philosophy', through their specialised vocabularies, for example, conspicuously obstruct the perception of reality – 'through [them] we see torturedly . . .' – democracy likewise alienates individuals, but it does so surreptitiously. Yet, Williams is not opposed to democracy as such but only to what he in a 1936 speech calls 'old-fashioned democracy', that is, to actual democracy as it existed in contemporary United States. Democracy as Williams describes it in *Embodiment* above, John Beck remarks, '. . . [is] a thing that lays heavily over society. This is democracy used to regulate and control . . .' (Beck 73).

The estrangement and isolation Williams describes in *Embodiment* are the fate of the citizens of *Paterson*. At the beginning of the poem, they are, for example, compared to 'a thousand automatons',

> . . . . Who because they
> neither know their sources nor the sills of their
> disappointments walk outside their bodies aimlessly
> for the most part,
> locked and forgot in their desires – unroused. (*P* 6)

A little later, the citizens are presented as the creations of the poet Dr. Paterson:

> . . . Mr.
> Paterson has gone away
> to rest and write. Inside the bus one sees
> his thoughts sitting and standing. His
> thoughts alight and scatter–
>
> Who are these people (how complex

the mathematic) among whom I see myself
in the regularly ordered plateglass of
his thoughts, glimmering before shoes and bicycles?

They walk incommunicado, the
equation is beyond solution, yet
its sense is clear – that they may live
his thought is listed in the Telephone
Directory– (*P* 9-0)

The similarities between the alienation Williams describes in *Embodiment* and the state of the citizens are conspicuous. Unwittingly governed by powers beyond their control or understanding, the citizens behave like sleepwalkers. They are unable to escape from their predicament and ensnared by mundane fantasies that distract them and isolate them even further. The metaphor of the 'film' that separates individuals from 'reality', as described in *Embodiment*, interestingly surfaces in the second excerpt in the shape of the store window. The role capitalism plays in democracy and its contribution to the alienation of individuals, to which Williams briefly refers at the end of the excerpt from *Embodiment* above, here assumes a more concrete form. Capitalism sublimates the desires for an authentic relationship to one's surrounding into material goods, available and advertised everywhere. The citizens of Paterson do not relate to each other. They only become aware of their fellow citizens in the reflection of the shop window, in the films that separate them from 'reality'. They coexist, yet are separated by gaps, like entries in a telephone directory, and they have long lost the capacity to communicate. They are unable to communicate, not only because everybody is lost in their own 'desires' but also because none of the discourses available to them is adequate:

The language, the language
fails them
They do not know the words
or have not
the courage to use them .

–girls from
families that have decayed and
taken to the hills: no words.
They may look at the torrent in
their minds
and it is foreign to them. .
(*P* 11-2)

This is where the quest for the 'redeeming language' enters the picture. The sound of the Passaic Falls, the 'torrent in / their minds', symbolises the languages that have become incommensurate with the experiences of the citizens. This is why it fails them, and this failure is particularly evocatively represented in Book I by Mrs. Cumming, who fell down the Passaic Falls, and Sam Patch, who used to jump down waterfalls as a spectacle, but who died when he tried to do so at the falls of the Genesee River. A prose section at the end of Book I.i. in particular relates that Patch used to hold speeches before his jumps, and while it wonders, 'What could he say that he must leap so desperately to complete it?', the poem states that Patch fell because, '[s]peech had failed him. He was confused. The word had been drained of its meaning . . .' (*P* 16). Later the poem compares the deaths of Patch and Cumming:

> Patch leaped but Mrs. Cumming shrieked
> and fell – unseen (though
> she had been standing there beside her husband half
> an hour or more twenty feet from the edge).
>
> . . . . . .
>
> both silent, uncommunicative
> (*P* 20)

Patch spoke and actively jumped, while Cumming merely emitted an inarticulate shriek and fell. Nevertheless, both failed to communicate and the silences of their dead bodies are the apotheoses of this failure.

Williams distrusts established literary forms and specialised discourses, such as those of 'Science' or 'Philosophy', but also the more ubiquitous language of 'democracy' or capitalism because they all arrest the flux of reality, and while they might have been useful and valid when they emerged, they all persist beyond their times. This contrast between ceaselessly dynamic experience and the arresting property of discourse is skilfully expressed in two lines of Book III, where Dr. Paterson visits the library: 'Books will give rest sometimes against / the uproar of water falling' (*P* 97). Written language fixes the flow of experience and thus functions as a kind of shelter for the weary. Yet, by the same token it also always falsifies or misrepresents, and Dr. Paterson is therefore highly suspicious of it. He hates the library, for instance: 'The place sweats of staleness and of rot / a back-house stench . a / library stench' (*P* 103). Language, discourses and frameworks of

all kinds all but inevitably lag behind ever-changing actuality. Yet, this is not only a technical problem but also of political significance, because it is in the interest of the people in power to maintain the status quo. In his essay 'Against the Weather', Williams argues that it needs to be taken into consideration that 'truth' constantly changes: 'The mutability of the truth, Ibsen said it. Jefferson said it. We should have a revolution of some sort in America every ten years. The truth has to be redressed, re-examined, re-affirmed in a new mode' ('Weather' 217). Nevertheless, Williams does not advocate a revolution, let alone a series of revolutions. Despite everything he believes in reasoned action and order, and he is consequently suspicious of the impulsiveness of revolutions or the chaos of unlimited freedom (see, for example, 'Revolutions' 98, 100-1, 113; 'Weather' 209). This is already implicit in Williams's objections to Whitman's 'free verse', in his argument that all verse has to be 'governed'. Yet, he believes that whatever order is realised at a given moment can only be provisional and always has to derive from 'reality', rather than being imposed on it ('Basis' 190; 'Weather' 210, 217). Hence, Williams emphasises the importance of the particular and of immediate experience. 'It is not an "essence," a philosophic or physiochemical derivative I am seeking but a *sensual* "reality"', he writes in 'Against the Weather', and in 'Field of Action', he emphasises more specifically that the 'discoveries' on which successful American poetry will be based must come 'from what we *hear* in America', '. . . we must *listen* to the language for the discoveries we hope to make' ('Weather' 197, my emphasis; 'Field' 290, emphases in original). Williams can sound, at times, like an eighteenth-century empiricist. 'The artist is limited to the range of his contact with the objective world', he writes in an early essay, for instance, and adds: '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' ('Yours, O Youth' 33). Accordingly, one of the problems in *Paterson* is that people do not listen: the Passaic Falls are 'crashing upon a stone ear', that is, upon the ear of the giant, and later the poem laments that there is '[s]o much talk of language – when there are no / ears' (*P* 15, 106). Moreover, it is significant with respect to Williams's focus on the particular and immediate experience that he based *Paterson* on a particular locality, on the

region in which he had been born, in which he lived most of his life and in which he died. He explains in his *Autobiography*: 'I wanted . . . to write about the people close about me: to know in detail, minutely what I was talking about – to the white of their eyes, to their very smells' (*Autobiography* 391).

Williams's awareness of the limits or inadequacies of discourses and fixed forms generally, and his emphasis on immediate experience in response is reminiscent of the development discovered in Bataille's thought, particularly from *Contre-Attaque* onwards. However, Williams's aversion to revolutions and his trust in reason distance him from Bataille, while his focus on the particular or local invites a comparison between Williams and Jones. Lloyd compares Jones and Williams on precisely this ground. She refers to Jones's 'Preface' to *The Anathemata*, specifically to Jones's argument that '. . . only what is actually loved and known can be seen *sub specie aeternitatis*', and maintains that 'both poets are trying to make a shape out of the things of which they are made' (81). These similarities between Jones and Williams are suggestive, indeed, and Williams sounds even more like Jones in 'Against the Weather', which Lloyd does not quote, when he argues: 'A life that is here and now is timeless. That is the universal I am seeking'. Later in the same essay, Williams refers to 'the universality of the local' ('Weather' 196, 198). However, it is important to realise that Williams's and Jones's interests in the particular are motivated by exceedingly different philosophies or ideologies. Jones's emphasis on the particular, the local, the contractual or corporeal is ultimately grounded in the 'incarnational theology' of Thomism (Schwartz 324). No wonder that, according to Jones, Joyce is the 'incarnational' artist par excellence ('Notes on the 1930s' 46; 'James Joyce's Dublin' 304). Williams, by contrast, is as opposed to religion as he is to 'Science', 'Philosophy' or 'democracy', for, according to him, religion is just another externally imposed order. In *Embodiment*, Williams considers 'Catholicism' a kind of dogmatism, similarly to 'Science': 'Catholicism . . . offers intellectual integrity . . . but at the cost of the intelligence . . . . It is all argument out of "God's" hat. The same error is committed here as by science . . .' (*EK* 109). In 'Against the Weather', he associates religion with capitalism in a similar vein: 'All formal religions, in spite of their varieties, embrace one final and damning evil; founded on the immanence of a religious experience, they tend rather to be

monopolies using religion to bring a man under an economic yoke of one sort or another . . .' ('Weather' 215-6). Williams's focus on the particular or local is intimately related to his aim of establishing an American culture.

Since the immediate experience of one's surrounding is obstructed by the 'films' of dead forms, the objective of *Paterson* is the achievement of 'clarity' – clarity of vision, clarity of experience. 'Clarity' is a recurring and specifically charged term in Williams's essays and in *Paterson*, and Ian Copestake maintains that it is directly related to Williams's conception of 'the proper business of poetry'. Copestake explains: 'For Williams "clarity" constitutes the means by which forms of authority can be questioned . . .' (99). Indeed, opposing 'poetry' to 'Science' and 'Philosophy', Williams maintains in *Embodiment* that '. . . poetry is the breath of life itself', before he asserts, '. . . clarity! is life' (*EK* 26). Later he states more directly: '. . . clarity is the essence of "poetry"' (*EK* 37). In *Paterson*, Williams stresses the importance of 'clarity', for example, in the context of Cumming's and Patch's failures to communicate:

> Only of late, late! begun to know, to
> know clearly (as through clear ice) whence
> I draw my breath or how to employ it
> clearly – if not well:
>
> Clearly!
> speaks the red-breast his behest. Clearly!
> clearly! (*P* 20)

The excessive repetition of 'clearly' conveys the urgency to achieve it. Clarity is the poet's goal and inspiration, the latter of which is implicit in the reference to 'breath'. Yet it is by no means clear what clarity precisely means or how it can be achieved. Even 'clear ice' is not particularly clear after all, and the banal rhyme of 'red-breast' with 'behest' does not yield any insight, either, but rather signals a return to poetic commonplaces. The repetition of 'clearly' and the inability to progress beyond this single notion to the task at hand testify to these difficulties and paradoxically result in obscurity. Once clarity is identified as goal, the question is how to achieve it, and two other passages in *Paterson* provide important clues to this:

> . . a mass of detail
> to interrelate on a new ground, difficultly;
> an assonance, a homologue
> triple piled

> pulling the disparate together to clarify
> and compress
> (*P* 19)
>
> Invent (if you can) discover or
> nothing is clear – will surmount
> the drumming in your head. There will be
> nothing clear, nothing clear .
> (*P* 85)

Clarity is achieved by breaking with the established, current orders or systems, by 'interrelating' the material 'on a new ground', by inventing or discovering new connections and relationships. This can be achieved only 'difficultly', because the means to such projects are always lacking. The material of old, inadequate frameworks has to be adapted to new uses. Clarity is achieved through makeshift approaches, and such invention or discovery is the work of genius. According to Williams, the 'imagination' is the faculty responsible for 'innovation' or 'discovery', the faculty through which 'truth' can be 'redressed, re-examined, re-affirmed'. 'The imagination is the transmuter. It is the changer', Williams writes, '[w]ithout imagination life cannot go on, for we are left staring at the empty casings where truth lived yesterday . . .' ('Weather' 213). In 'Revolutions Revalued', a speech Williams gave in 1936, he similarly maintains that, '. . . individual genius is the basis of all social excellence whether as inventor, organizer, or governor', and he postulates that, '[a]ll the great additions to knowledge, all great acts, have originated in the head of one man or one woman' ('Revolutions' 104, 112). Such genius is not represented in *Paterson* by Dr. Paterson, who struggles most of the time to compose anything, but rather by Marie Curie and her discovery of atomic fission. Book IV relates how Curie discovered a discrepancy between her experiments and what she had expected according to the periodic table: 'A dissonance / in the valence of Uranium / led to the discovery' (*P* 175). The significance of Curie's discovery in the context of Williams's poem is that it reformed an existing order, namely the periodic table:

> flagrant!
> adept at thought, playing the words
> following a table which is the synthesis
> of thought, a symbol that is to him,
> sun up! a Mendelief, the elements laid
> out by molecular weight, identity
> predicted before found! and .

. . . . . .
Ah Madam!
this is order, perfect and controlled
on which empires, alas, are built

But there may issue, a contaminant,
some other metal radioactive
a dissonance . . .
(*P* 177-8)

Mendeleev's periodic table might be an admirable 'synthesis / of thought' and it might be an ideal order, 'perfect and controlled', yet it is too perfect and not only 'controlled' but also controlling. It is a fixed order imposed on reality, and therefore an order that cannot account for all of reality, an order that is inevitably schematic and reductive. Such an order can be useful for some time – for example, it allowed Mendeleev to predict the existence of elements – but sooner or later it becomes inadequate and, if it is not superseded, coercive. The political stakes involved here become clear through the comparison to the order of 'empires'. Curie discovered a 'dissonance' in Mendeleev's system, a glitch, a heterogeneous component, a surplus the 'perfect' order could not explain or accommodate, and the sign of this dissonance, according to *Paterson*, was an unsubstantial remnant of Uranium in Curie's cauldron that started glowing:

a stain at the bottom of the retort
without weight, a failure, a
nothing. And then, returning in the
night, to find it .
LUMINOUS!
(*P* 176)

The stain is 'a / nothing', not only because of its negligible quantity but also because the current system cannot account for it. '[R]etort' is a clever pun here, for while it refers to the scientific apparatus, the 'LUMINOUS' stain at the bottom of the vessel also represents a 'retort' to Mendeleev's order of elements. In *Paterson* the glowing leftover Curie discovered becomes a symbol for everything that resists systematisation or codification, for everything the discovery of which signals the achievement of 'clarity'.

Insofar as Curie sees through an established system and reforms it, she represents the 'genius' or 'artist', rather than 'Science'. In *Embodiment*, Williams argues that knowledge as totality is quintessentially 'human', while 'Science' and

'Philosophy' fetishise one dimension or aspect of it.[3] They focus on a part and elevate it to the status of the whole. Thus, he maintains, for example: 'Knowledge is essential, delightful, human . . . ; science, as the codified sum of knowledge is stupid and inhuman . . .' (*EK* 63). In Book I, *Paterson* declares that, '[d]ivorce is / the sign of knowledge in our time, / divorce! divorce!', and Williams's poem primarily confronts this fragmentation and specialisation of knowledge by attacking the institution of the university (*P* 17; see also 33-4). 'We have to acknowledge', Williams writes in *Embodiment*, '. . . that there is a division between those who know (some certain thing) and those who do not know it' (*EK* 44), and in a capitalist society in which 'knowledge' or 'information' – 'know-how' – equals power and money, such a division is of considerable political importance. Those in power, in order to remain in power, do all they can to maintain this division. They foster the monopolisation of knowledge by experts. Yet, according to Williams, there are degrees and kinds of knowledge, and the knowledge of experts is only one type. '[T]he scholar, not being ignorant, has not the knowledge which the ignorant man possesses', Williams claims, and he adds: 'But both are parts of a whole' (*EK* 44). This whole, this totality of knowledge is knowledge as 'universal to humanity', and such universal, quintessentially 'human' knowledge is the realm of art (*EK* 44-5). Accordingly, Williams maintains that 'Science' and 'Philosophy' merely represent part of the total knowledge, with which art is concerned: 'Science and Philosophy. These are provinces (necessary to explore) of my knowledge . . . which is always perfect and whole' (*EK* 35; see also 92-3). Since 'knowledge' as totality is, on the one hand, quintessentially 'human' and, on the other hand, the object of 'art', it follows that 'art' is inextricably related to the 'human'. 'Poems must be . . . considered as documents of men', Williams states in *Embodiment*, for example, and in 'Revelation', an article published in 1947, Williams contends that art reveals '[t]hat which is inside the man' (*EK* 74; 'Revelation' 268; see also 'Basis' 184; 'Field' 291). Likewise, Williams argues more generally in 'Against the Weather' that without art there would be no 'mankind':

> . . . a man walks the streets but he is none without the agency of the artist. He may be a 'soul' or a 'citizen,' a 'member of the party,' an

[3] This is an argument to which Williams returns throughout *Embodiment*. See, for example, *EK* 36–45.

> example of certain philosophic concepts in operation or one of the genus *Homo sapiens* but a MAN – lacking art – never! Only that preserves him in his full sensuality, the man himself. ('Weather' 200)

Williams's conceptions of art, particularly of its relationship to 'knowledge' and 'humanity', establish the 'artist' as a powerful figure closely related to the Romantic notion of poetic genius. Similarly to his arguments in *Embodiment*, in 'The Basis of Faith in Art', Williams attributes to the 'artist', 'a sense of totality; the whole; humanity as a whole' ('Basis' 192). In 'Revolutions Revalued', he postulates a close relationship between the 'artist' and 'truth', maintaining that '. . . the artist is the truthfullest scribe of society . . .', before asserting: '[The artist] has first to speak the truth. Second to share the truth in such a form that the form itself will be an image of what is said. . . .' ('Revolutions' 104, 109 square brackets in original). In 'Caviar and Bread Again: A Warning to the New Writer', Williams writes more specifically about the 'poet' and presents 'him' as an unacknowledged legislator of the world. He claims that, '[i]t is he, the poet, whose function it is, when the race has gone astray, to lead it . . .', and consequently that, '[o]n the poet devolves the most vital function of society: to recreate it . . . in times of stress, in a new mode . . .' ('Caviar' 102-3). In 'Against the Weather', which is subtitled, 'Study of the Artist', Williams draws on all these characterisations, synthesises and elaborates them. Here, Williams writes that 'art' joins, unifies and completes: '[Art] closes up the ranks of understanding. It shows the world at one with itself', '[e]very masterwork liberates while it draws the world closer in mutual understanding and tolerance. This is its aroma of the whole' ('Weather' 198-9). The artist, accordingly, is a human being that can see the big picture, that perceives the 'world' as totality. 'Being an artist I can produce, if I am able, universals of general applicability', Williams declares, and he contends just as boldly: '. . . the artist's is the great master pattern which all others approach . . . . The moral good and bad approach the good and bad of the arts . . .' ('Weather' 197, 205). This is precisely why, according to Williams, the work of the artist is 'the most important creation of civilization' and also the 'creator' of civilisations ('Weather' 197). Moreover, since the artist, as Williams writes, 'addresses himself to life as a whole', and since the function of art is to bring back into focus the entirety of 'life' or the 'world' when forms of discourse of civilisation

obscure it, neither good art nor the artist can ever be committed to particular, individual causes (‘Weather’ 198, 204).

According to Williams, then, the artist is capable of reforming partial systems of thought and thus of restoring the unity of ‘the world’, which is illustrated in *Paterson* by the figure of Curie. Yet, the question remains of how the writer or poet can achieve such an effect, in a work like *Paterson*, for example. In *Embodiment*, Williams distinguishes between language used as medium for communication and language used for its own sake. The latter, he writes, is ‘the field of letters’, to which belong poetry and fiction (*EK* 141). Whenever language is used merely as medium and is consequently not appreciated as ‘material’ or as ‘reality’ on its own, Williams maintains, it is ‘debauched – prostituted in the sense that it is enforced for a purpose by which it is limited strictly to nonlinguistic necessities’ (*EK* 142). If language is used merely as discourse, it is immobilised. Words function as constant, reliable referents; they become ‘symbols’ (*EK* 17–20, 143–7). This, however, represents not only a situation unfavourable to the literary artist but a predicament for humanity as a whole. If language is subordinated to abstract ideas and concepts, Williams writes, ‘. . . we ourselves (along with the words) are deeply enslaved’. ‘It is by language that we are stabilized . . .’, he explains (*EK* 142). Accordingly, Williams argues: ‘Language is the key to the mind’s escape from bondage to the past. There are no “truths” that can be fixed in language. It is by the breakup of the language that the truth can be seen to exist and that it becomes operative again’ (*EK* 19). Hence, the task of the man, or woman, of letters is to liberate language. Language has to be used for new, authentic expression, but before this is possible the ‘word’ needs to be ‘cleaned’ of its old connotations, associations and referents, and needs to be re-established as a thing in itself (*EK* 6, 17–8). According to Williams, the works of Gertrude Stein nicely illustrate the first step of this process, while James Joyce but also, so some extent, Pound are masters of the second (*EK* 17–20, 143; ‘Comment’ 28; ‘A 1 Pound Stein’; ‘A Note on the Recent Work of James Joyce’; ‘The Work of Gertrude Stein’). The quest for the ‘redeeming language’ in *Paterson* is accordingly precisely this emancipation of language from established discourse. Dr. Paterson aims at discovering or recovering a ‘pure’ language, a mode of expression that is coextensive with experience. ‘Haven’t you forgot your virgin purpose, / the

language?', the poet is asked at the beginning of Book V.iii (*P* 186). The noise of the Passaic Falls, which is introduced in Book I but forms a constant background noise in the poem, is of central importance with respect to this. This noise not only symbolises the inadequate, out-dated discourses with which the citizens of Paterson are left, but also the return of discourse to a quasi-primeval sound out of which a new language can emerge. Near the beginning *Paterson* wonders:

> (What common language to unravel?
> . . combed into straight lines
> from that rafter of a rock's
> lip.)
> (*P* 7)

Dr. Paterson tries to 'comb' through the noise of the falls to discern a new language that is capable of authentic expression, a language that the citizens share and that unites them, a language that is truly 'common'. Dr. Paterson's task of 'combing' through language to discover a new mode of expression, the difficulties involved in it and its political implications are skilfully expressed in a passage of Book III, in which the poet is troubled by doubts:

> Give it up. Quit it. Stop writing
> "Saintlike" you will never
> separate that stain of sense,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> –never separate that stain
> of sense from the inert mass. Never.
> Never that radiance
>
> quartered apart,
> unapproached by symbols .
>
> Doctor, do you believe in
> "the people," the Democracy? Do
> you still believe – in this
> swill-hole of corrupt cities?
> Do you, Doctor? Now?
>
> Give up
> the poem. Give up the shilly–
> shally of art.
> (*P* 108-9)

The search for the 'redeeming language' entails the isolation of the 'stain of sense', of the 'radiance' that no 'symbol' can embody, from the 'inert mass' of old notions and words. Dr. Paterson combs through the primordial noise of the falls precisely in search of this stain, which, of course, is coextensive with the stain on the bottom of Curie's cauldron. Just as in *Embodiment*, when Williams maintains that 'stabilized' language 'enslaves' humanity, the political significance of the retrieval of the 'stain of sense' is expressed in the penultimate stanza of the present excerpt. 'Does a phrase like "the people" still mean anything?', the poem asks. Does Dr. Paterson still believe in 'democracy'? Is actual democracy still viable or is it, as in *Embodiment*, just a 'film' that obstructs people's relationships with their environment? This excerpt beautifully illustrates that Williams believes that a successful work of art is capable of reforming 'life' or the 'world' by improving people's experience of their environment. 'Democracy' could be saved, could be adapted to new circumstances, if these new circumstances could be experienced, expressed and understood, if a new language, a language that embodies the 'radiance' of meaning was available. At such moments, *Paterson* and the city of Paterson converge; poetics and politics meet.

The continuity established between *Paterson* and Paterson, between poetics and politics, testifies to Williams's fundamentally organic outlook. 'Everything happens within everything else', Williams writes in 'The Basis of Faith in Art' ('Basis' 193). 'Paterson' is a city, a poem, a poet, and a giant, and they are all intrinsically interrelated. Williams's organic worldview is of considerable interest to the present discussion of *Paterson* as late modernist epic because it demonstrates the extent to which Williams's poetics is informed by the notion of totality. According to Williams, as has been seen, art is intimately related to the totality of knowledge and, since knowledge is quintessentially human, to the totality of the human or of humanity. Hence also, the work of art is conceived as absolute, complete world or cosmos. As quoted above, Williams maintains that art 'shows the world at one with itself', and in an interview quoted in *Paterson* he states similarly that, '[a] poem is a complete little universe ('Weather' 198; *P* 221). The work of art, notably the poem, consequently presents, rather than represents, a total, unified world, and Williams's conception of poetry or art generally here approaches Mallarmé's notion of 'the book of the world', that is, of the work of art as absolute and absolutely autonomous. In a

lengthy essay on *Paterson*, Jameson establishes precisely such a connection between Williams's epic and Mallarmé's ideal, even though he also posits in the former, 'a serenity subtly different from the hyperaestheticism of other classical modernism, such as is to be found in Mallarmé's famous injunction . . .' ('The Poetics of Totality' 10). Regrettably, Jameson does not immediately explain the subtle difference Williams's 'serenity' is supposed to effect. Nevertheless, Williams's poetic theory necessitates the determination of the degree to which *Paterson* presents or aims at presenting an absolute totality. The political and philosophical stakes of this enquiry become particularly clear as soon as it is appreciated that *Paterson* is closely associated with the community of Paterson, an association that is significantly modified by the figure of Paterson the giant. 'The sleeping giant', James E. Breslin remarks, 'introduces the possibility of organic community within the city . . .' (175). The ideal of a total artwork that is implicit in notions such as the conception of the poem as 'complete little universe', hence, is reflected in *Paterson* on the level of content by the idea of an organic, that is to say, of a total, complete, and autonomous, community. This relationship between form and content, between the poetics and politics of *Paterson*, now needs to be addressed.

3.4 *Paterson*, Philosophy and Politics

While the above exposition of Williams's poetics starts with the observation that he intensely disapproves of fixed forms or universalising frameworks of all kinds, it ends with a discussion of Williams's fundamentally organic outlook on the world. Williams's aversion to universalising discourses or systems of thought and the postulation of an organic universe testify to a tension in Williams's art and thought that characterises him as a late modernist artist, namely the presupposition and simultaneous problematisation of a metaphysical totality. This tension can specifically be revealed and assessed through an examination of *Paterson* against the background of past criticism, and in particular with respect to an intriguing phenomenon that can be observed in such criticism. Even though Williams is completely opposed to 'Philosophy', as *Embodiment* illustrates, his poetry,

ironically, repeatedly attracted philosophical readings.[4] In the nineteen seventies, in the heyday of 'French Theory' in the United States, Williams was championed as a (proto-)poststructuralist poet by critics such as J. Hillis Miller and Joseph Riddel (see also Bové). About a decade later, Carl Rapp accused Williams of being an idealist in *William Carlos Williams and Romantic Idealism*, a reading that was continued more recently and with some variations by Donald W. Markos and Carla Billitteri. Yet, to make matters even more interesting, recent Williams scholarship betrays a clear trend to emphasise the extent to which Williams's work is informed by pragmatist philosophy. Rather than privileging any of these three philosophical accounts of Williams's work, the remainder of this chapter argues that this proliferation of conflicting philosophical interpretations testifies to the conflict at the heart of Williams's poetry that characterises him as late modernist. This is so because the idealist readings of Williams's poetry in different ways discuss and emphasise the manners in which his work is governed by the notion of a metaphysical absolute, while both poststructuralism and pragmatism represent philosophical traditions that are not only suspicious of absolutes, but more radically even attempts to avoid metaphysics altogether. Consequently, rather than chronologically retracing the accounts of Williams as (proto-)poststructuralist, idealist and pragmatist, the present section considers Williams's relationships to forms of idealism before turning to readings of Williams as pragmatist and finally as (proto-)poststructuralist. All of these philosophical interpretations, however, have their political ramification, and to illuminate these it is helpful to start the following discussion with a consideration of the representations of 'community' in *Paterson*.

The form and order of Williams's poem, questions of whether or how parts are connected, are endowed with considerable political significance, and Williams's awareness of the politics of poetic form explains his nearly paralysing preoccupation with the form of his long poem. As early as 1936, Williams writes to Pound, for example: 'And then there's that magnum opus I've always wanted to do: the poem PATERSON. Jeez how I'd like to get at that. I've been sounding myself out in these years working toward a form of some sort . . . .' (*SL* 163). The form, however, long

[4] For Williams's aversion to 'Philosophy' or 'metaphysics', in addition to *Embodiment*, see also *SL* 219, 238-9.

remained elusive and precarious, for in 1945, Williams writes to Norman Macleod: '. . . already I have been informed that *Paterson* will not be accepted because of its formlessness, because I have not organized it into some neo-classic *recognizable* context' (*SL* 239, emphasis in original). Yet, *Paterson was* published, and Williams explains to Edith Heal in an interview: 'I was aware that it wasn't a finished form, yet I knew it was not formless. I had to invent my form, if form it was. I was writing in a modern occidental world; I knew the rules of poetry even though I knew nothing of actual Greek; I respected the rules but decided I must define the traditional in terms of my own world' (Williams and Heal 83-4). At stake here is, of course, the relationship between *Paterson* and the European literary tradition, between the 'Greek' and Williams's 'own world'. Yet, in addition, or rather related to this – considering that Williams associates the literary 'forms of the past' with 'political, social and economic autocracy' – direct, political consequences are also at stake ('Australian Editor' 10). Beck remarks, for example, that '[f]or Williams the work of art should embody the possibilities of democratic liberty in its form . . .', and Bruce Comens observes more specifically that 'Williams' own struggles toward a new poetic form, at this time centering on *Paterson*, was . . . the primary struggle on behalf of democracy against forces of tyranny' (Beck 35; Comens 106; see also Leicht 208).

Considering Williams's interest in democracy, which Beck and Comens emphasise, it is surprising that *Paterson* advances the notion of an organic community. It does so, as Breslin remarks, through the figure of the giant, but even before the giant is introduced, *Paterson* establishes a comparison between the city and 'man':

> a nine months' wonder, the city
> the man, an identity – it can't be
> otherwise – an
> interpenetration, both ways . . . . (*P* 4)

Williams explains to Heal, '[w]hen I speak of Paterson throughout the poem, I speak of both the man and the city', and the conception of the city as 'man', indeed, informs also later passages of *Paterson*. In Book IV, for instance, usury is compared to cancer and the Social Credit theory Williams advocates to the radium that could be its cure, while Book III compares the flood of Paterson to an 'edema' (*P* 142, 182-3).

In contrast to these examples, in which the city is compared to 'man', in a 1951 letter to Robert Lowell, Williams compares the human body to the political infrastructure of a city, as he writes: 'I did not have another heart attack; that member of my anatomical assembly seems to be carrying on as well as can be expected for a man of my years . . .' (*SL* 302). Williams's comparison of the heart to the 'assembly' might suggest that he considers the human body a 'democratic' organism, but the problem of an organic conception of 'community' is precisely that it justifies or gives rise to hierarchical, not egalitarian, models of society. The figuration of the city as 'man' is nothing other than an instance of the figure of the body politic that has already been encountered in relation to *The Anathemata* in the shape of the Church as the body of Christ. Such organic conceptions of 'community' function as models of hierarchical, rather than egalitarian, structures, because organic communities are governed and unified by a single, ultimate principle, such as God or Christ, which they eventually represent. For this reason, also, organicism is closely related to forms of idealism.[5] Markos, for example, who considers Williams 'something of a closet Platonist' maintains that, '[w]hile Williams appreciates the independent status of nature, he intuits a larger unity embracing both man and nature – a unity that the imagination can grasp . . .' (15, 33). Hence, according to Williams, Markos recognises, '. . . the imagination also has a productive function – the creation of organic forms . . .', and Markos explains that this conception of the imagination as creative force nearly blasphemously relates the artist to God (115). Thus, more similarities emerge, on the one hand, between Jones's notion of the relationship between artistic and divine creation, and his interest in classical Christian typology, and, on the other hand, Williams's conception of the imagination and the figure of the city as 'man'. In *Paterson*, the metaphor of the city as 'man' and the image of Paterson the giant are not completely the same, but they are closely related and perhaps even interchangeable. While the former figures the community of Paterson as living organism the latter represents its chthonic foundation. The giant, it is worth remembering, 'lies in the valley under the Passaic Falls', next to the female giant, 'facing him / his arm supporting her, by the *Valley of the Rocks*, asleep' (*P* 6, 8

[5] For a historical overview of the relationship between organicism and idealism from Plato to Whitehead, see Markos 153–5.

italics in original). In any case, the notion of the city as 'man' and the figure of the giant – '. . . in whose apertures we /cohabit . . .', as Dr. Paterson reflects (*P* 23) – express the 'unnaturalness' of the general state of 'divorce' that afflicts the inhabitants of the city and at the same time represent a metaphysical principle that beneath everything always already (re-)unites the citizens. In 'Against the Weather', Williams comments on precisely such a deeper, metaphysical unity of the people, for he maintains that, '[t]he real character of the people is not toward dispersion except as a temporary phase for the gathering of power, but to unite. To form a union, To work toward a common purpose . . .' ('Weather' 209).

The political significance of 'man' and the giant as metaphors for a unified, organic 'community' becomes clearer if these figures are contrasted with another recurring metaphor. Book II repeatedly refers to the working class population as 'great beast' (see *P* 54, 80). The poem, however, distances itself from this expression by consistently placing it in quotation marks. Initially, the expression 'great beast' occurs in a newspaper clipping in the poem: In 1880 the German Singing Societies of Paterson met in the park for hiking and unwittingly trespassed on the property of William Dalzell, who overreacted and shot one of their members. The article, then, describes the successive events:

> Immediately after the shot the quiet group of singers was turned into an infuriated mob who would take Dalzell into their own hands. The mob then proceeded to burn the barn into which Dalzell had retreated from the angry group. . . .
>
> The crowd now numbered some ten thousand,
>
> 'a great beast!'
>
> for many had come from the city to join the conflict. . . .
>
> (*P* 46)

Thus, the 'great beast' represents the irrational and therefore potentially subversive masses that need to be kept in check. Even more than the previous two metaphors, the metaphor of the 'great beast' emphasises the importance of social control and the viability of a hierarchical society in which the few at the top keep in check the many at the bottom. Indeed, considering that the 'great beast' invariably refers to the working class population, this expression increases the hierarchical structure that is already implicit in the metaphors of the city as 'man' and the giant. It emphasises class differences by projecting the dichotomy between human and animal on the

social hierarchy. The following prose excerpt expresses this particularly clearly, while it also reveals much of the ideological subtext at work in all three metaphors:

> Hamilton saw more clearly than anyone else with what urgency the new government must assume authority over the States if it was to survive. He never trusted the people, 'a great beast,' as he saw them and held Jefferson to be little better if not worse than any. (*P* 67)

This is the third time 'great beast' occurs in *Paterson*, but Alec Marsh convincingly maintains that this phrase generally needs to be allocated to Hamilton. Book II as a whole, he explains, '. . . may be read as a reply to Alexander Hamilton's disparaging retort to an incipient Democrat: "You people, sir, are a great beast!"' (*MM* 43). McGowan's note to the earlier prose passage above, indeed, confirms that 'great beast' is not part of the original newspaper article but Williams's own addition (*P* 269n). In any case, like the expression 'great beast', Hamilton figures repeatedly throughout Book II and is closely associated with the beginnings of American capitalism. 'Even during the Revolution', another prose passage reads, 'Hamilton had been impressed by the site of the Great Falls of the Passaic. His fertile imagination envisioned a great manufacturing center, a great Federal City, to supply the needs of the country' (*P* 70). Markos observes that '[t]he potential for what Williams calls a "related culture" – one emerging from contact with the ground of immediate experience – was thwarted in America by the drive toward wealth', and this 'drive towards wealth' is represented in *Paterson* to a considerable extent by Hamilton (164). Thus, the figure of Hamilton becomes coextensive with capitalist exploitation and consequently also with the theme of divorce, with the estrangement of the population of Paterson from each other and their land. These representations of Hamilton, however, Marsh remarks, '. . . are not as much about Hamilton as about Jeffersonianism; they are straight political ideology' (*MM* 206). Accordingly, the organic metaphors of the city as 'man' or of Paterson the giant, which work as counterpoints to the image of the 'great beast', need to be considered against the background of Jeffersonianism. Jeffersonianism, Marsh explains, has roots in Physiocracy, for 'Jeffersonians see land and man as working in partnership, not in some subject/object relation' (*MM* 12). This partnership between 'land' or 'nature' and 'man', Marsh further explains, is often imagined as a 'marriage', 'as the male freeholder's monogamous relationship to the female property, which responds to his

virtuous "husbandry" as a giving wife' (*MM* 13). Thus, the theme of 'divorce' in *Paterson* and, for example, the relationship between the male and the female giant, which is later imagined as a 'marriage', are fraught with ideological significance (*P* 107). Modern capitalism, perhaps particularly through its substitution of use value with exchange value, spelt the end of the 'natural', immediate and harmonious relationship between 'man' and 'his' land, and Jeffersonianism accordingly, Marsh explains, '. . . looks back to a nonindustrial, agrarian form of capitalism as its economic ideal . . . [in which] citizens are imagined to live unalienated lives in touch with things' (*MM* 42).[6] The interpretation of the metaphors of the giant and of the city as 'man' as specifically expressive of the Jeffersonian ideal of a more 'natural' and harmonious relationship between the citizens of *Paterson*, and between the citizens and their land goes some way towards explaining two conflicting aspects of these metaphors. On the one hand, it clearly reveals the extent to which these metaphors, like the metaphor of the Church as the Body of Christ, betray the nostalgic longing to restore an ideal, complete, autonomous, but, as Jean-Luc Nancy explains in *The Inoperative Community*, always already lost or broken, community (Nancy 9-10). Marsh, indeed, remarks that the ideal world the Jeffersonians imagine never existed, and while he consequently emphasises that Jefferson, in contrast to Hamilton, was fundamentally an idealist, he also perceives clear links between 'the complex nostalgias of modernism' and 'Jeffersonian ideology' (*MM* 42-3; see also 14, 15, 21, 24). On the other hand, the close association of these potentially stratifying metaphors with the founding father of American democracy is capable of explaining to some extent why Williams, to all appearances, did not see a conflict between democratic values and an organic conception of 'community'.

Yet, of course, there are such conflicts, and they centre to a large extent on Williams's embrace of the Romantic notion of poetic genius. While Williams posits in 'Against the Weather' a fundamental 'union' of the people, or elsewhere humanity or the world as totality, there is no doubt that, according to him, the poet is uniquely

[6] The close relationships between Jefferson and an economy based on use value, on the one hand, and Hamilton and an economy based on exchange value, on the other, are well appreciated. See for example Marsh, *MM*, especially Chapters 1 and 2, and Marshall Chapter 4.

capable of perceiving and revealing such a unity or totality.[7] Hence, Carla Billitteri argues that Williams '. . . elevates the poet to a plane of existential and epistemological superiority and conceives the relationship between artist and audience in terms of a steep class divide comparable to the divide between aristocracy and populace . . .' ('Politics of Form' 44). Rather than realising an order that is organically contained in the poetic material, Williams's poetry imposes social order and control, Billitteri argues ('Politics of Form' 50-1). The poet, she writes, 'operates like a surgeon whose formal control on the material extends to the audience with a firm, sadistic grip', and *Paterson*, consequently, is '. . . a poetic structure meant to contain the mob crowding the "debased city" of Paterson, a city dying in its "squalor of spreading slums" . . .' ('Politics of Form' 54, 58). Billitteri's account of Williams as aloof, 'aristocratic' poet finds support in Williams's aversion to politically committed art, which is based on his conviction that the artist is in communication with the totality of existence and responsible for conveying some knowledge or awareness of it, while any political agenda is of necessity always only partial (Billitteri, 'Politics of Form' 48; see also 'Weather' 198, 204; W. C. Williams, 'Art and Politics').

Rapp's reading of Williams's work is more philosophical and less political than Billitteri's, but he concurs with her insofar as he, too, maintains that Williams himself is the active, shaping or organising principle of his work and not merely the transmitter of an independently existing organic order. Initially, Rapp writes, *Paterson* appears to the reader as 'an "untamed aggregate"'. Yet, he continues:

> Subsequently, we realize that the point is precisely that the aggregate *has* been tamed, that the pieces *are* brought into relation by an act of will on the part of the poet. . . . the real unity of the poem is provided by Williams' own mind as it casts about among its materials, arranging them according to the principle of comparison and contrast. (104, emphasis in original)

According to Rapp, Williams believes in the Romantic idealist notion of 'a universal spirit or a universal mind' that is, by definition, unrepresentable and whose only 'vehicle' on earth is the poet (24, 112, 114). By constantly trying to embody this 'universal mind' and necessarily failing, Rapp argues, Williams does not primarily admit defeat but, on the contrary, consolidates the unique position of the poet as

[7] See the discussion of Williams's conception of the poet or artist above.

himself the only earthly representative of the spiritual origin of the world (30). Rapp bases his reading of Williams to a considerable extent on Williams's early essay 'Love and Service', which was posthumously published as part of 'Five Philosophical Essays' added to *Embodiment*. In this essay, Williams argues that 'man's' only purpose is to admire and praise existence, whose principles lie beyond 'his' comprehension. 'As far as any ultimate problem of the universe is concerned', Williams starts his essay, 'man on earth must forever be totally ignorant. For him all simply exists' (*EK* 178). The secret of existence, according to Williams, is absolutely unknowable and it can consequently not be directly represented or 'praised'. Williams insists:

> We must not forget that we praise the unknown, the mystery about which nothing can be said; and second, that we praise in silence, the rest being but perishable signs. Then lest we mistake our signs for the reality let them be ever new, for ever new for only by forever changing the sign can we learn to separate from it its meaning . . . (*EK* 182).

'Love and Service', Rapp recognises, shows that, according to Williams, '[t]he artist . . . no less than the philosopher or the scientist, creates misrepresentations of reality' (37). More significantly, however, Rapp maintains that this essay unmistakably testifies to Williams's belief in the Fall and thus in an 'ultimate ground of our existence', in the ideal of a harmonious, complete, 'pre-lapsarian' state (37-8).

However, it is highly intriguing that this 'ultimate ground' of existence, to use Rapp's words, according to Williams, is both unknowable and unrepresentable, for, considering this, Rapp's accusation of Williams of being an idealist – and it is unmistakably an accusation – recalls Sartre's misinterpretation of Bataille as 'mystic'. Similarly to Williams's secret of existence, Bataille's 'nothingness' exceeds all form and is fundamentally unknowable. Sartre's interpretation of Bataille as 'mystic' hinges on his interpretation of 'nothingness' as ideal, even though Bataille only ever refers to it in negative terms, and Rapp's interpretation of Williams as idealist, likewise, frames as ideal what Williams in 'Love and Service' calls 'the Unknown' (*EK* 181). As noted in the first chapter, Bataille expresses the instability and unrepresentability of his 'nothingness' through water metaphors, and an interesting similarity emerges here between Bataille and *Paterson*, specifically with regard to the image of the river and the waterfall (see epigraph to present chapter). A couple of lines in Book I, in fact, not unlike Bataille, even compare the

dynamic connection between waves to an intimate relationship or 'community' between human beings that might be possible in a state of flux:

> And the air lying over the water
> lifts the ripples, brother
> to brother, touching as the mind touches,
> counter-current, upstream . . . (*P* 24)

For Williams, as for Bataille, the problem is how to imagine an organic totality without turning it into a metaphysical absolute. Markos expresses this tension in his own words when he establishes that '. . . Williams's organicism involves an attempt to reconcile the reality of flux with the reality of permanent and transcendental essences' (17). In Williams's poetry, according to Markos, the image of the sea reflects this conflict, for it '. . . sometimes represents the totality of things and, at other times, the ultimate source of these things, the "formless ground" . . .' (40).

Williams attempts to preserve the 'formlessness' of the 'ground' or the 'flux' of reality in his works, among other strategies, by avoiding established, conventional language. Hence, Williams disapproves of 'symbolism', which becomes evident in *Embodiment* when he argues that philosophers or scientists use words as 'symbols' because they merely use language as discourse. In 'Against the Weather', Williams accordingly advocates: '. . . the salutary mutation in the expression of all truths, the continual change without which no symbol remains permanent' ('Weather' 208). This is nothing other than a restatement of Williams's argument with respect to the 'sign' above, namely that '. . . only by forever changing the sign can we learn to separate from it its meaning . . .', and it shows, as Markos recognises, that Williams is primarily opposed to 'fixed and conventional symbols . . .', not to symbolism *per se* (111). Thus, it is no refutation of Williams's poetic theory to remark that he, indeed, uses symbols in his poems. Yet, his use of symbols nevertheless constitutes a problem because some symbols signify what could be considered a transcendental ideal and they consequently point to an underlying idealism. In *Paterson*, for example, the radiant gist is a prominent symbol and it betrays Williams's indebtedness to a form of idealism because it represents the ideals of authenticity, clarity and ultimately of 'truth'. By discovering the radiant gist, Curie succeeds in establishing a new, authentic relationship to the world. She succeeds in expressing the truth, however momentarily, which apart or beyond its continual change and

mutation is, nevertheless, always only singular. The notion of the 'imagination', in Williams's critical writings, fulfils a closely related function and could accordingly also be considered a similar symbol. In addition to the radiant gist, however, *Paterson* offers a number of other telling symbols. Book III, for instance, repeatedly addresses the 'beautiful thing'. In the course of Book III it becomes clear that the beautiful thing is a black woman who was raped and of whom Dr. Paterson takes care (*P* 104–6, 125–8). The poem reflects on what has happened:

> and they maled
> and femaled you jealously
> Beautiful Thing
> as if to discover whence and
> by what miracle
> there should escape, what?
> still to be possessed, out of
> what part
> Beautiful Thing
> should it look? (*P* 128)

The attackers, *Paterson* here suggests, raped the beautiful thing because they wanted to come into possession of – 'what?' – because they wanted to possess something that is bound to escape them forever, something the poem cannot articulate but can only represent through the symbol of the beautiful thing. *Paterson* presents the beautiful thing in terms closely related to the radiant gist for it is also opposed to and possibly a way out of the established and out-dated: 'Beautiful thing: // – a dark flame, / a wind, a flood – counter to all staleness' (*P* 100). The passage of the beautiful thing in Book III is preceded by the image of '[a] tapestry hound / with his thread teeth drawing crimson from / the throat of the unicorn' (*P* 126), and in Book V, which features an ekphrasis of the 'Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries[,which are] in the collection of the Cloisters Museum' in New York, the unicorn becomes a symbol closely related to the beautiful thing (*P* 296n, 206–9, 227–34). The longest passage on the tapestries begins as follows:

> The Unicorn roams the forest of all true lovers' minds. They hunt it down. Bow wow! sing hey the green holly!
>
> – every married man carries in his head
> the beloved and sacred image
> of a virgin
> whom he has whored .

but the living fiction
a tapestry
silk and wool shot with silver threads
a milk white one horned beast
(*P* 230-1)

Like the rapists of Book III the hunters chase and catch or kill the unicorn to come into possession of something that ceases to exist as soon as they think they have it. The unicorn is a thinly veiled symbol for female virginity, and, in contrast to rape, marriage is in these lines presented as merely the 'legitimate' attempt at possessing it. It is telling, in this respect, that Book IV refers to the poet's quest for a 'redeeming language' as the 'virgin purpose' (*P* 186). Virginity is, indeed, an apt symbol for Williams's 'Unknown', for it is literally 'unknowable' if knowledge is interpreted as carnal knowledge. While the radiant gist, then, represents the fortunate and transient expression of an ever elusive 'truth', the unicorn and the beautiful thing symbolise the futility of its active pursuit but also represent the violence with which it is frequently sought.

If it is taken into consideration that the radiant gist is closely associated with Curie, the radiant gist, the beautiful thing and the unicorn furthermore illustrate that Williams's idealism is based on or expressed through the idealisation of the 'other'. In this, Williams, again, resembles Bataille. The 'other', with respect to the radiant gist, the beautiful thing and the unicorn, is always the 'female', while in the case of the beautiful thing, race also enters the equation. In Book IV, Curie not only discovers atomic fission but she is also pregnant, and *Paterson* closely and unimaginatively associates her pregnancy with her scientific discovery: '– a furnace, a cavity aching / towards fission; a hollow, / a woman waiting to be filled' (*P* 174). The analogy between the female organism and the revelation of truth is continued a little later in disconcertingly voyeuristic lines that portray the 'miracle' of birth as epiphany: 'waiting for the sun to part the labia / of shabby clouds . ' (*P* 177). Like the hunt of the unicorn, the portrayal of pregnancy and birth in Book IV is blatantly masculine, which is exacerbated in above lines by the homophonous relationship between 'sun' and 'son'. The idealisation of race in addition to gender, as in the case of the beautiful thing, can be observed early in *Paterson* in the well known description a *National Geographic* picture that shows '. . . the 9 women / of some African chief semi-naked / astraddle a log . . .' (*P* 13). '[T]he first wife', in

particular, is endowed with symbolic significance, as the poem reflects on how she supports the whole tribe (*P* 13-4). Only a few pages later the poem returns to the oldest woman, thus: 'the first wife, with giraffish awkwardness / among thick lightnings that stab at / the mystery of a man . . .' (*P* 20). Like Curie, the beautiful thing and the unicorn, the first wife is intimately related to a metaphysical foundation of some kind, '*the* mystery of a man' (my emphasis). For all of this, however, these female figures do not have an advanced understanding of the truth they represent. They merely become its symbols in the hands or imagination of the poet. Yet, Williams does not only idealise the female and non-Western people. In his essays, for instance, he repeatedly writes about childhood in similar terms (see, for instance, 'Revelation' 270; *EK* 3–5), while Book II of *Paterson* presents the idealisation of the working class population that has gathered in the park. The working class crowd in Book II is presented as ugly, vulgar, dirty and wasteful, and Dr. Paterson accordingly reflects that,

> . . . – among
>
> the working classes SOME sort
> of breakdown
> has occurred. . . . (*P* 51)

Yet, both Marsh and Ann Marie Mikkelsen convincingly interpret the 'breakdown' Dr Paterson observes in the park as new beginning rather than end. Marsh maintains that although the masses in the park are portrayed with 'comic condescension', they 'become the source of a new poetry' and 'representatives of a new class, with their own style and their own claims to individuality' (*MM* 198). Mikkelsen similarly argues that the waste and the disintegration of social codes and order portrayed in Book II are part of 'the continuous rejuvenation of the community and the poet' (90). '[T]he power of Williams's poetics', Marsh maintains in a different context, 'is his awareness of the inadequacy of the Jeffersonian position, of the yeoman self, under the regime of corporate modernity' (*MM* 170). However, the Jeffersonian idealisation of farm life is in *Paterson* replaced by an idealisation of the working class as the social class that is still most in touch with its locality and the material reality of everyday life. Such an idealisation of the working class is implicit in Williams's explanation in his *Autobiography* that he chose Paterson as the subject of his long poem because of the knowledge he had already had of its population, or as

he states, because he wanted '. . . to write about the people close about me: to know in detail, minutely what I was talking about – to the whites of their eyes, to their very smells' (*Autobiography* 391). Throughout *Paterson*, Williams is interested in the industrial past of his city, and in this statement of the *Autobiography* he clearly does not have the middle class population in mind. Just as Curie, the beautiful thing or the African chief's 'first wife' are objectified and made to signify an ideal, here Williams's reference to 'the whites of their eyes, their very smells' presents the working class people as animalistic objects of his study that represent an ideal, because particularly immediate, relationship to their locality. Williams here strikes a chord surprisingly similar to Hamilton's 'great beast'.

In sum, then, the problem of the poetics of *Paterson*, insofar as it is 'idealist', is that it gives rise to a strict and firm social hierarchy in which the poet, who is alone capable of perceiving the entire 'truth' of the universe, occupies the top and the 'others', who passively and unconsciously represent the 'truth', the bottom. Yet, *Paterson* is not unequivocally or purely 'idealist' but, as various recent discussions of Williams's poetry argue, it can also be considered pragmatist. Pragmatism, academic philosopher Hans-Johann Glock pithily explains, is '[the] move away from the Absolute to action', while Marsh defines its 'primary characteristic' as 'an active skepticism about philosophical skepticism concerning "practical consequences"' (Glock 83; Marsh, 'Man of Action' 3). Action and the practical application of knowledge, hence, play important roles in pragmatist philosophy, and Richard J. Bernstein, indeed, explains in *The Pragmatic Turn* that Charles S. Peirce, James Dewey, William James and George H. Mead, the 'founders' of pragmatism, all '. . . were critical of the traditional philosophical quest for absolute certainty and of what Dewey labelled the "spectator theory of knowledge." They emphasized the role of *know-how*, *social practices*, and *human agency*' (8-9, italics in original). Moreover, Bernstein emphasises that pragmatism was from its beginnings a self-consciously American philosophical tradition, which is significant considering Williams's investment in the consolidation of an independent American culture (9). With these statements about pragmatism in mind, Williams's criticism of 'Philosophy' in *Embodiment* can be interpreted, not as a wholesale rejection of philosophy, but as pragmatist criticism of metaphysics. In a paragraph entitled 'Poetry', Williams

declares, for example, '[i]t is only stupid when you transcendentalize it, give it a future "onward and upward forever" . . .' (*EK* 31). A similar dismissal of metaphysics can be observed in the same letter to Macleod in which Williams writes about the 'formlessness' of *Paterson*. There, Williams complains: '. . . to mix [art] with metaphysics is the prime intellectual offense of my day' (*SL* 238-9). Likewise, statements by Williams, in which he links art and 'action' suddenly acquire fresh significance against the background of pragmatist philosophy. In 'Against the Weather', for example, Williams calls the poet 'a universal man of action' and he maintains that the poet '. . . differs from the philosopher in point of action', while *Paterson* is also introduced at the very beginning, among other things, as '. . . *a plan for action to supplant a plan for action*' ('Weather' 197; *P* 2, emphasis in original).

Pragmatist interpretations of Williams's work are of special interest to the present examination of *Paterson* for two reasons at least. Firstly, more immediately than idealism and in contrast to poststructuralism, pragmatist philosophy is rooted in Williams's cultural background. Mikkelsen explains, for instance, that Williams and other American poets of the early and mid-twentieth century, '[l]ike most of their contemporaries . . . experienced pragmatism in large part as a philosophy that suffused contemporary reassessment of the ideal self and community' (16). Secondly, and related to the reassessment of self and community Mikkelsen mentions, pragmatism is closely linked to democratic thought. In *The Search for a Democratic Aesthetics*, Leicht defines democracy in terms of three 'dimensions', namely 'egalitarianism', 'pluralism', and 'openness', and he establishes a particularly close relationship between pragmatism and the latter two 'dimensions', when he remarks: 'In recent years, various philosophers associated with the revival of American Pragmatism have shown that the concept of democracy as an open process of inquiry is at the center of Pragmatist political thought . . .' (19, 51). To add a second voice, in *Reconstructing Individualism: A Pragmatic Tradition from Emerson to Ellison*, James M. Albrecht distinguishes pragmatism from 'traditional schools of thought' primarily through 'its pluralistic metaphysics and its subsequent advocacy of a thoroughgoing experimentalism in all areas of human inquiry and endeavor' (3). The pragmatist emphasis on experimentalism, openness, and process and the ideals of democracy, according to Leicht and Albrecht, are most directly

connected in the work of pragmatist philosopher John Dewey. According to Dewey, Albrecht writes, 'democracy' is 'a way of life', 'an ideal to be pursued through an ongoing process of experimental, communal inquiry and endeavor insofar as no fixed model of human nature or social organization can be dogmatically predetermined' (5). Leicht similarly explains: '. . . Dewey draws on the parallels between the democratic process and the scientific process of inquiry. Just as scientific inquiry is a way of finding solutions to scientific problems, democracy is a way of addressing and solving societal problems'. The parallelism between the democratic and the scientific process moreover implies, Leicht adds, '. . . that democracy is undertaken in a spirit that is aware of the necessary incompleteness and provisionality of all solutions' (51). Williams was familiar with the writings of Dewey and it is widely recognised in recent Williams scholarship that, of all the American pragmatist philosophers, Dewey is the one with whom Williams has most in common. Beck, who specifically investigates this relationship in *Writing the Radical Center*, however, maintains that the connection between Dewey and Williams must be conceived, 'not so much as one of influence as of ideological confluence' (3). According to Marsh, Williams first came across a work by Dewey in 1920 in the *Dial*. Dewey's 'Americanism and Localism' was printed opposite the last page of Pound's 'Fourth Canto', and it is from this essay that Williams borrowed the notion of the 'universality of the local' (Marsh, *MM* 190–3). Furthermore, Dewey's comparison between the processes of democracy and scientific enquiry sheds an interesting light on the fact that it is a scientist who represents the possibility of social change in *Paterson*.

In accordance with the pragmatist emphasis on provisionality and process, pragmatist readings of Williams's works, in contrast to critics who consider him an idealist, do not stress the presence of an ultimate metaphysical ground in Williams's poetry but rather the formlessness or continuous flux of existence to which it gives expression. Thus, while Marsh, for instance, acknowledges that the radiant gist in *Paterson* '. . . veers close to a reinstatement of ideal Platonic forms', he stresses: 'It is not a static pre-existing ideal. . . . The radiant gist . . . is an ongoing process. Williams's emphasis on making and process link his gist to pragmatism. He is proposing not a theory of ideal forms but a theory of meaningful processes . . .' (*MM*

215). Similarly to Marsh's acknowledgement of the possibility of an idealist interpretation of the radiant gist and his simultaneous problematisation of such a reading, Brian A. Bremen interprets the radiant gist as 'image of the "momentary deity"' (24). Bremen borrows the concept of 'momentary deity' from Ernst Cassirer. According to Bremen's use, 'momentary deities' refer to quasi-epiphanic experiences without ultimate, transcendental meaning. They are transient expressions of the immanent pluralism of experience. Bremen quotes Cassirer: '. . . no recurrent trait or value is retained in [momentary deities] and transformed into a mythico-religious image; it is something purely instantaneous, a fleeting, emerging and vanishing mental content . . .' (Cassirer qtd. in Bremen 20). It is essential, Bremen repeatedly emphasises, that the 'momentary deity' be, indeed, 'momentary' and be not related to any 'ideal essence' (20). He explains: '. . . it is when those momentary gods we have named become reified, deified, and worshipped that trouble begins. Hierarchies become established, and ways of seeing the world, as well as ways of seeing our self in that world, become the objects of religious devotion to which others must bow down' (26). As 'momentary deity', the radiant gist, according to Bremen, can be linked to Dewey's notion of 'creative democracy', that is, to democracy as a 'way of life' and an open-ended process (163, 197).[8] Hence, a pragmatist interpretation of Williams's symbolism in *Paterson* that is in accordance with Marsh's and Bremen's readings would argue that the radiant gist, the beautiful thing, the unicorn or the African chief's 'first wife', among other symbols, represent merely fleeting, authentic experiences of existence and are not representations of 'truth' or 'authenticity' outside and beyond their immediate occurrences for the poet or the reader in the poem.

If the stabilisation of Williams's symbols in *Paterson* must be avoided because this would give rise to hierarchies, the same holds true for the structure of Williams's poem as a whole. Analogously to Bremen's warning against the reification of 'momentary deities', Beck remarks: 'The danger of writing an epic poem is clearly that it might fix the "national spirit" in its "self-objectifying shape"'. Beck continues:

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[8] On Dewey's 'creative democracy', see, for example, R. J. Bernstein 75-6, 85–8.

> Williams deliberately avoids this danger through a pragmatic conception of writing as experiment . . . . If *Paterson* reaches any kind of totality, it is a Deweyan totality that contains its own unraveling. Dewey's view of totality is an attempt to eradicate the kind of tragic failure critics such as Georg Lukács have attributed to the modern world. An imagined ideal totality, whether nostalgically memorialized or projected into an unattainable future, is for Dewey a case of privileging absence over presence which devalues the actual in favor of an imagined elsewhere. (136)

It is intriguing how pragmatism in these lines resembles Bataille's 'philosophy' with respect to its focus on the immediacy of the present and its aversion to teleology, to privileging the future, and yet its advocacy of direct action is utterly opposed to Bataille's thought. Williams, according to Beck, avoids '[fixing] the "national spirit"', avoids creating the community of *Paterson* as totality, by conceiving of writing as experiment. Marsh concurs with Beck in this regard for he suggests 'the possibility that the poem has no plan' and maintains that it 'stages its own contingency', while Copestake likewise argues that the form, or perhaps rather formlessness, of *Paterson* reflects Williams's '. . . reluctance or inability to define his work in terms of aims or goals' (Marsh, *MM* 227-8; Copestake 127). Thus, while Williams felt uneasy about the 'formlessness' of *Paterson*, it represents a virtue, perhaps even the chief virtue, of Williams's poem, according to these pragmatist readings. In fact, Williams himself draws a connection between the absence of an established poetic form and pragmatist philosophy, for immediately after complaining about metaphysical approaches to poetry and the 'formlessness' of *Paterson* in his 1945 letter to Macleod quoted above, Williams refers to Dewey: 'Dewey might do something for me, but I am not worth his notice' (*SL* 239).

Copestake discusses the openness and provisionality of the form of *Paterson* by focusing on the 'Preface' and eighteen phrases that introduce Williams's poem at the very beginning, some of which have been quoted above. The eighteen phrases that precede the 'Preface', Copestake maintains, imply 'a celebration of the poem's multiplicity of meaning over and above the importance of a single, central, and therefore fixed focus of meaning' (110). The 'Preface', according to Copestake, initially realises the flux of meaning implied by the eighteen phrases, but eventually ends in a single image, as it concludes: '. . . and so to man, / to Paterson' (*P* 5). However, Copestake convincingly argues that 'Paterson', the last word and image of

the ‘Preface’, represents the missing object of the eighteen disjunctive phrases of the beginning, and that the end of the Preface consequently gestures back to the very beginning (113). Thus, Copestake discovers an infinite circularity in *Paterson* from multiplicity of meaning to a sense of closure, which, in turn, is undermined by a renewed dispersal of meaning and so on. Copestakes’s interpretation of the beginning of *Paterson* presents Williams’s poetics as revisionary rather than simply as open-ended or experimental, and such a reading finds support elsewhere in *Paterson* as well as in Williams’s prose. In ‘Against the Weather’, Williams reflects on the importance of revision, as he establishes: ‘If, as writers, we are stuck somewhere, along with others, we must go back to the place, if we can, where a blockage may have occurred. We must go back in established writing, as far as necessary, searching out the elements that occur there’ (‘Weather’ 202). In addition to the beginning, *Paterson* realises a revisionary poetics in other parts and ways. On the one hand, Williams’s poem repeatedly revisits already introduced themes, motives, metaphors or symbols and, in doing so, elaborates on and modifies them. The themes of the African chief’s first wife, and of Sam Patch and Mrs. Cumming, which are introduced towards the end of Book I.i, for instance, surface again in the middle of Book I.ii, and acquire additional significance (*P* 13–6, 20-1). *Paterson* returns to these and other previously introduced motives and figures, for example, again at the end of Book II (*P* 80–6). On the other hand, the notion of a new beginning, of a beginning independent of or perhaps even in the absence of a first, original beginning, represents a recurring concern of *Paterson*. Towards the end of Book IV, the last Book according to Williams’s original plans, lines that invite a self-referential interpretation state, for instance: ‘– you cannot believe / that it can begin again, again, here / again . here’ (*P* 198), while already in Book III a similarly metapoetic passage reads:

> How to begin to find a shape – to begin to begin again,
> turning the inside out : to find one phrase that will
> lie married beside another for delight . ?
> – seems beyond attainment . (*P* 140)

With regard to the ‘formlessness’ of Williams’s poem as discussed above, it is significant that as late as Book III, *Paterson* still ponders ‘[h]ow to begin to find a shape’, while the immediate reformulation of ‘how to begin’ to how to ‘begin again’

illustrates that *Paterson* does not only circle back to its opening at the end of the 'Preface', as Copestake shows, but that it does so throughout. *Paterson* is full of new beginnings that are constantly revised and overcome: 'A delirium of solutions, forthwith, forces / him into back streets, to begin again' (*P* 27). The multiplicity of meaning Copestake discovers in the 'Preface' and the eighteen phrases, thus, exists throughout *Paterson*. This is how Williams's poem realises the pragmatist principles of pluralism and structural openness.

While *Paterson*, thus, is a 'Deweyan totality that contains its own unraveling', the same has to be true of the community of Paterson if it is to be a democratic community. Now, it is necessary to return to the metaphor of the city as 'man' because while this figure might at first blush be interpreted as a model of a static, organic and potentially hierarchical state, it can also, and arguably more convincingly, be read as metaphor for a Deweyan 'creative democracy'. Dewey, Albrecht explains, conceived of a dialectical relationship between the individual and its 'social conditions'. He perceived '*both* the need to reconstruct social conditions so as to shape and reshape individuals' habits *and* the crucial role that individual desire, imagination, and choice play in so reconstructing social conditions' (Albrecht 232-3, emphases in original). Williams establishes a similar relationship between the individual and society in his talk 'Revolutions Revalued'. 'There is no conflict between the individual and society', Williams maintains, '. . . . society, *to be served*, must generate individuals to serve it, and cannot do otherwise than to give such individuals full play – *until* or unless their activities prove anti-social' ('Revolutions' 103, emphases in original). Society needs to guarantee individuals' freedom and safety, while the individuals represent the active principle that keeps society in flux, the 'creative power upon which society may be wholly dependent' ('Revolutions' 102). Thus, society continuously gives birth to individuals, while the individuals, in turn, give birth to society. The individual and society, 'man' and the 'city', therefore, are, indeed, as *Paterson* states, 'a nine months wonder', 'an identity', 'an / interpenetration, both ways' (*P* 4). In 'Revolutions', accordingly, Williams turns the metaphor of the body politic on its head and, in doing so, turns it into a model for a democratic state: 'Except for the individual, society is a body without a head. But it is the head that chiefest value' ('Revolutions' 112).

Yet, Williams's revision of the metaphor of the body politic reveals that he does not, after all, conceive of society and the individual as absolutely equivalent, for he privileges the individual, the dynamic principle of social change, while society is relegated to creating and maintaining the conditions in which the individual thrives. 'There is a unity, of course, and the final term of all investigation', Williams writes in *Embodiment*, 'it is the individual himself' (*EK* 73; see also 9). This privileging of the individual and the conception of society primarily, if not exclusively, as guarantor of individual freedom can be observed throughout Williams's writings, and it reveals the extent to which Williams is a liberal before he is a democrat. In *The Democratic Paradox*, Chantal Mouffe reminds the reader that the democratic and the liberal tradition are distinct and need to be separated: 'On the one side we have the liberal tradition constituted by the rule of law, the defence of human rights and the respect of individual liberty; on the other the democratic tradition whose main ideas are those of equality, identity between governing and governed and popular sovereignty' (2-3). Williams's privileging of 'individual liberty' can clearly be observed in 'Revolutions', as can his advocacy of 'the role of law' as long as it ensures individual liberty. Moreover, Williams's support of 'the rule of law', in particular, is also implicit in his aversion to 'free verse' and his assertion that verse must be 'governed'. Absolute freedom amounts to anarchy and, thus, signifies a potential danger to the individual, while 'liberty', as Williams argues in 'Revolutions', includes respect for 'the freedom of others' ('Revolutions' 101; see also 'Weather' 208-9). Hence also, in Book II of *Paterson*, the carnivalesque leisure crowd in the park and the potentially transgressive space of the park itself are securely circumscribed and contained. The park is 'limited by the escarpment, eastward; to / the west abutting on the old road', *Paterson* notes, and '[a]t nine o'clock the park closes. You / must be out of the lake, dressed, in / your cars and going . . .' (*P* 55, 80). Liberalism might be reconcilable with democracy to some degree, as liberal democracies illustrate, but the democratic ideal of equality is not as important to liberals as the freedom and safety of the individual. Liberalism is a middle-class ideology, and Beck discusses how both Dewey and Williams were quintessential middle-class liberals. 'Williams and Dewey both inherited the moral values of the Victorian middle-classes', he writes, 'self-reliance, a strong and proud

work ethic, and a loyalty to place and family' (3). Both of them, Beck furthermore notes, 'often spoke in defense of the underprivileged and underrepresented, but there can be a residual sense of exoticism attached to their paeans to cultural pluralism . . .' (4). In *Paterson*, this exoticism manifests itself precisely as the idealisation of the 'other'. Thus, we have come full circle from interpretations of Williams as idealist to the examination of affinities to pragmatism that his work and thought exhibit, further on to the relationship between pragmatism and democracy, and via Williams's liberalism back to an influence of idealism. In 'Revolutions' Williams might postulate the importance of individual liberty, but it is clear that the most important individual, or at least the individual whose freedom must be guaranteed before everyone else's, is the artist, for, as already quoted, '. . . the artist is the truthfullest scribe of society that is found when he is left free' ('Revolutions' 104). Thus, Williams's poetics and politics are based on ideals that are most perfectly realised or embodied by the artist.

However, this reintroduction of an idealism through the back door does not primarily represent a weakness or flaw of Williams's work and thought but is instructive about the poetics of *Paterson* insofar as it is pragmatist and democratic. In *The Poetics of Transition*, Jonathan Levin remarks that pragmatism is frequently placed in opposition to idealism, but he maintains: 'There is, however, an abiding affinity between pragmatism and the idealism it would refute. . . . pragmatism crucially depends on its latent idealism . . .' (17). Pragmatism is incapable of completely avoiding idealism because without arresting the pluralism of experience, and therefore elevating it to the status of an ideal, its hands are tied. Williams cannot endorse the pragmatist notion of the 'mutability of truth' without relying on an ideal notion of 'truth', he cannot seek a 'redeeming language' or ever new manifestations, incarnations or versions of the radiant gist without the ideal of 'clarity'. In other words, or on another level, the problem of pragmatism is that it cannot embrace immediate action without also subscribing to a metaphysical principle in which agency is grounded. Beck articulates this difficulty in political terms with regard to democracy, when he remarks: 'Since democracy cannot theoretically accommodate notions of intrinsic social stratification – class – it becomes very difficult to figure, when democracy is not working, who has the right to speak for whom' (6). Here

also, the one, most significant difference between Williams and Bataille needs to be considered. For all the similarities they share, such as an interest in direct experience, a conception of experience as flux, or an aversion to discourse and teleology, Bataille, in contrast to Williams, as has been mentioned, condemns 'action' and he also continuously tries to move beyond the 'self' or 'individual'. Bataille does so precisely because the notions of 'action', the 'self' or 'individual' presuppose metaphysics.

Insofar as *Paterson* is based on a pragmatist poetics, then, it is not capable of permanently avoiding idealism because action sooner or later reintroduces an Absolute. Yet, besides the pragmatist escape into immediate action, another strategy of bypassing metaphysics can be observed in Williams's poem and his essays, namely the outright denial of a metaphysical ground. This strategy links Williams to apophatic mysticism and, thus, again to Bataille. Indeed, Jameson maintains that 'the fundamental ontological "strategy" of *Paterson* as a whole' is 'a *via negativa* in which something is kept alive by virtue of the untruthfulness of the very form itself' ('The Poetics of Totality' 14). Through its impatience with 'form', be it with regard to local forms that are always already inadequate or the permanent 'formlessness' of the poem as a whole, Jameson maintains, *Paterson* presents ideas in negative terms (Jameson, 'The Poetics of Totality' 22). Bataille's 'nothingness' has already been compared above to the 'Unknown' Williams describes in his essay 'Love and Service', but the extent to which Williams indeed believes in and postulated an unknowable ground of existence now has to be considered. In *Embodiment*, which was written several years after 'Love and Service', Williams speculates:

> The character area of myths, of which the past of human history consists – and upon which rests all his later knowledge, the immaterial ultimate reality guessed at by philosophers, the religious heaven and hell (projections of the same) – all that is outside of deduction, and unscalable by reason – are all one thing.
>
> It cannot be called 'despair' and it is improper to describe it by any such sensational epithet. It may be indicated generally by the term 'unknown,' but even that is nothing more than a word standing for a negation. (*EK* 131)

As in 'Love and Service', Williams here describes the metaphysical foundation of existence through negations. It is unknown and unknowable, not open to rational explanation. Moreover, it is unrepresentable because it does not exist in any common

way. It is a negation, and even a term like the 'unknown' only indirectly and imperfectly refers to it. At the same time, however, '[i]t is the basis upon which all rests' (*EK* 132). The postulation of the 'unknown' as singular, transcendental basis of existence and the simultaneous characterisation of the 'unknown' as negativity closely aligns Williams here with apophatic mysticism. Already in 'Love and Service', Williams associates the unknowable ground of existence with poetry, and he does so, too, in 'Revelation', an essay Williams wrote more than ten years after *Embodiment*. After establishing that '[t]he object in writing is, to reveal', Williams maintains in this later essay that '. . . to reveal one must reveal something, not nothing – even though that would be better' ('Revelation' 268). Thus, Williams implies that, if it was only possible, poetry would have to reveal the absent ground of existence. This would be an absolutely liberating and unsettling kind of poetry, and two letters Williams wrote to readers of *Paterson*, indeed, describe nearly ecstatic experiences that surprisingly closely resemble Bataille's. In a 1951 letter to Sister Bernetta, Williams writes with regard to her interpretation of his poem: '. . . it frightens me to see, rather than how obscure it is to others' minds, how clear it is to you' (*SL* 309). Later in the same letter, Williams explains:

> . . . one fault in the modern compositions such as – (name it yourself) is that the irrational has no place. Yet in life . . . there is much that men exclude because they do not understand. . . . Perhaps, if you understand what I mean, you and I share something bigger than ourselves when we are tolerant – each of the other – as I have seen you to be. (*SL* 309)

In a 1954 letter to Paul Nash, Williams opens with the following paragraph:

> When I read, or had read to me, your article on my use of prose in my poem, *Paterson*, I was left speechless. It has taken me until now to re-establish my equilibrium so that I feel only now in a trustworthy mood to write to you. You have penetrated to a secret source of whatever power I possess and it has frightened me. Fright was my first impression and that also stopped me cold because one does not like to be laid bare that anyone that runs may read! I felt that my very hairs were moving on my head, actually I felt my scalp move. (*SL* 323)

Williams can be seen here describing ecstatic experiences of a communication between or community of beings that tellingly resemble Bataille's experiences. The last sentence quoted from Nash's letter, indeed, could come straight out of Bataille's *Summa*. Williams speculates that Sister Bernetta and he might form a community that is based on an implicit understanding of the irrational, of what he describes in

Embodiment as ‘unknown’ or ‘negation’. Similarly, Nash’s essay on *Paterson* has left Williams ‘speechless’, has disturbed his ‘equilibrium’, because Nash had ‘penetrated to a secret source’ of Williams’s being. Later in the same letter, Williams reinforces: ‘. . . [Nash’s interpretation] goes to the very core of why I am a writer. You have laid me bare . . .’ (*SL* 323). The profound and inexpressible ways in which Williams feels understood by Sister Bernetta and Nash fills him with a fright that resembles Bataille’s existential anguish because this understanding transcends their identities. In the second letter, Williams explains that he feels this fright because he has been ‘laid bare’, which is an interesting expression that brings to mind Bataille’s notions of the exposure or laceration of the ‘self’. In these two letters, Williams describes ‘an / interpenetration, both ways’ of sympathetic minds.

Like Williams’s prose, *Paterson* features passages and imageries that evoke apophatic mysticism. Book I of *Paterson* ends with a haunting description of a cave that illustrates this well:

> Thought clambers up,
> snail like, upon the wet rocks
> hidden from sun and sight–
> hedged in by the pouring torrent–
> and has its birth and death there
> in that moist chamber, shut from
> the world – and unknown to the world,
> cloaks itself in mystery–
>
> And the myth
> that holds up the rock,
> that holds up the water thrives there–
> in that cavern, that profound cleft,
> a flickering green
> inspiring terror, watching . .
>
> And standing, shrouded there, in that din,
> Earth, the chatterer, father of all
> speech . . . . . .
> (*P* 38-9)

The images of darkness and light lend this passage a mystic air that is heightened by the words ‘mystery’ and ‘terror’. Here, *Paterson* is concerned with the ultimate ground of existence, with ‘birth and death’, with the ‘mystery of . . . man’ (*P* 14, 20), which is described as ‘unknown’, like in *Embodiment* above. Life is associated with water and moisture, and the cave, a uterus-like space, can be brought into a direct

relationship with the motif of Curie's pregnancy in Book IV, while the 'flickering green' represents a precursor of the radiant gist. However, in contrast to Curie or the radiant gist, the ground of existence is here not represented by any image or figure other than the cave itself. In the last lines, the cave is identified with 'Earth', which might represent a unifying and singular metaphysical ground, just as the 'unknown' is described in *Embodiment* as 'all one thing'. Significantly, however, a cave is not strictly speaking a 'thing' at all, but rather, to quote two lines that occur later in *Paterson*, 'a nothing, surrounded by / a surface . . .' (*P* 124). *Paterson* repeatedly returns to the question of a metaphysical ground and raises the possibility of its complete absence.[9] According to Markos, as quoted above, the sea, in Williams's poetry, sometimes represents such a ground, 'the totality of things' or 'the ultimate source of these things, the "formless ground" . . .' (40), and in this regard, the representation of the sea at the end of Book IV is of interest:

> I warn you, the sea is *not* our home.
> the sea is not our home
>
> The sea *is* our home wither all rivers
> (wither) run .
>
> the nostalgic sea
> sopped with our cries
> Thalassa! Thalassa!
> calling us home .
>
> I say to you, Put wax rather in your
> ears against the hungry sea
> it is not our home!
>
> . draws us in to drown, of losses
> and regrets . (*P* 199-0, emphases in original)

In this internal dialogue, Dr Paterson, presumably, strenuously attempts to reject the notion of an organic universe, the idea of an end and origin of all that exists, of which the nostalgic longing for a total 'community' is one expression. The sea

[9] See, for example, the short poem at the beginning of Book II.iii, which features several key words that also occur in the passage of the cave quoted above (*P* 77). Similarly, in Book V, the 'imagination' is described both as 'hole / in the bottom of the bag' and as escaping 'through this hole / at the bottom of the cavern' (*P* 210). Like 'Earth' above, the imagination is, thus, represented at once positively, as that which escapes through a hole, and negatively, as the hole itself.

'wither all rivers / . . . run . . .', the end and destiny of the Passaic river, is not the foundation of everything, even though this idea is as tempting to the poet as the sirens were to Odysseus. There is no doubt that, like all rivers, the Passaic River will end in the sea, just as there is no doubt that everybody will die. 'Yet you will come to it, come to it! . . .', *Paterson* assures, '. . . to Oceanus / where the day drowns' (*P* 200). However, despite this, the sea is not the end and origin of everything. It is not, as Williams's poem later states, 'our nostalgic / mother in whom the dead, enwombed again / cry out to us to return' (*P* 201). Rather, the sea that, as *Paterson* nearly compulsively states, '. . . is not our home', can be interpreted, in accordance with Bataille's thought, as absolute nothingness or otherness (*P* 199–201). From this lack, outside or 'other', which cannot be described in positive terms or does not assume any form, everything comes and to it everything returns. Individuals internalise it but need to forget it and keep it at bay to exist. The notion that 'the sea is not our home', in this regard, recalls Freud's famous phrase, '*the ego is not master in its own house*' (142).

Since the 'unknown' Williams describes lies beyond reason, since the 'nothing' he locates as the ground of existence cannot be represented, it is impossible to prove or examine whether Williams's denial of a metaphysical ground is successful. As in Bataille's case, this denial involves a *volo*: if one agrees with Williams, one does so because one believes in it or has experienced it, but if one disagrees with him, it merely means that one has not understood. However, assuming for the moment that Williams's poetry, indeed, suspends a metaphysical foundation, the question remains of what kind of poetry, what kind of a universe or what kind of a 'community' results. This has been described by poststructuralist critics, such as J. Hillis Miller and Joseph N. Riddel. According to Miller, Williams, in his poetry, leaves behind all kinds of idealism and also Cartesian dualism (*Poets* 288–92; *Moment* 356, 361), and in doing so, he abandons the notions of time (*Poets* 301; *Moment* 357) and causality, including the idea of a First Cause (*Poets* 289). Similarly to Miller, Riddel maintains that Williams's poetry replaces the concept of a beginning, origin or centre with the notion of a 'primordial difference', which 'denies unity, the master Idea' (*The Inverted Bell* 9). The beginning, Riddel writes, is 'a "stroke" immediately left behind', and '[i]t is that stroke which [*Paterson*] desires

to bring to light. For it is to this moment . . . the poem incessantly returns and from which it simultaneously recedes' (*The Inverted Bell* 155). Yet, Williams's poetry is noteworthy, Riddel and Miller agree, because Williams recognises the impossibility of returning to an ideal beginning. As a result of the absence of a metaphysical ground, according to Miller and Riddel, Williams's poetry is a space of simultaneity in which all hierarchical structures are replaced by horizontal, differential relationships. Miller describes Williams's poetry as a 'realm of immanence', in which 'anywhere is everywhere', or as force field (*Poets* 328). Words and personae in Williams's poems, accordingly, are forces or energies, or perhaps rather nodes that emerge when forces meet (*Poets* 300–4, 310, 323, 346; *Moment* 363, 377, 379, 382). Like Miller, Riddel posits in Williams's poetry a decentred 'field' or 'plane' that is governed exclusively by differential relationships (see, for example, *The Inverted Bell* 18-9, 50, 63, 66, 68, 75, 182). The local, the place, the city, and the poem, Riddel maintains, in *Paterson* function precisely as such 'fields' (*The Inverted Bell* 23–8).

Miller's and Riddel's conceptions of Williams's poetry in spatial terms find support in Williams's famous discussion of the poem as 'a field of action'. However, intriguingly, in *Embodiment*, when Williams postulates that the basis of all that exists is 'a negation', he also maintains that '. . . there is a palpable mode by which this "beginning" is universally objectified, where it centers not as a mystery, and that is place' (*EK* 131). In *Embodiment*, Williams reflects on 'the pluralism of experience', which, he argues, forever resists generalisation, for example the generalisations of discourses, and is 'decentralizing in effect' (*EK* 149). Moreover, since Williams subscribes to such a pluralism, he locates knowledge, which he associates with poetry and humanity, as explained above, not as the aim and final term of investigations but 'in each phase of it and everywhere' (*EK* 71; see also 81). Thus, Williams, indeed, describes a differential, decentralised space not unlike the one that Miller and Riddel posit. Now, the knowledge that Williams locates everywhere at the same time has to be placed in opposition to the 'unknown' that Williams objectifies as 'place', for he writes: 'Before this knowledge begins it must be placed' (*EK* 132). Williams here sounds surprisingly like Martin Heidegger, who, for example, writes about the *Dasein*, the being-there of the human being, that the *sein* (the being) is

thrown into its *Da* (its there) (Heidegger 131). 'Unless a man be thus placed as all men are in their past', Williams writes with regard to the 'unknown' as 'place', 'everything subsequent is without foundation' (*EK* 133). In his introduction, Riddel refers to Derrida's interpretation of Heidegger and explains that Heidegger, even though he tries, 'cannot get beyond metaphysics' (*The Inverted Bell* 37). Riddel implies that Williams might be capable of taking this step, but he is exceedingly reluctant to affirm this definitely (*The Inverted Bell* 38-9). Similarly, even though Miller repeatedly asserts that Williams's poems represent a world of pure immanence, purged of any transcendental centre or basis, he constantly reintroduces transcendental concepts in his interpretations (for example, see *Poets* 333 and 335-6; *Moment* 353-4 and 377). Miller indirectly explains this tension in his argument when he asserts that Williams escapes from metaphysics, however, '. . . not in thought or in theory, for no theoretical thinking can escape it, but in *praxis*, in something that occurs in or between the words of his poems' (*Moment* 384). While, thus, the *volo* returns, it becomes now also clearer what kind of a 'community' the poetics of *Paterson* implies if it is considered from a poststructuralist point of view.

Poststructuralism and pragmatism alike postulate a pluralism of experience or existence. Copestake considers the similarities between these philosophical traditions as follows:

> Both Williams [whom he considers a pragmatist] and the poststructuralists share a willingness to question established epistemologies, viewing knowledge as a process rather than the attainment of fixed points of incontrovertible truths, while both also insist upon the role played by language in forming dogmatic truths and in helping to undermine them. (5)

However, while pragmatism attempts to use the awareness of an existential pluralism to practical ends by devising agenda, such as Dewey's 'creative democracy', that take it into consideration, poststructuralism primarily resigns itself to passively contemplating its manifestations and corollaries. Thus, insofar as *Paterson* is informed by a poststructuralist poetics it gives rise to a community of humanity – since poetry and knowledge, according to Williams, are quintessentially human – whose members are loosely related like waves in the sea – '. . . the ripples brother / to brother' (*P* 24) – by an otherness they share and which exists within as well as between them. It is interesting to remember that Bataille conceptualises this

otherness, or rather this ‘nothingness’, among other things, as ‘chance’, for in his discussion of *Paterson* Jameson reaches the conclusion that ‘[c]ontingency is in one way or another the greatest formal conquest of the modern (or Poundian, miniature) epic . . .’ (‘The Poetics of Totality’ 42).

4. Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems*

> *Asking oneself before another: by what means will he calm within himself the desire to be everything? . . . . A wink of an eye with a glimmer of malice, a melancholic smile, a grimace of fatigue betray the disguised suffering that the astonishment at not being everything, at even having short limits, gives us.* (Bataille, *IE* 4, italics in original)

4.1 Introduction

Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems*, edited by George F. Butterick and for the first time published in 1983 by the University of California Press, unites three volumes: *The Maximus Poems*, published in 1960, *Maximus Poems IV, V, VI*, published in 1968, and *The Maximus Poems: Volume Three*, posthumously published in 1975. Together, these three volumes encompass over 300 poems that were written over nearly twenty years (Butterick, *Guide* xix). Unlike the first two volumes, the publication of volume three was not overseen by Olson, who had died in 1970. When Olson learnt that he was dying of cancer, Butterick recounts in his invaluable *A Guide to the* Maximus Poems *of Charles Olson*, he '. . . appointed Charles Boer as his literary executor, and at the same time instructed Boer that there was to be a final volume in the *Maximus* series' (*Guide* xlv). Butterick himself joined in the task shortly afterwards at Olson's request. The instructions Boer and Butterick received from Olson, the latter recollects, 'were minimal: [Olson] simply assured me that I would be able to identify the poems from among the papers' (*Guide* xlv). Olson had not left behind a list of poems for the third volume or a plan. He had merely identified the first poem in a talk and the last poem directly to the editors (Butterick, *Guide* xlvi). The rest of the volume Butterick and Boer had to arrange themselves. This meant

> . . . going methodically though the more than 250 document boxes which now house the assorted papers and records of Olson's life; the roughly 60 notebooks and notepads of the period from 1963 to his death . . . ; the letters from over 500 correspondents, on the backs of envelops of which poems were occasionally composed; and through the 1,500 books in Olson's library. (Butterick, *Guide* l)

Considering these circumstances of the publication of *The Maximus Poems: Volume Three* it is important to acknowledge, as Butterick does, that it has no more than 'a certain limited authority' ('Editor's Afterword' 642). The criterion that governed the editors' selection of poems included in the last volume was the 'subject matter' of the poems (*Guide* xlix), and in the arrangement of the poems they followed a chronological order, for which volumes one and two served as precedents (Butterick, *Guide* xlvi). However, the extent to which the final form of volume three is bound to remain a matter of conjecture can be gauged from the numerous and substantive changes to the 1975 edition that Butterick introduced in the 1983 publication by the University of California Press, such as the omission of one poem and the addition of another twenty-nine (Butterick, 'Editor's Afterword' 643). Nevertheless, whenever the present chapter refers to Olson's '*Maximus*' it is to the 1983 edition of his poem and thus to all three volumes. It is understood that, had Olson edited the last volume, it would have looked different. However, considering the all-inclusive nature of epic, the open form of the poem and the fact that it is permissible and frequently illuminating to establish connections between all works by a given writer, including unpublished material, this does not represent an overwhelming problem. In the 'Afterword' to the 1983 edition, Butterick explains that the inclusion of the additional twenty-nine poems is based on their 'intrinsic merit and their role in the larger context' ('Editor's Afterword' 643). At the very least, then, *Volume Three* can be considered a selection of *Maximus*-related poems that had not been published in the previous two volumes but are of relevance to them. Finally, with Butterick, *The Maximus Poems* (1983) has arguably as competent an editor as is possible. In addition to editing the 1975 edition of volume three and writing the *Guide to* The Maximus Poems (1978), Butterick also '. . . [edited] Olson's collected lectures, his correspondence with Robert Creeley, and ten issues of the journal *Olson*', as Alan Golding remarks in a review of the 1983 edition (213).

Olson wrote the first *Maximus* poem in 1950, and at that time he had no plans to elaborate it into a work of epic length or scale, even though he had been experimenting with several ambitious literary projects, none of which eventually materialised (Butterick, *Guide* xx–xxiv, xxix-xxx). Accordingly, Olson composed the first couple of *Maximus* poems only sporadically. Between the first four, several

months, up to a year elapsed.[1] Only in Spring 1953, when Olson wrote the next seventeen poems, *Maximus* became more than a few scattered poems and began to assume the shape of a longer work. The central subjects of *Maximus*, consequently, also are not all to equal extents present from the beginning but emerge or gain momentum gradually in the course of the different volumes. Volume one is centrally concerned with the history of Gloucester, Massachusetts, a small city on Cape Ann, where Olson often spent his holidays as a child and young adult, and where he moved in 1957 (Clark 8, 266–70). However, volume one turns to this topic only after initial poems that condemn contemporary capitalism and criticise the states of Gloucester and the nation as a whole. Volume two frequently engages with mythology and cosmology, and focuses on Gloucester's Dogtown, which, Butterick explains, is '[a]n uncultivated section of Gloucester strewn with glacial deposits in the central part of Cape Ann' (*Guide* 83). Volume three, in turn, continues the esoteric poetics of volume two but in particular registers a growing interest in mysticism and an increasing emphasis on the personal or private. The present chapter is organised as follows: Part two below considers the epic tradition in which Olson, according to himself, participates, because his understanding of his predecessors is inherently related to his poetic theory, which forms the focus of part three. Olson's poetic theory, in turn, provides good reasons for considering *Maximus* a late modernist epic, which is discussed in part four. Part five, eventually, examines some of the difficulties and pitfalls of Olson's poetics, and in doing so establishes relationships between *Maximus* and the texts discussed in the previous chapters.

4.2 Olson's Epic Tradition

While *Maximus*, like *Paterson*, is associated with a distinct American epic tradition by critics such as Michael André Bernstein, James E. Miller or Jeffrey Walker, Olson places himself in a different and longer literary lineage. Miller notices that Olson feels exceedingly anxious about his relationship to Pound and Williams, while he does not betray such sentiments with respect to Whitman, and this relative

[1] Butterick's *Guide* establishes the exact or approximate dates of composition of nearly all the *Maximus* poems. Whenever such a date is given in the present chapter, it is taken from Butterick.

indifference towards Whitman is instructive about Olson's own sense of his literary tradition (J. E. Miller 203-4). Conspicuously often when Olson mentions Whitman it is in conjunction with Melville and in opposition to the latter (*Ishmael* 19-0; 'Equal' 124; 'Goddard College' 40-1; 'Mushroom' 102; 'Interview in Gloucester' 310 and 312). A passage in *Call Me Ishmael*, Olson's study of Melville, written in 1945 and published two years later, is particularly illuminating in this respect. Olson considers Melville's 'perception of America' and argues that America in *Moby-Dick* is personified by Ahab. Then, he turns to Whitman as follows:

> It has to do with size, and how you value it. You can approach BIG America and spread yourself like a pancake, sing her stretch as Whitman did, be puffed up as we are over PRODUCTION. It's easy. THE AMERICAN WAY. Soft. Turns out paper cups, lies flat on the brush. N.G.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Or you can take an attitude, the creative vantage. See her as OBJECT in MOTION, something to be shaped, for use. It involves a first act of physics. You can observe POTENTIAL and VELOCITY separately, have to, to measure THE THING. . . .
>
> Melville did his job. He calculated, and cast Ahab. BIG, first of all. ENERGY, next. PURPOSE: lordship over nature. SPEED: of the brain. DIRECTION: vengeance. COST: the people, the Crew. (*Ishmael* 63-4)

Melville's strategy of writing an epic, as this passage beautifully illustrates, according to Olson, fundamentally differs from Whitman's, and there is no doubt on which side Olson needs to be placed. At the end of *Ishmael*, indeed, Olson outlines an epic tradition that includes neither Whitman nor Pound or Williams, but extends from Homer over Dante to Melville (*Ishmael* 103–5). Convincing as studies like Miller's, Walker's or Bernstein's are, Olson's conception of his own literary tradition needs to be kept in mind. The association of Melville in the above excerpt with 'MOTION', 'POTENTIAL', 'VELOCITY', 'ENERGY' and 'SPEED' is telling for, as will become clear shortly, it presents him as forerunner of 'projective verse'. In Olson's seminal essay with the same title, written five years after *Ishmael*, Whitman is present again, although not named: 'It comes to this: the use of a man, by himself and thus by others, lies in how he conceives his relation to nature . . . . If he sprawl, he shall find little to sing but himself . . .' ('PV' 247). No matter how much Olson owed to Whitman, in contrast to Pound and Williams, then, he did not

consider Whitman a predecessor but rather a representative of an inferior or undesirable alternative poetics.

It is, consequently, not surprising that Olson mentions and discusses Whitman decisively less frequently than Pound and Williams. Both of Olson's contemporaries repeatedly occupy him in his letters and prose writings, and both are presences in *Maximus*.[2] The extent to which Olson thinks of himself as in one line with Pound and Williams is apparent, for instance, at the beginning of 'Projective Verse', where he distinguishes between the projective and non-projective, and names Pound and Williams as examples of the former ('PV' 239; see also 245–7). The similarities between Olson, Pound and Williams, however, lie not only in the poetics of their works but also, inherently related to this, in the fact that Pound and Williams had been and were publishing parts of their epic poems at the time when Olson was conceiving plans for his own. Hence, Olson also feels the need to distance himself from both and at times fiercely criticises them. His two most famous assessments of Pound and Williams occur in a 1951 letter to Robert Creeley and a 1953 letter to Cid Corman. In the first he writes:

> Ez's epic solves problem by his ego: his single emotion breaks all down to his equals or inferiors (so far I can see only two, possibly, are admitted, by him, to be his betters – Confucius & Dante. Which assumption, that there are intelligent men whom he can outtalk, is beautiful because it destroys historical time, and
>
> thus creates the methodology of the Cantos, viz, a space-field where, by inversion, though the material is all time material, he has driven through it so sharply by the beak of his ego, that, he has turned time into what we must now have, space & its live air
>
> . . . . . .
>
> the primary contrast, for our purpose is, BILL: his Pat is exact opposite of Ez's, that is, Bill HAS an emotional system which is capable of extensions & comprehensions the ego-system . . . is not. Yet
>
> by making his substance historical of one city (the Joyce deal), Bill completely licks himself, lets time roll him under as Ez does not . . . .
>
> . . . . . .

[2] For Pound in *Maximus*, see, for example *M* 7, 31-2, 35-6, 75, 86, 193, 492, 552; Butterick, *Guide* 13, 52, 105, 125. In contrast to Pound, Williams does not figure in *Maximus* in person but Olson alludes to him and his works. For example, Von Hallberg notices an allusion to Williams's 'This is Just to Say' in 'Letter 9' (*M* 46; Von Hallberg 45).

> each of the above jobs are
> HALVES, that is, I take it (1) that the EGO AS BEAK is bent and busted
> but (2) whatever it is that we can call its replace-
> ment (Bill, very much a little of it)
> HAS, SO FAR, not been able to bring any time so abreast of us that we are in this present air, going straight out, of ourselves, into it . . .
> (*CO/RC V* 49-0)

Here, Olson approves of the *Cantos* because of Pound's conception of time or history as a 'space-field', that is, as contemporary and simultaneous. The problem, however, is that this new order of history is held together by Pound's 'ego' alone, for Pound imposes his views and interpretations on his material. Williams, on the contrary, avoids this trap by admitting a plurality of voices and perspectives, but Olson disapproves of the chronological conception of history in *Paterson*. As Miller correctly recognises, Olson here, of course, 'clears the space for his own Maximus Poems, somewhere between Pound's ego-dominance and Williams's ego-submission' (205). Olson himself nearly admits this much later in the same letter (*CO/RC V* 50). Three years later, in his letter to Corman, Olson offers an extremely concise summary of what he considers Pound's and Williams's respective advantages before losing himself in a more detailed explanation. He writes: '. . . EP gave any of us the methodological clue: the RAG-BAG; bill gave us the lead on the LOCAL' (*LO* 129). However, if Olson betrays ambivalent feelings towards Pound and Williams that suggest an anxiety of influence not uncommon among writers, his relationship to Pound is inherently complicated by the latter's politics and actions during the Second World War. Catherine Seelye summarises Olson's feelings towards Pound, whom he visited over a period of two-and-a-half years at St. Elizabeth's hospital thus: 'on the one hand, an abhorrence of the "fascist traitor," on the other, an enormous admiration for a great poet . . .' (xvi).

In sum, then, while *Maximus* is frequently placed in the tradition of the American epic poem, which runs, among others, through Whitman, Pound and Williams, Olson also associates his work with the latter two poets, but conceives of himself as continuing an alternative tradition that begins with Melville. This alternative poetics, which Olson calls 'projective verse' in his 1950 essay, Olson practices throughout *Maximus* and it is not only of poetic but also of immense political and philosophical significance. A sense of the high stakes of 'projective

verse' is already expressed in *Ishmael* in another juxtaposition of Whitman and Melville. Olson writes:

> Whitman appears, because of his notation of the features of American life and his conscious identification of himself with the people, to be the more poet. But Melville had the will. He was homeless in his land, his society, his self.
>
> Logic and classification had led civilization toward man, away from space. Melville went to space to probe and find man. . . .
>
> In place of Zeus, Odysseus, Olympus we have had Caesar, Faust, the City. The shift was from man as a group to individual man. Now, in spite of the corruption of myth by fascism, the swing is out and back. Melville is one who began it. (*Ishmael* 19)

Thus, by continuing what he considers Melville's tradition, Olson aims at returning from 'man' to 'space' or from 'individual man' to 'man as a group'. It is significant that Olson associates the trend towards man as individual with '[l]ogic and classification' and that he imagines a countermovement via a kind of mythology, even though he shows full awareness of the 'corruption of myth by fascism'. It is interesting in this respect that Don Byrd reflects that 'Olson is perhaps the first writer to produce a major body of work in full consciousness of the implications of modern totalitarianism'. Byrd maintains that a central aspect of Olson's term 'projective' and its relative 'prospective' is that they are forward- and future-oriented (xiii). 'In the simplest senses', Byrd writes, 'these terms are nothing more than antonyms for "retrospective" and "fascist"' (5)[3]. However, the above excerpt from *Ishmael* offers only an early and incomplete picture of Olson's objectives and his poetics, to which the present discussion needs to turn now.

4.3 Olson's Poetic Theory

Olson returns poetry from 'man' to 'space' in 'Projective Verse', his famous manifesto of 1950. He starts by distinguishing between 'projective' and 'non-projective', or 'open' and 'closed', verse, the former of which he associates with Pound and Williams and the latter with Wordsworth and Milton ('PV' 239). Similarly to Williams in 'The Poem as Field of Action', Olson considers the poem as

[3] In 'GrandPa, GoodBye', Olson expresses awareness of the relationship between Pound's retrospective, nostalgic view of the world and his totalitarianism ('GrandPa' 145-6).

'field', but he goes significantly further in this regard than his predecessor. In any case, in his *Autobiography*, published the year following 'Projective Verse', Williams at length quotes from Olson's essay and commends the 'advance' Olson achieved 'by looking at the poems as a field', while Olson's account of poetry as spatial and dynamic reads exceedingly similar to J. Hillis Miller's and Riddel's interpretations of Williams's works (*Autobiography* 329–332). Olson maintains: 'A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it . . . , by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader. . . . the poem must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge' ('PV' 240). The projective poet, according to Olson, takes energy present in his environment and transfers it to the poem through 'his' breath. Olson emphasises the importance of the breath throughout 'Projective Verse'. He writes, for instance, '. . . the line comes (I swear it) from the breath, from the breathing of the man who writes, at the moment that he writes, and thus, it is here that, the daily work, the WORK, gets in . . .', or, '. . . breath allows *all* the speech-force of language back in . . .' ('PV' 242, 244, emphasis in original). Olson's emphasis on breath drives home the notion that the poem, understood as energy transfer from poet to reader, comes into existence at the moments of composition and reception. Poetry thus considered is poetry as process, performance or motion. Accordingly, Olson considers the 'kinetics' of the poem and he introduces the following principle, which he borrows from Edward Dahlberg: 'ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION' ('PV' 240. 243). Olson explains in his own characteristic manner: 'It means . . . get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, the acts, the split second acts, the whole business, keep it moving as fast as you can, citizen' ('PV' 240). Olson's notions of the poem as embodiment, reserve and medium of energy and of the poet as transmitter of energy have at least two significant consequences. Firstly, the poet is primarily a mediator, and therefore, he does not impose any form on his objects but merely brings to expression forms that are present in them. Olson accordingly prescribes that 'FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT' ('PV' 240). Olson opposes conventional forms as well as classifications and categories that are imposed on objects, including, for instance, syntax, tenses,

and grammar, generally. He argues: '. . . the LAW OF THE LINE, which projective verse creates, must be hewn to, obeyed, and . . . the conventions which logic has forced on syntax must be broken open as quietly as must the too set feet of the old line' ('PV' 244). Since 'the LAW OF THE LINE' derives from the poet's breath, which connects the poet to 'his' environment, it is part of the latter, not foreign to it. Hence, it is a legitimate ordering principle. Secondly, the projective poet is located on one plane with the rest of existence and in a continuous relationship with it. Hence, projective verse also entails a new 'stance toward reality' ('PV' 239, 246). Already in notes for a lecture he delivered at Black Mountain College in 1948, which anticipate some of the arguments of 'Projective Verse', Olson considers 'man' as 'force' that participates in 'nature' and as 'object' rather than subject ('Notes' 3). In 'Projective Verse', he refers to this state of being or experience as 'objectism', and explains:

> Objectism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the 'subject' and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature . . . and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects. For a man is himself an object . . . ('PV' 247)

In his 1948 notes, Olson describes man considered as 'object in space' as '[p]rismatic man' and opposes 'him' to 'Christian man', to 'man as subject of time' ('Notes' 4). If 'man' 'is reminded of his place in the order of nature', if he becomes aware of himself as one 'object' among many and as continuous with the rest of existence, Olson believes, he will 'acquire some of his original modesty about force, his own and otherwise', will 'achieve an humilitas sufficient to make him of use' ('Notes' 3; 'PV' 247). Yet, this does not amount to a rejection of power. On the contrary, if 'man' becomes aware of himself as part of 'nature' and can, as a consequence of this knowledge, establish a harmonious relationship with the rest of existence, 'he' can transcend 'his' individuality and grow in a manner or in dimensions that an oppositional relationship to 'nature' or the 'environment' precludes. Accordingly, Olson declares that '. . . the projective act . . . leads to dimensions larger than the man' ('PV' 247), and he explains: '. . . breath is man's special qualification as 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 . . .

then he . . . works in that area where nature has given him size, projective size' ('PV' 248).

'SONG 4' of '*The Songs of Maximus*', an early *Maximus* poem written in 1953, beautifully illustrates Olson's application of 'projective verse' in *Maximus*. It is necessary to quote the poem in full to illustrate this:

I know a house made of mud & wattles,
I know a dress just sewed
(saw the wind
blow its cotton
against her body
from the ankle
so!
it was Nike

And her feet: such bones
I could have had the tears
that lovely pedant had
who couldn't unwrap it himself, had to ask them to, on the schooner's deck

and he looked,
the first human eyes to look again
at the start of human motion (just last week
300,000,000 years ago

She
was going fast
across the square, the water
this time of year, that
scarce

And the fish
(*M* 19)

The absence of traditional forms, such as regular metre or rhyme pattern, and the varying line lengths are first indications that this poem might be an instance of 'projective verse'. The differences in line lengths, for instance, between the one-syllable line, 'so!', the relatively short sixteenth line that ironically stretches millions of years, and the unusually long twelfth line, are of significance with respect to the immediate experience of composition and to the experience of reading. For example, the deictic exclamation 'so!' represents a moment of heightened tension or energy that concentrates the movement of the dress in one point or instant in which the experiences of composition and reading nearly merge. The spatial dimension of

Olson's poems, such as the differences in line lengths, gains in potency if they are read in the original, large format, rather than as quoted here. Olson's poetic lines then explore, advance into, or spread across the large white space of the page, sometimes from or into all directions. In 'Projective Verse', Olson emphasises, besides the 'line', the importance of the syllable, maintaining that it is 'the smallest particle of all' ('PV' 241). This concern with the elementary constituents of language is primarily related to his interest in unmediated expression of experience (see, for instance, Billitteri, *Language and Renewal* 129 and 138). Additionally, in the present poem, three one-syllable words play central roles. Firstly, the conjunction 'and', which occurs three times, and each time not only at the beginning of a line but also at the beginning of a stanza, is characteristic of projective verse.[4] Parataxis results from the rule that 'ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION' ('PV' 240). In the lines above, the conjunction 'and' accordingly juxtaposes different perceptions or perhaps rather experiences. The sighting of a woman in a dress is followed by an incident on a fishing boat, which, in turn, gives way to – Butterick explains – the discovery of a prehistoric fish (*Guide* 29). In contrast to grammatical categories, such as subject and object, and syntactical structures, such as clauses and sub-clauses, parataxis does not establish hierarchical relationships but laterally joins one element to another. Hence, it not only represents an important strategy within individual poems but, Byrd suggests, also the principle according to which individual 'anecdotes' or poems in *Maximus* are juxtaposed to each other (34). Beside 'and', the other two one-syllable words of central importance are the homophones 'eye' and 'I'. Sight or vision is a major theme in *Maximus* from beginning to end. In 'Letter 5', the poem succeeding '*The Songs of Maximus*', Olson for instance refers to people of whom he approves as 'those others . . . who look, who can still look' (*M* 22). In 'SONG 4' sight is intrinsically related to motion across space and, as a result, prospection and projection merge. The first line of 'SONG 4', Butterick notes, is an allusion to William Butler Yeats's 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', but he argues that '[i]n Olson's case the setting would be Lerma, on the Yucatan Peninsula, where he stayed for six

[4] It is interesting that in line one, where a conjunction occurs in the middle of the line, Olson uses the ampersand rather than 'and'.

months in 1951 . . .' (*Guide* 28-9). The beginning of 'SONG 4', thus, tentatively locates the persona in Lerma and from there 'he' sees a dress blown against a woman's body. This woman is identified with Nike and maybe she is also the woman who 'was going fast / across the square . . .'. In lines thirteen to sixteen, several pairs of eyes are looking. Butterick glosses this section as follows: 'On 29 December 1952, a living specimen of the coelacanth, a primitive fish said to have existed 300 million years ago and considered an ancestor of the land vertebrates (including man), was reported discovered in the Mozambique Channel on the East African coast . . .' (*Guide* 29). The masculine third-person singular pronoun in line thirteen, consequently, could refer to the person who discovered the fish, but since the fish is related to the human species the personal pronoun could just as well refer to the fish itself. Vision or sight and motion coincide in the fish, whose 'human eyes' signify 'the start of human motion'. Temporal distance, the '300,000,000 years', in 'projective verse', however, vanishes and everything, all kinds of motion and extension across space, takes place simultaneously: the dress that is moved by the wind, the female figure that crosses the square, more implicitly, the schooner that moves across the water and the fish in the water, the 'I' of the first lines that looks out from Lerma and perhaps simultaneously from Innisfree, and the prehistoric fish that, captured in the 'present', also looks out of the eyes of its 300,000,000-year-old relatives. This close relationship between projection and prospection that the present poem establishes is of significance because it implies that vision, be it perception or imagination, is one mode by which 'man' can 'project' 'himself'.[5] Some lines of a later *Maximus* poem, indeed, establish this relationship between vision and motion more explicitly:

> . . . faster than telegraph than radar than
> computer is
>
> sight [faster than

[5] Commenting on the importance of breath and the voice to 'projective verse', Olson reminds his reader in his essay that Latin 'spiritus' means not only breath but also spirit ('PV' 245). With his breath or his voice the poet, consequently, also projects part of his self. 'Vision', with its meaning of sight but also of apparition or imagination, arguably, covers a semantic spectrum similar to 'spiritus'. It corroborates the argument that the spatial extension of the self can not only be achieved through breath or the voice but also through sight.

flight (*M* 457)

The ‘eye’ thus represents one means by which the ‘I’ can grow beyond the limitations of time and space, by which the individual can transcend itself and attain ‘dimensions larger than man’ – ‘projective size’.

‘SONG 4’ illustrates that the implications or consequences of projective verse by far exceed poetics. Accordingly, Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander remark that ‘Olson’s ultimate interest in the *concept* of “Projective Verse” is phenomenological . . .’, while Stephen Voyce explains that ‘a significant context’ of projective verse is a ‘commitment to alternative forms of local community building’ that pervaded Black Mountain College at the time Olson held its rectorate (Allen and Friedlander 424, emphasis in original; Voyce 10). Olson articulates some of the extra-poetic concerns of projective verse in his 1950 essay by considering the new ‘stance towards reality’ his poetics implies, but an interest in new conceptions of ‘community’ in particular can already be observed in earlier writings, such as in *Ishmael*, when he writes, as quoted above, that he intends to return from ‘individual man’ to ‘man as a group’. In the notes of his 1948 Black Mountain lecture, he writes similarly: ‘Man as object . . . is the buried seed in all formulations of collective action stemming from Marx. This seed . . . is the secret of the power and claim of collectivism over men’s minds’ (‘Notes’ 3). These philosophical or sociological dimensions of projective verse represent the focus of ‘Human Universe’, Olson’s second major essay, which was published in 1951. Here, Olson maintains that modern ‘man’ is incapable of immediately experiencing ‘reality’ and that ‘he’ is consequently alienated from ‘his’ ‘environment’ and from ‘himself, as organism’, which Olson describes as ‘the only two universes which count’ (‘HU’ 156-7). The roots of this predicament, Olson locates in the domination of humanity by ‘discourse’, in the elevation of language from an ‘instrument’ to an ‘absolute’, the beginnings of which he traces back to ancient Greek philosophy from Socrates onward (‘HU’ 156). Olson criticises ‘Socrates’ readiness to generalize, his willingness . . . to make a “universe” out of discourse’, which is only exacerbated by Aristotle’s introduction of ‘logic and classification’ (‘HU’ 156). Likewise, Plato’s idealism is by no means an improvement, according to Olson: ‘Idealisms of any sort, like logic and classification, intervene at just the moment they become more than the

means they are, are allowed to become ways as end instead of ways *to* end, END . . .' ('HU' 157, emphasis in original). However, the alienation of modern 'man' from 'himself' and 'his' environment that Olson diagnoses is not inevitable, Olson realised during his stay in Lerma in 1951. Olson grants that the modern Mayans he encountered there, like Western 'man', '. . . are poor failures of the modern world . . . . They have lost the capacity of their predecessors to do anything in common' ('HU' 158). Yet, in contrast to Western 'man', Olson posits in contemporary Mayans an innate memory or instinctive knowledge of 'community'. He writes:

> they wear their flesh with that difference which the understanding that it is common leads to. When I am rocked by the roads against any of them – kids, women, men – their flesh is most gentle, is granted, touch is in no sense anything but the natural law of flesh, there is none of that pull-away which, in the States, causes a man for all the years of his life the deepest sort of questioning of the rights of himself to the wild reachings of his own organism. The admission these people give me and one another is direct, and the individual who peers out from that flesh is precisely himself, is a curious wandering animal like me – it is so very beautiful how animal human eyes are when the flesh is not worn so close it chokes, how human and individuated the look comes out of a human eye when the house of it is not exaggerated. ('HU' 158)

Olson discovers in the Mayans' unaffected acknowledgement of their own bodies a remnant of an awareness of being-in-common. He discovers a direct, continuous relationship between 'man' and 'his' environment similarly to the one the poet establishes via 'his' breath. Olson reflects: '. . . the skin itself, the meeting edge of man and external reality, is where all that matters does happen, . . . man and external reality are so involved with one another that, for man's purposes, they had better be taken as one' ('HU' 161). In 'The Present is Prologue', an essay published the following year, Olson reiterates: '. . . there is no such thing as duality either of the body and the soul or of the world and I, the fact in the human universe is the discharge of the many (the multiple) by the one (yrself [*sic*] done right, whatever you are, in whatever job, is the thing – all hierarchies, like dualities, are dead ducks)' ('Present' 205). In the same essay, Olson describes the continuity of the 'human universe' with respect to 'a will to cohere', which he associates with the ancient cultures of the Mayans and Sumerians ('Present' 206; see also 'Gate' 170–2). Furthermore, in 'Human Universe', Olson elaborates on an 'ethics' based on 'projective verse', some signs of which can already be discovered in 'Projective

Verse' insofar as Olson maintains that the conception of 'man' as object among objects will lead an 'humilitas'. In 'Human Universe', Olson argues that 'man' who considers 'his' environment external to 'himself' exploits 'nature', thus, turns 'nature' against itself, and, since 'he' belongs to 'nature', eventually also against 'himself' ('HU' 163). Consequently, Olson argues that the awareness of a continuous relationship between 'man' and 'environment' emerges together with an appreciation of 'man's' responsibility with respect to his universe: '. . . if man is once more to possess intent in his life, and to take up the responsibility implicit in his life, he has to comprehend his own process as intact, from outside, by way of his skin, in, and by his own powers of conversion, out again' ('HU' 162). 'The meeting edge of man and the world is also his cutting edge', Olson a little later pithily asserts, and he adds: '['man's'] door is where he is responsible to more than himself' ('HU' 162).

In the essays discussed thus far, Joon-Hwan Kim observes, Olson aims at little less than '[deconstructing] what post-structuralists, following Heidegger, called the Western metaphysics of Being . . .' (77). Not surprisingly, however, Olson describes his project in different terms. In *The Special View of History*, for instance, a 1956 lecture series he delivered at Black Mountain and which he explicitly presents as a continuation of 'Projective Verse', Olson calls for a 'redefinition of humanism' that is to replace the 'anti-humanism' of the western philosophical tradition and 'the humanism of the Renaissance' (*SVH* 32, 35). In these lectures, he reflects on the contemporary alienation of 'man' from 'himself' and his 'environment' in relation to Heraclitus's saying that '[*m*]*an is estranged from that with which he is most familiar*', and he speculates that one possibility of ending this estrangement might be found in John Keats's notion of 'negative capability', which the latter in a letter defines as the ability of '. . . *being in uncertainties*, *Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason* . . .' (Heraclitus and Keats qtd. in *SVH* 14, italics in original). In a talk given at Black Mountain in 1953, Olson reflects on what precisely Heraclitus's 'familiar' might be and offers a list of interpretations, such as 'all that gets left out', 'mystery', 'life', 'the intangibles', the 'irrational', 'terror'. He moreover paraphrases it as 'the feeling we are more than, or at least other than, anything we do or say accomplishes', and eventually summarises the 'familiar' as 'who we are' ('THE AREA' 95). In *Special View*, Olson simply explains that

'[Heraclitus] was saying man is estranged from himself as man' (*SVH* 32). The isolation of the human being, be it as 'subject' in opposition to objects or as individual in opposition to society, according to Olson, is symptomatic of this estrangement. The separation between 'individual and society', he maintains, is 'a lie of discourse': 'Man is not ideal, and life is not an isolation, and the falsest estrangement of all, which set in with logic and classification in the 5th century B.C., is contemplation' (*SVH* 25; see also 38). 'Contemplation', of course, depends on the positioning of 'man' as subject, as the one who contemplates, in opposition to the rest of existence, which is contemplated. However, since, according to Olson, 'man' 'himself' belongs to 'nature', since 'man' and 'nature' form one continuous whole, 'man' is incapable of knowing absolutely everything about 'nature'. At the beginning of 'Human Universe', Olson presents this problem as follows: 'The difficulty of discovery (in the close world which the human is because it is ourselves and nothing outside us, like the other) is, that definition is as much a part of the act as is sensation itself, in this sense, that life *is* preoccupation with itself, that conjecture about it is as much of it as its coming at us, its going on' ('HU' 155, emphasis in original). By accepting an element of 'mystery', 'doubt' or 'uncertainty' that cannot be dispelled by the 'irritable reaching after fact and reason', Keats, according to Olson, takes into account that 'man' himself is inherently part of 'existence' rather than external to it. 'What Keats proposes as Negative Capability', Olson writes, 'is the readmission of the familiar. . . . In other words, the condition itself is the penetralium (the innermost secret)' (*SVH* 32). Keats accordingly deprives the human being of 'his' privileged position as subject, that is, as complete, self-sufficient and external to 'existence'. He 'unsat the unit "I"', Olson explains, and '. . . went so far . . . in another place in the letters on this subject . . . as to say that the Man of Negative Capability has . . . "not any individuality, any determined Character"' (*SVH* 32-3). Olson's 'new humanism' is not, strictly speaking, a humanism proper, but an organic conception of existence, according to which 'man', as 'object' among objects or as 'energy', exists on one level with everything else. Nevertheless, and slightly contradictorily, 'human universe', the name Olson gives the totality of existence, reveals that his perspective is anthropocentric. However, before examining Olson's human universe in some more detail, it is now necessary to turn to the question of the genre of Olson's poem,

because his poetic theory provides compelling reasons for considering *Maximus* a late modernist epic.

4.4 The Question of Genre: *Maximus* as Late Modernist Epic

The Maximus Poems, the title implies, is not a single long poem but a series of poems. In fact, the poems are 'letters' that the poetic persona, Maximus of Gloucester, addresses to his city, several of which, especially at the beginning, are simply entitled 'Letter' and consecutively numbered, while others have individual titles. This form makes it necessary to consider the genre of *Maximus* against the background of Rosenthal and Gall's reading of Olson's poem as poetic sequence. Poetic sequences, it is necessary to remember, descend from sonnet sequences and are usually sequences of lyric poems (Hart 187). According to Rosenthal and Gall they '[fulfil] the need for encompassment of disparate and often powerfully opposed tonalities', and thus are comparable to epics, while they are, however, subjective, psychological and introspective (3). Hence, in light of Olson's poetics, in particular considering his aversion to 'the lyrical interference of the individual as ego', his aim to transcend subjectivity and individuality, it becomes questionable to interpret *Maximus* as poetic sequence ('PV' 32). Indeed, James E. Miller convincingly maintains that in 'Projective Verse' '[Olson's] purposes . . . are clearly epic' (207). At the beginning of his essay, Olson tentatively suggests that projective verse '. . . may, the way things look, lead to new poetics and to new concepts from which some sort of drama, say, or of epic, perhaps, may emerge', and at the end he returns to the subjects of epic and drama ('PV' 239, 248). The kind of drama Olson has in mind is, most likely, drama that harks back to ancient Greek plays before Aeschylus, in whose works he locates '[t]he birth of that exaggerated individual called hero' ('Language and Theater' 256). Similarly, Olson associates epic with a new kind of heroism, namely of a heroism that is not based on 'man's capacity to overthrow or dominate external reality', but on realising one's potential to grow to projective size ('Gate' 171). Olson writes: '[E]nergy is larger than man . . . if he taps it as it is in himself, his uses of himself are EXTENSIBLE . . .'. Hence, '. . . the EXCEPTIONAL man, the "hero," loses his description of "genius" . . . and becomes, instead IMAGE of possibilities implicit in the energy . . .' ('Gate' 172-3). The 'hero',

the being that has grown beyond its individual limits, achieves mythical or mythological dimensions. '[H]ow many generations does it take to turn a hero into a god?', Olson wonders ('Gate' 168). Size or scale is the decisive factor for Olson, and this preoccupation is also reflected in the hero of his poem. With respect to his name, Maximus of Gloucester, Olson was inspired by the Greek philosopher Maximus of Tyre. Beyond this superficial connection, however, Olson's poem does not suggest a strong link between the two Maximuses. '[I]t is unlikely that Olson found Maximus's own words or thoughts of equal inspiration to his name', Butterick argues, and he emphasises: 'He must have been drawn . . . by the name, the sheer boldness of "The Greatest." It was a proposal sufficiently large to satisfy any of his ambitions' (*Guide* xxvii-iii). Particularly in volume one, Maximus lives in Gloucester and is concerned with the corruption of his city. Yet, Maximus cannot be limited to this persona, precisely because he embodies growth or extension beyond individuality. Accordingly, *Maximus* features a long list of heroes associated with Maximus, and Maximus 'himself', as a result, acquires an archetypal dimension. He becomes 'an allegorical figure', Butterick remarks, signifying 'Man-becoming-all-that-he-might-become' (*Guide* xxix).

In their analysis, Rosenthal and Gall only consider volume one of *Maximus* together with 'Letter 27' of volume two, which was 'withheld' from the first volume. The latter poem, they maintain, is 'a central illumination of the sequence from which it was originally excluded' (341). Yet, 'Letter 27' beautifully illustrates the shortcomings of Rosenthal and Gall's interpretation of *Maximus* as poetic sequence and supports the interpretation of *Maximus* as epic. 'Letter 27' features an important shift in mode and it is therefore helpful to quote it in full, just as Rosenthal and Gall do:

> I come back to the geography of it,
> the land falling off to the left
> where my father shot his scabby golf
> and the rest of us played baseball
> into the summer darkness until no flies
> could be seen and we came home
> to our various piazzas where the women
> buzzed
>
> To the left the land fell to the city,
> to the right, it fell to the sea

I was so young my first memory
is of a tent spread to feed lobsters
to Rexall conventioneers, and my father,
a man for kicks, came out of the tent roaring
with a bread-knife in his teeth to take care of
a druggist they'd told him had made a pass at
my mother, she laughing, so sure, as round
as her face, Hines pink and apple,
under one of those frame hats women then

This, is no bare incoming
of novel abstract form, this

is no welter or the forms
of those events, this,

Greeks, is the stopping
of the battle

It is the imposing
of all those antecedent predecessions, the precessions

of me, the generation of those facts
which are my words, it is coming

from all that I no longer am, yet am,
the slow westward motion of

more than I am

There is no strict personal order
for my inheritance.

No Greek will be able
to discriminate my body.
An American
is a complex of occasions,
themselves a geometry
of spatial nature.

I have this sense,
that I am one
with my skin

Plus this–plus this:
that forever the geography
which leans in

> on me I compel
> backwards I compel Gloucester
> to yield, to
> change
> Polis
> is this
> (*M* 184-5)

According to Rosenthal and Gall, this is 'one of the truly introspective poems in [volume one]', a poem 'of confession and reconciliation' (344, 346). Reading the whole 'Letter' through the 'confessional', self-reflexive or introspective perspective with which it opens in the first three stanzas, Rosenthal and Gall are oblivious to the significance of the shift that occurs thereafter. After the 'lyrical' beginning, 'Letter 27' attempts to overcome the notions of 'individual' or private consciousness and, in accordance with Olson's poetic theory, to conceive of the self on an existential plane, as part of the totality of being. It relativises the importance of the introductory anecdotes by asserting that 'there is no strict personal order / for my inheritance'. The self at the present moment is not considered the sum or culmination of its private history but merely an infinitesimal part of the large, cosmic process of Olson's universe: '. . . all that I no longer am, yet am, / the slow westward motion of . . .'. Olson believes that humanity originated with the ancient civilizations of today's Middle East, and that it slowly extended itself in a north-westerly direction until it reached America with the seventeenth-century migration from Europe to North America (*M* 251; Butterick, *Guide* 360-1; 'Gate'). In volume one of *Maximus*, Olson writes:

> New Plymouth here,
> Dorchester there
> . . . . . .
> . . . the motion
> (the Westward motion)
> comes here,
> to land. . . . (*M* 124-5)

Significantly, Olson's association of himself with an epic tradition that runs from Homer through Dante to Melville is also directly related to his notion of humanity's westward motion. He writes in *Ishmael* that 'Homer was an end of the myth world from which the Mediterranean began', while Dante represents 'Atlantic man', and Ahab's exploits '[t]he third and final odyssey' (*Ishmael* 104-5). 'The Pacific', Olson

furthermore maintains, ‘is the end of the UNKNOWN which Homer’s and Dante’s Ulysses opened men’s eyes to. END of individual responsible only to himself. Ahab is full stop’ (*Ishmael* 105). A recurring concern of *Maximus* is the retracing of this ‘motion’ back east, through which, in effect, time is turned into space, which can also be observed in ‘Letter 27’. ‘Polis’, as will be seen shortly, can be understood as synonym for ‘human universe’, and in order to realise ‘Polis’, that is, in order to make his contemporaries aware of their place in the immense space of the universe and against its large processes, the poetic persona ‘compel[s]’ Gloucester ‘backwards’, that is, back east. Just as in Olson’s essay, the renunciation of individuality that coincides with the achievement of the human universe or polis brings with it an increase of potential, a growth to projective, epic, mythic proportions, as the persona becomes ‘more than I am’ and enters a harmonious, continuous relationship with the universe: ‘I have this sense, / that I am one / with my skin’. The lines, ‘. . . this // Greeks, is the stopping / of the battle’, accordingly, can be read as an address to the future citizens of Gloucester that compares them, as members of a polis, to the Greeks. However, it is also a statement on the status of poetry and the role of the poet in such a ‘community’. Butterick suggests that the phrase ‘the stopping / of the battle’ is an allusion to ‘the ancient Celtic concept of the poet’, across which Olson probably came in Robert Graves’s *White Goddess* (*Guide* 140-1). Graves, who explains that for the ancient Celts the poet was ‘sacrosanct’, ‘a priest and judge’, and that he even wielded powers over kings (17-8), describes the following scenario: ‘In a sixth-century Welsh poem, the *Gododin*, it is remarked that “the poets of the world assess the men of valour”; and the combatants – whom they often parted by a sudden intervention – would afterwards accept their version of the fight, if worth commemorating in a poem, with reverence as well as pleasure’ (18; see also Butterick, *Guide* 140). Accordingly, in ‘Letter 27’, ‘the stopping of the battle’ can be interpreted as the interruption of chronological history and of the dominance of modern subjectivity. This suspension of time and of the individual as self-sufficient, complete entity is signalled by a liberation of the words on the page. After the initial three stanzas that, discrete and self-contained, look like stanzas of a conventional lyric poem, the lines of the rest of ‘Letter 27’, in truly ‘projective’ fashion, explore the space of the page. Finally, Olson’s reference to Graves implies

the epic nature of the poem at hand, since '*this* // . . . is the stopping / of the battle' (my emphasis). The poet, consequently, assumes the role of a bard, a social authority, and not, as in the lyric mode, of an entertainer. While this settles why the conception of *Maximus* as poetic sequence is problematic, if not its interpretation as epic compelling, it now remains to be considered to what extent *Maximus* is a late modernist work.

Olson repeatedly uses the term 'post-modern' – he always hyphenates the word – and considers himself such. It is therefore more than likely that he would have agreed with the categorisation of *Maximus* as postmodern, or 'post-modern', epic. The first published instance of 'post-modern', according to Allen and Friedlander, occurs in 'The Materials and Weights of Herman Melville', in a passage in which Olson considers Melville, Dostoevsky, Rimbaud and D.H. Lawrence 'men who engaged themselves with modern reality in such fierceness and pity as to be of real use to any of us who want to take on the post-modern' ('Materials' 115-6; Allen and Friedlander 397). The conception of Melville, Dostoevsky, Rimbaud and D.H. Lawrence as forerunners of the 'post-modern' is reinforced in 'The Present is Prologue', which was written the same year but published only three years later ('Present' 207). Olson's view of Melville, Dostoevsky, Rimbaud and D.H. Lawrence as forefathers of the 'post-modern' suggests that his understanding of this term must be distinguished from other, later conceptions of postmodernism. Butterick shows that, like Toynbee, who is commonly credited with the coinage of the term and whom Olson might not have read, Olson locates the beginnings of the 'post-modern' in 1875, but for different reasons than the latter ('Postmodern Advance' 9). 1875, according to Olson, Butterick explains, signifies 'the date for the founding of the science of archaeology', and Butterick further clarifies: 'It is not that Olson uses the year 1875 to mark the birth of postmodernism as such, but of the tools that make possible a post-modern advance' ('Postmodern Advance' 9). Olson's 'post-modern' heralds the end of the 'modern', which he associates with the crossing of the Pacific (the geographic colonisation of the unknown) and the elimination of the unknown by reason, classification or discourse. Both of these developments signify the apotheosis of the individual, the self-sufficient and self-contained human being that conceives of itself in opposition to its environment and is 'responsible only to [itself]' (*Ishmael*

105; ‘Gate’ 171). The ‘post-modern’, consequently, signals the return to or of the unknown, hence Olson’s interest in Keats’s negative capability, and, in contrast to the modern individual, the advent of a ‘human universe’, polis or ‘new humanism’. ‘Olson sought to restore man from his egocentric humanism to a proper relationship with the universe, in the same way he says Melville had, and, before that, early man . . .’, Butterick maintains, and archaeology is of importance to this endeavour because Olson believed that, ‘the deeper man returns to his archaic, primordial, pre-rationalist condition, the further beyond modernism he advances’ (‘Postmodern Advance’ 5 and 12). Accordingly, in a letter to Creeley that features one of his earliest discussions of the ‘post-modern’, Olson writes:

> the *modern* (and we have to push this biz, of the SINGLE I, to undo the modern) does – admit it or not – feel he does *not* belong to what – just, quick, call it, the universe
>
> my assumption is any POST-MODERN is born with the ancient confidence that, he *does* belong. (*CO/RC VII* 115, emphases in original; see also *SVH* 25)

‘Post-modern’ ‘man’, then, is ‘man’ who is conscious of the ‘human universe’ and who conceives of the relationship between ‘himself’ and ‘his’ ‘environment’ as continuous.

According to his own definition of the ‘post-modern’, then, Olson can plausibly be considered a postmodern poet and *Maximus* a postmodern epic, and various American critics of the seventies and eighties seem to agree. Scholars like Joseph N. Riddel, Charles Altieri, William V. Spanos or Paul Bové place ‘postmodernist’ poetry in opposition to the aestheticism and academicism of ‘modernism’, paradigmatically exemplified by T.S. Eliot’s works and the New Critical approach to literature (Spanos, *Repetitions*; Bové, *Deconstructive Poetics*; Altieri, *Enlarging the Temple*; Riddel, *The Inverted Bell*, *The Turning Word*, ‘Decentering the Image’). Inspired chiefly by Martin Heidegger’s deconstruction of metaphysics, or more precisely by Jacques Derrida’s interpretation and appropriation of the same, these critics relate the philosophical criticism of logocentrism to Olson’s poetics of open form. In doing so, they aim at dismantling the politics of the ‘literary tradition’ dictated by the universities and to argue, more generally, for the political relevance of post-1945 American poetry. Yet, in contrast to Altieri *et alii*, Anthony Mellors maintains that Olson and many of his contemporaries are late modernists

rather than postmodernists, for their poetics are 'firmly attached to atavistic beliefs about the decline of an organic, whole, concrete, centred, religious mode of being into the fragmented, alienated, abstract and mechanised culture of modernity' (24). Consequently, unlike 'proper' postmodernist poetry, the works of these mid-century American poets are based on notions of 'totality' (24–6).[6] Comparing and contrasting the American critics' accounts of Olson as postmodernist with Mellors's interpretation of his works as late modernist, however, is in the present context only of limited usefulness because it involves two variables: competing interpretations of Olson's works, on the one hand, and discrepant definitions of 'postmodernism', on the other. Mellors recognises that '. . . in the context of mid-century American poetics, postmodernism is sometimes defined as an organic theory of culture based on the rejection of modernist values' (23). Thus, while Altieri, Riddel, Spanos or Bové apply to Olson's poetry theoretical or philosophical frameworks that are frequently associated with a postmodern 'turn', their understanding of postmodernism resembles Olson's and is consequently rather specialised. By contrast, Fredric Jameson provides an account of postmodernism that is widely recognised across genres and cultures, and his analysis of postmodernism, indeed, interestingly complements Mellors's interpretation of Olson as late modernist. In *Postmodernism*, it needs to be recalled, Jameson, too, names Olson, among other writers, as a possible representative of 'late modernism' (*Postmodernism* 305).

The most striking similarity between Jameson's analysis of postmodernism and Olson's poetics concerns the privileging of space over time. The postmodern is a 'force field', Jameson repeatedly insists (*Postmodernism* 6, 25), and he remarks: 'We have often been told . . . that we now inhabit the synchronic rather than the diachronic, and I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism' (*Postmodernism* 16). Jameson's postmodern 'space' is vast, all-inclusive, even sublime, depthless, and absolutely homogeneous (*Postmodernism* 6, 34–7, 48, 309-0). Similarly to Olson's 'human universe', it transcends dichotomies, such as the one between inside and outside, which Jameson famously illustrates in his discussion of

[6] See also Mellor's criticism of Riddel's 'Decentering the Image' (101–4).

the Westin Bonaventure Hotel (*Postmodernism* 38–45). Olson's aim of transcending subjectivity or individuality also finds a 'postmodern' correspondence in Jameson's account. Jameson argues that the poststructuralist 'death of the subject', 'the end of the autonomous bourgeois monad or ego or individual', can be understood as one aspect of postmodernism and one consequence of the postmodern 'space' (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 14-5). Thus, Olson looks, indeed, almost like a postmodern in Jameson's sense. According to Jameson, the immense, uniform space of postmodernity is 'the whole world system of present-day multinational capitalism' (*Postmodernism* 37). The most important and problematic aspect of this 'hyperspace' is that human beings are incapable of mapping it and thus of locating themselves within it (*Postmodernism* 44). Hence, Jameson argues:

> [T]he new political art . . . will have to hold to the truth of postmodernism, that is to say, to its fundamental object – the world space of multinational capital – at the same time at which it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects . . . (*Postmodernism* 54)

Even more similarities between Jameson's postmodernism and Olson's poetics emerge here, while, however, a crucial difference also articulates itself. The unrepresentability of Jameson's postmodern 'space' could be related to Olson's conceptualisation of the totality of existence with the help of Keats's negative capability. Yet, in contrast to Jameson, Olson does not aim at returning to 'man' as 'collective [subject]' in addition to 'man' as individual, but rather in place of the latter. Moreover, the totality of existence that Keats, according to Olson, grasped through his notion of negative capability is inherently unrepresentable. This is why *Maximus* cannot be understood as an example of the 'cognitive mapping' Jameson imagines, even though its 'space' is as vast as Jameson's and like the latter problematises the status of the subject, and even though *Maximus* is centrally concerned with maps and repeatedly locates the individual in space.[7] Olson's poem is not an instance of the postmodern art Jameson welcomes because its object is not the depthless, homogeneous space of 'multinational capital' but the three or even four dimensional, heterogeneous space of the 'human universe'. Unlike the

[7] For Jameson on 'cognitive mapping', see *Postmodernism* 51–4. For an interpretation of *Maximus* as 'cognitive mapping', see Corey.

postmodern space, the 'human universe' is not given at the present moment, 'at the moment of a radical eclipse of Nature' (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 34), but it is a potential of the present, a potential, moreover, that harks back to more 'natural' states of humanity. In short, Olson is not interested in representing 'the world space of multinational capital' but in abandoning it, and his attitude towards capitalism, to a considerable degree, locates him on the side of 'modernism' and in opposition to 'postmodernism'. Jameson writes in this respect:

> Perry Anderson reminds me . . . that . . . the deepest and most fundamental feature shared by all the modernisms is not so much their hostility to a technology some . . . actually celebrated, but rather their hostility to the market itself. The centrality of this feature is then confirmed by its inversion in the various postmodernisms, which, even more wildly different from each other than the various modernisms, all at least share a resonant affirmation, when not an outright celebration, of the market as such. (*Postmodernism* 304-5)

According to Olson, twentieth-century capitalism represents the contemporary culmination of the opposition between 'individual' and 'nature', and thus also of the classifying, generalising, and homogenising tendencies Olson discerns throughout history from Socrates onwards. Not unlike *Paterson*, which associates capitalism with the general state of 'divorce', *Maximus* contrasts the possibility of achieving a 'polis' with the cityscape of contemporary Gloucester, marked as it is by the traces of capitalism. In an unpublished essay entitled 'The Methodology is the Form', Butterick writes, Olson addresses the question, 'what is our polis?', and his answer, quoted and condensed by Butterick, is: '"the very whole world," not "a bit smaller than the whole damn thing"; it is "the State," "The System," the "totality," adding, that it is necessary "to invert totality – to oppose it – by discovering the totality of any – every – single one of us"' (*Guide* 25). In 'Definitions by Undoings', an essay written in spring 1956 (*Guide* 25), Olson contrasts polis, which he translates as 'city', with 'civis', translated as 'village' ('Definitions' 10). 'Civis' or the village is associated with 'civilized' man of the Pliocene who started developing his own tools, while polis and the city are related to 'cultured' man of the later, Pleistocene epoch, who acquired speech. The crucial difference between Pliocene and Pleistocene man, and thus between 'civis' and 'polis', according to Olson, is the development of a 'collective experience' (Christopher Hawkes qtd. in 'Definitions' 9). Thus, Olson writes: 'POLIS, then, is a

filled up thing (in the passive as a city, the community or body of the citizens, not their dwellings, not their houses, not their being as material, but being as group with will . . .' ('Definitions' 11). While human 'dwellings' can already be found in the Pliocene and are thus associated with 'civis', collective experience, here the collective will, defines polis. This shows that Olson did not necessarily associate 'polis' with ancient Greece and ancient democracy but rather with an even older way of living and existing. In 'The Gate and the Centre', Olson does not mention 'polis' but he associates the ancient civilisation of Sumer with the 'will to cohere' mentioned above, contrasts it with the 'wish to disperse' of modern 'man', and writes: '. . . this one people [of Sumer] held such exact and superior force that all peoples around them were sustained by it, nourished, increased, advanced, that *a city was a coherence* which . . . gave man the chance to join knowledge to culture and . . . to make daily life itself a dignity and a sufficiency' ('Gate' 170-1, my emphasis). Like human universe, 'polis', then, signifies a 'community' of humanity and a state of being in connection and harmony with the totality of existence. A sign of this unity or harmony is the appreciation of knowledge as itself a part of human being rather than simply as 'know-how', as means to exploit the 'environment'. As a result of its meaning of 'city', 'polis' can be misleading, particularly in conjunction with Olson's emphasis on 'localism', for 'polis' does not refer to any specific city. 'Polis' is not 'localism', 'LETTER 3' of *Maximus* states (*M* 14). Granted, localism, for example the local history of Gloucester, is important but only as a point of departure. Like the skin, the local is 'the meeting edge' and 'cutting edge'. The step from the local to 'polis', Judith Halden-Sullivan helpfully suggests, corresponds to the step from the ontic to the ontological (83-4). Gloucester is not and, as or by itself, can never become 'polis', but 'polis' exists in Gloucester as potential.[8]

In the first three poems, the poetic persona repeatedly mentions and addresses 'his' city. The first poem considers '. . . the flake-racks / of my city' and exclaims 'o sea city', while 'LETTER 2' refers to it as 'hidden city' and in 'LETTER 3' it is, again, 'my city' (*M* 5, 6, 9, 13). Yet, as 'hidden city' and, since for Olson '[t]he beginning of man was salt sea' (*Ishmael* 18), also 'sea city' suggest, the focus of these lines is

[8] Bernstein, for example, misinterprets polis by conflating it with Gloucester, and Corey comes close to making the same mistake (Corey 121).

less actual Gloucester than 'polis'. Indeed, a little bit later in 'LETTER 3', 'polis' is explicitly mentioned for the first time:

> As the people of the earth are now, Gloucester
> is heterogeneous, and so can know polis
> not as localism, not that mu-sick (the trick
> of corporations, newspapers, slick magazines, movie houses
> the ships, even the wharves, absentee-owned
>
> they whine to my people, these entertainers, sellers
>
> they play upon their bigotries (upon their fears
> (*M* 14)

'Polis' is heterogeneous, not the homogenuous space of twentieth-century politics and capitalism. This heterogeneity is represented throughout 'LETTER 3' by 'tansy', a weed that was brought to Gloucester from England 'on the bottom of bags in cargoes' (Olson qtd. in Butterick, *Guide* 22). Tansy, Olson explains, '. . . doesn't grow anymore at the same place but that is due to more efficient mowers, and the desire (like blacktop) to have anything smooth and of one sort or character. We therefore celebrate TANSY MORE THAN BEFORE' (Olson qtd. in Butterick, *Guide* 22-3). The main enemy of polis in contemporary Gloucester is capitalism, the 'corporations, newspapers, slick magazines, movie houses', 'these entertainers, sellers', that create and prey on 'the masses'. '[M]u-sick', in early *Maximus* poems, signifies everything that is wrong with contemporary mass culture. Originally, this term occurs in the first *Maximus* poem, in lines that complain that '[s]treetcars in Washington, D.C., when Olson was living there in the late 1940's, and perhaps at the time this poem was composed, had recorded music piped in to "ease" the travellers' (Butterick, *Guide* 13-4):

> love is not easy
> but how shall you know,
> New England, now
> that pejorocracy is here, how
> that street-cars, o Oregon, twitter
> in the afternoon, offend
> a black-gold loin?
>
> how shall you strike,
> o swordsman, the blue-red back
> when, last night, your aim
> was mu-sick, mu-sick, mu-sick
> And not the cribbage game?

(*M* 7)

Why Oregon in particular is contrasted with Washington in these lines is open to conjecture (*Guide* 13-4). 'Love', Gary Grieve-Carlos insightfully remarks in a discussion of another *Maximus* poem, needs to be understood as Eros (146). Here, 'love' or Eros signifies the principle that connects human beings with each other and their environment. It, thus, symbolises organic form and an authentic way of relating to one's 'environment'. '[L]ove is form, and cannot be without / important substance', 'one loves only form / and form only comes / into existence when / the thing is born', preceding lines of the poem read (*M* 5 and 7). However, this experience of the 'human universe', of the Pelasgian, the 'black-gold loin',[9] is rendered impossible by the alienation that results from contemporary 'pejorocracy', a term and concept Olson borrows from Pound (*Guide* 13). The music in the streetcars is emblematic of capitalist entertainment culture that distracts the people, renders them passive in their alienation and thus prevents them from seeking and finding 'love', from becoming citizens of Olson's polis. Williams's portrayal of the citizens of Paterson as 'automatons' that are 'locked and forgot in their desires – unroused' here comes to mind (*P* 6). Later, in '*The Songs of Maximus*', the passivity of the people who listen to the 'mu-sick' is opposed to the active stance of singing, which, of course, is not least of all embodied by Maximus or Olson, the epic bard himself (*M* 19 and 20). Above, however, alienation and passivity are opposed to the image of a hunting swordsman, who, Butterick elucidates, is 'the swordfish harpooner' (*Guide* 14). Considering the close connection 'Projective Verse' establishes between projection of the voice and movement across space, song and poetry are not far removed from this picture of a harpooner who chases across the sea a creature moving below its surface and who, above all, projects his projectile towards it. After all, Olson introduces projective verse at the very beginning of his essay as '(projectile (percussive (prospective' ('PV' 239).

The criticism of capitalism and mass culture, the feeling of isolation and alienation from the totality of being, together with the promise of a more harmonious, unified mode of existence in the form of polis, all this illustrates the

[9] The identification of the 'black-gold loin' with the sea is anticipated in the following lines that precede the present excerpt: '. . . the water glowed, / black, gold, the tide / outward, at evening' (*M* 6).

continuation of a modernist poetics beyond the peak of high modernism. Like postmodernist art, *Maximus* employs late capitalist imagery of advertisements, brands and signs. It refers, for example, to 'billboards', neon signs, television, the CBS or Coke (*M* 6, 75). '*The Song and Dance of*' even features an instance of Baudrillardean 'hyperreal', for it contrasts the sweet oranges of the Carribbean or Mediterrenean with the simulacra of oranges that arrive in the 'big' cities: '. . . what the refrigerator trains / debouch into our cities, those pictures of' (*M* 60). Yet, in contrast to postmodernist art, *Maximus* does not play with or celebrate these phenomena of late capitalism. On the contrary, it recognises them as symptoms of the latest developments of a 'mercantilism' and 'nascent capitalism' it locates as early as with the first settlers of Gloucester (*M* 105).

4.5 *Maximus* and the Limits of the Late Modernist Epic

With the overview of Olson's poetics and the reasons for considering *Maximus* a late modernist epic in mind, it is now possible to establish some connections between *Maximus* and the works considered in the previous chapters, and in doing so to reach further insights both about *Maximus* and the late modernist epic more generally. Like Bataille, Jones and Williams in different ways, Olson considers contemporary society alienated from human nature or the human condition and in reaction to it he attempts to conceive of humanity as reconciled and reunited. He does so, again like the previous three figures, by imagining humanity as immanent totality, that is as a totality without 'outside', without any transcendental foundation. Bataille attempts to achieve this in reaction to the rise of fascism in Europe and by abandoning metaphysics. Jones approaches a conception of the world centred on human nature rather than theology, which, chapter two has argued, can plausibly be interpreted as an attempt to compensate for his sympathies for transcendental nationalism before and during the war. Williams assumes both a pragmatist and a (proto-)poststructuralist position, and conceives of art as inherently related to an organic conception of humanity, which dovetails with his politics of the third way. Like Bataille, Jones, and Williams, Olson writes in the context of or in opposition to twentieth-century European totalitarianism, but for Olson, whose *Maximus* started to take shape at a time when the works of the previous three writers were already or

almost complete, there are additional reasons for being suspicious of totalising systems and agenda. Voyce provides some context:

> Those who worked at [Black Mountain College] during the early to mid-1950s did so during a time in which the (inter-)national was being reconfigured: the establishment of the World Bank (1945) and the International Monetary Fund (1944) inaugurated a new era of capital, the final revisions of the Geneva Conventions (1949) sought to formalize the role of the United Nations, and the convention designating a new 'status of the refugee' (1951) was introduced to respond to diasporas across the planet. . . . It would be more accurate to say of Black Mountain . . . that it exists in a historical moment 'sur-rounded' . . . not merely by conservative 1950s culture, but by a notion of totalizing governmentality at national and international levels. (30)

Olson's human universe, then, needs to be placed in opposition not just to totalitarianism but also to such 'totalizing governmentality' and it consequently needs to be understood as other, and conceivably bigger, than the global. For Olson and others at Black Mountain, Voyce writes later, 'the word "totalitarian" does not refer to America's enemies; it refers rather to any discourse that seeks to contain and paralyse political thought and creative activity' (50). The question that now needs to be addressed is how Olson attempts to conceive of a human community without 'totalitarianism' in Voyce's broad sense. How does he imagine humanity as immanent totality, as entirety without outside, without transcendental basis?

Olson's polis or human universe shares aspects with the conceptions of 'community' discovered in the works of all three previously considered writers. Bataille, Williams, and Olson, for instance, all describe humanity's estrangement from its own condition as obstruction of the immediate experience of 'reality', the importance of which they consequently emphasise, and they associate this interference, among other things, with the dominance of discourse, classifications or generalisations. Similarly to Williams, Olson occasionally strikes a pragmatist chord in reaction, by emphasising the importance of 'action' or usefulness in the present moment. Thus, he complains in 'Human Universe' that 'logic and classification' interfere with 'action' and he similarly maintains that all kinds of idealism become obstructive as soon as they 'are allowed to become ways as end instead of ways *to* end, END, which is never more than this instant, than you on this instant, than you, figuring it out, and acting, so' ('HU' 156-7). At the beginning of 'Projective Verse', Olson likewise declares: 'Verse now, 1950, if it is to go ahead, if it is to be of

essential use, must, I take it, catch up . . .' ('PV' 239, emphasis in original). Yet, pragmatism did not have a significant impact on Olson. Neither Ralph Maud nor Tom Clark, both of whom have written comprehensive studies on Olson, mentions that he read or was interested in John Dewey or William James, while Charles Peirce is rather cryptically and elliptically mentioned once in Olson's Beloit lectures and twice in Olson's part of *USA: Poetry* (Olson and Moore 215, 222; 'Poetry and Truth' 258). Rather, Olson, indeed, engages in what, following Kim, could be describes as deconstruction of western metaphysics and while he, in this regard, also resembles Williams to some extent, this is where he significantly converges with Bataille.

A striking similarity between Bataille and Olson can be observed in *Ishmael*, when Olson, as quoted above, advocates a return to myth 'in spite of the corruption of myth by fascism' (*Ishmael* 19). This embrace of 'myth' despite, or perhaps even in opposition to, fascism cannot fail to evoke *Contre-Attaque'*s anti-fascist embrace of 'myth'. The 'myth' Olson mentions in *Ishmael* turned out to become the 'myth' of the human universe, but 'myth', of course, needs to be understood in a particular sense here. In *Special View*, Olson proposes 'a mythology *without letting God in* as a primordial nature in the old static sense, but only as an image of Primordial Nature in the prospective sense of the absolute as that which is included in the relative' (*SVH* 55, emphasis in original). In effect, Olson considers mythology as immanent totality, that is, as totality that is based on nothing other than itself. Another insightful comment on mythology can be found in 'The Present Is the Prologue', where Olson maintains that everybody has two pasts, namely '. . . your own . . . and one which we don't yet have the vocabulary for, because the West has stayed so ignorant . . . . I can invoke it by saying, the mythological, but it's too soft' ('Present' 206). Accordingly, 'myth' or 'mythology' might be defined as collective past, as the past of the 'human universe' or the polis, that complements the personal or private past of the individual or subject. Yet, because Olson aims at transcending the individual these two pasts are actually one, and since he, moreover, also aims at transcending chronological time, 'history' and 'mythology' together become a past that exists in the present moment. However, Olson's synthesis of fields or subject areas to accord with his totalising vision of the human universe does not stop here. In the years following 'Projective Verse' and 'Human Universe', Olson developed an intricate 'science' of the human

universe that combines knowledge of an astounding range of subject areas and which, around his time at Black Mountain, Olson came to call the (new) sciences of man. A '1st Draft of Possibilities for THE INSTITUTE OF THE SCIENCES OF MAN', which dates, according to Maud, around May 1952, gives a good impression of the scope of Olson's 'discipline' (Maud 97). Olson provides a list of sub-disciplines or fields of inspiration that includes archaeology, culture-morphology, 'geographical sciences (the earth, climate, soils, crops, etc.', 'bio-sciences (ontogenetics, phylogenetics, etc)', psychology, mythology, anthropology, art, physics, mathematics and geometry ('1st Draft' 3-4). This list, however, is incomplete and misses at least philosophy, particularly of the pre-Socratic tradition, cosmology, hermetism, mysticism and world religions. The rationale behind such a wide, eclectic and inclusive list of disciplines can easily be guessed. If Olson's concept of polis or human universe is his 'myth', the new sciences of man are the study or discipline of this myth, and if the polis or human universe refers to a total, unified state of existence that transcends all classifications and categories, then the study of this totality needs to unify all areas of knowledge. Accordingly, in his Black Mountain notes, Olson defines or describes the 'object' of the new sciences of man as 'the totality of the living human being', 'the totality of the problem of the phenomenon of man', 'all of everything there is to know and to feel', 'the life in us – in any one of us', or several times as 'totality' pure and simple ('Shape-Up' 11, 12; 'Beginning' 19; 'THE AREA' 95, 98). Yet, with respect to 'totality', the distinction between the 'discipline' and its 'object' cannot be maintained, since the object includes the discipline, and the discipline has to be coextensive with the object. In other words, 'new sciences of man', 'human universe' and 'polis' all refer to the same notion of an immanent totality and thus also all present the same problem, namely the impossibility of or ban on an 'outside'. As quoted above, Olson reflects on this challenge at the beginning of 'Human Universe', and he does so, as well, in his Black Mountain notes ('HU' 155; 'Beginning' 18-9).

Olson imagines the human universe as immanent totality by considering it as a field of energy in which 'man' figures as energy or force. This allows him, on the one hand, to picture the human universe as organic whole and, on the other hand, to dispense with any transcendental foundation. Olson's notion of existence as

dynamic, self-contained 'field' made him specifically receptive to the philosophy and cosmology of Alfred North Whitehead, whose *Process and Reality*, which he read for the first time in 1955, significantly influenced his writings (Von Hallberg 83; Voyce 48). Whitehead's philosophy supports Olson's key assumptions, as Shahar Bram summarises, namely that:

> (1) Existence is realized in full, undivided fashion; the various dichotomies (body/soul, I/other, nature/culture, individual/collective, subject/object, and so forth) that are characteristic of Western culture, are abstractions mistakenly perceived as 'final facts.' (2) Existence is realised as experience . . . . poetry, then, has no meaning except as an activity, a creation, an experience. (32)

However, since Olson describes poetry and the human universe as 'fields' in writings prior to 1955, Whitehead could not have been his chief inspiration in this respect, and Voyce accordingly speculates that 'it is likely that Heraclitus's concept of change, that objects are best understood as processes, lays the foundation for Olson's idea of the poem as energy field' (Voyce 48). Such questions of influence are illuminating with regard to Olson's poetics, but with respect to the late modernist epic, as studied in the present dissertation, other connections are more intriguing. In particular, the attempt to eschew transcendental categories by conceiving a totality as flux has already been observed in Williams's and Bataille's writings, and Olson's notion of the 'human universe' as dynamic field, indeed, tellingly resembles Bataille's conception of 'universal humanity' or the 'totality of existence'. For example, according to Bataille's general economy, as chapter one has discussed, the entirety of existence can be considered as energy in motion, energy that ultimately derives from the sun. In volume three of *Maximus*, intriguingly, the sun becomes a recurring motif with an exceedingly similar significance. It is associated with the renewal of the seasons, and considered in relation to the roles it plays in religions and ancient myths. Thus, the sun is related to life or energy, and eventually the human universe (see, for example, *M* 411, 416, 448, 480, 483–5, 493, 520, 557-8, 561, 579, 614–6, 630). 'The Ocean', a poem Olson wrote in 1965, states, '. . . the Real / is solar', and Butterick remarks that Olson uses the term 'the real' already in his 1958 essay 'Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself', where it signifies the human universe (*M* 462; *Guide* 594). A later poem of *Maximus* explicitly considers the sun as origin of life, stating that, '. . . without [the sun] as the hydrogen furnace / there'd be no us on

the earth' (*M* 613). In the Beloit lectures Olson delivered in 1968, moreover, he associates the sun with the human universe more enigmatically. '[W]e are darkness', 'our . . . condition inside is dark', he proclaims, adding, '. . . the unknown is rather your self's insides' and postulating that, '. . . to light that dark is to have come to whatever it is I think any of us seeks'. This lighting of the darkness that is 'our' inside and condition, Olson then associates with the 'sun' and the experience of the human universe, as he recalls a past experience, 'when I knew there was a sun, I mean a "helio," inside myself, so that everything, every other human being, and everything in creation, was something that I could see if I could keep that experience' ('Poetry and Truth' 247). Yet, an interesting difference between Bataille and Olson needs to be noted with respect to the conception of the totality of existence as energy. For while Bataille advocates the squandering of energy, since, according to him, energy is constantly in excess, which, if not reduced, results in catastrophes like the world wars, Olson condemns the wasting of energy. In 'Human Universe', Olson complains, for instance: '. . . the more I live the more I am tempted to think that the ultimate reason why man departs from nature and thus departs form his own chance is that he is part of a herd which wants to do the very thing which nature disallows – that energy can be lost' ('HU' 163). The same argument surfaces in 'The Ocean', which reflects: '. . . in a society like America energy if it is not moral is only / material. Which cannot be destroyed is never destroyed is only / left all over the place. Junk.' (*M* 461). Energy cannot be 'destroyed', it can only change its state, but it can be wasted by being reified and literally thrown away in the form of rubbish. Olson, who believes that 'man's' attainment of awareness of his position with respect to the human universe will be accompanied by the assumption of 'his' responsibility with respect to the latter (hence the 'morality' of energy), cannot condone the squandering of energy and the consequent destruction of the universe. Olson's understanding of 'morality' or 'responsibility' as the 'proper' use of energy by 'man' distinguishes him from Bataille and, again, betrays a minor pragmatist strand of his thought. However, with regard to 'man's' relationship to the totality of existence, the similarities between Olson and Bataille are striking. For both, the human being represents an inherent part of existence and is, consequently, on its own incomplete. At the beginning of 'Human Universe', Olson presents the relationship

between ‘man’ and the totality of existence in terms that evoke the inherent ‘insufficiency’ Bataille attributes to the self. Olson writes: ‘The trouble has been, that a man stays so astonished he can triumph over his own incoherence, he settles for that, crows over it, and goes at a day again happy he at least makes a little sense’ (‘HU’ 155). According to Olson, the human being compensates for its own ‘incoherence’ and ‘makes a little sense’ by opposing itself to the universe, by establishing itself as subject and studying or using the rest of existence as objects. Bataille calls this strategy ‘work’, ‘action’ or ‘project’. Moreover, like Bataille, Olson believes that the human being can be reunited with the totality of existence by opening itself to it, and one means by which this could be achieved, according to both, is ‘breath’.

In the works of all four writers, awareness or experience of the ‘community’ of humanity is achieved by ‘epiphanies’ in a broad sense. It is a ‘truth’ Jones’s, Williams’s and Olson’s poetry and Bataille’s texts reveal. For Bataille, more specifically, the experience of ‘community’ entails exposure and ecstasy since it transcends subjectivity. Volume two of *Maximus* engages with the ‘cosmology’ of the human universe, and it features several moments of ecstasy or epiphany, in which individuals become conscious of the totality of existence, that resemble Bataille’s experiences at the limit of the possible.[10] One particularly good example is the story of James Merry. Merry, who figures chiefly in the poem ‘MAXIMUS, FROM DOGTOWN – I’, was a sailor who used to fight a bull for people’s entertainment, until the bull had grown too strong and one night dismembered him, when he, drunk, wanted to test his skills in preparation for the show the coming day. The poem relates that Merry ‘died as torso head & limbs / in a Saturday night’s darkness / drunk trying / to get the young bull down’ (*M* 172). His death is endowed with mythological-cosmological significance, for through it, Merry grows to projective size. The poem reflects at length on the circumstances of his death:

> Not one mystery
> nor man
> possibly not even a bird
> heard Merry

[10] For example, similarly to Bataille’s ecstasies, the revelation of the human universe is in *Maximus* repeatedly associated with exposure, nakedness and sexuality. See *M* 191, 203, 205, 309, 329, 405, 567, 627.

fight that bull by
(was Jeremiah Millett's house

Drunk
to cover his shame,
blushing Merry
in the bar
walking up

to Dogtown to try
his strength,
the baby bull
now full grown

waiting,
not even knowing
death
was in his power over
this man who lay
in the Sunday morning sun
like smoked fish
in the same field
fly-blown and a colony
of self-hugging grubs – handsome
in the sun, the mass
of the dead and the odor
eaten out of the air
by the grubs sticking
moving by each other
as close as sloths
(*M* 173-4)

The darkness and absolute isolation in which the confrontation between Merry and the bull took place endows this encounter with existential significance. Fighting the bull, Merry assumes a position in opposition to 'nature' and thus initially personifies the old heroism of the individual. Yet, he emerges from this encounter as a type of Maximus, a human being in harmony and communication with the totality of existence, except that, of course, 'he' does not 'emerge' anymore at all. The confrontation between Merry and the bull is sexually charged; Merry was ashamed and 'blushing'. Furthermore, he was intoxicated, and these circumstances prepare the ground for an ecstatic experience, for the expansion and even loss of consciousness. Merry, however, does not just momentarily transcend the 'self' but is literally 'opened' by the bull. The 'truth' in him is exposed as he is torn apart. Hence, the

abject or 'heterogeneous' image of Merry's body parts covered by maggots is described as 'handsome', just as Bataille considers the Chinese torture victim 'beautiful as a wasp' (Bataille, *IE* 121). The unification of Merry and the human universe, however, is only complete when, after his 'exposure', the 'world' reveals 'herself' to him and absorbs him. 'DOGTOWN – I' concludes:

> Then only
> after the grubs
> had done him
> did the earth
> let her robe
> uncover and her part
> take him in
> (*M* 176)

The gap of Merry's grave in the earth mirrors the intimate gap in the midst of his 'self' that the bull exposed. 'Earth' here needs to be understood not primarily as ground or the planet but as the universe.

Merry's story is concerned with the limits of the human universe, limits that present an ontological problem, for as immanent totality the human universe cannot have an 'outside'. The poem solves this problem by implying that the limits of the human universe are contained within it, that the outside is inside. Initially, the limits of the universe are represented by Merry as individual, but the poem reveals that Merry had always already had the human universe within himself, namely in the form of a lack that the bull enlarged or opened up as he dismembered him. This lack, then, is allowed to assume the full size of the human universe in the form of 'earth', which absorbs its own limits in the shape of Merry's remains. In effect, this is the same relationship of 'interpenetration' between the part and the whole that has been observed in *Paterson* with respect to 'man' and the 'city', only that the insight of this relationship is applied to different ends or on a different metaphysical level (*P* 4). In 'DOGTOWN – I', the focus on the limits of the human universe is intensified through the juxtaposition of Merry's story with references to Egyptian mythology and Hesiod's *Theogony*. Merry's bull is associated with Nut, the Egyptian sky goddess in the figure of a cow. 'Nut is water / above & below, vault / above and below . . .', *Maximus* states (*M* 172; *Guide* 243-4). However, 'DOGTOWN – I' opens with the narrative of how, according to Hesiod, 'earth' gave birth to 'sea' and how afterwards 'heaven' and 'earth' conceived Okeanos, who is described as 'the

one which all things are and by which nothing / is anything but itself' (172; *Guide* 240). From the start Okeanos, thus, represents 'totality' and emerges as a figure of Maximus, like Merry. Okeanos represents the totality and unity of the human universe but also its limits. Similarly to Nut, 'DOGTOWN – I' locates Okeanos '"under" the dish / of the earth' and 'under / Dogtown' (*M* 172). Later, Okeanos is related to the unconscious, and the limits of the human universe he represents are consequently again located inside the individual, as in Merry's case. 'Celestial evening, October 1967', a poem in volume three, pictures an internal '. . . sea or organism / full of sounds & memoried / objects . . .'. Later in the same poem this internal sea is identified with Okeanos's tenth ring that, according to mythology, 'flows into the abode of Styx . . .' (*Guide* 707). The tenth ring 'within us', the poem reads, represents 'what we hear see are motived by / dream belief care for discriminate / our loves & choices cares & failures . . .' (*M* 573; see also 585). Accordingly, Okeanos represents the totality of existence that inheres in the individual as fundamental 'otherness'. It is the beginning and end of everything, but, in the words of *Paterson*, which, intriguingly, also refers to 'Oceanus' at the end of Book IV, 'it is not our home' (*P* 200).

However, the experience of the human universe does not have to be as absolute as in Merry's case and it consequently does not have to be lethal. In fact, various *Maximus* poems in volumes two and three present closely related epiphanic experiences, during which the persona gains a momentary glimpse of the totality of existence. The first of this series is the following short poem:

> The Poimanderes: now I see what was up,
> a year ago, chomping around these streets,
> measuring off distances, looking into
> records, disconsolately
> making up things to do – finding myself peeing
> under a thin new moon on Dogtown and noticing
> rills in the March night
> (*M* 187)

The *Poimandres*, according to Butterick, 'is the first treatise of the Hermetic corpus', and the poem thus starts with a reference to Gnosticism (*Guide* 267). However, more importantly, it describes a two-fold epiphany. In the past, the persona had a vision of 'rills in the March night', but only now he 'see[s] what was up'. The 'rills' could be associated with the image of Okeanos as stream that encloses the earth. More

significantly, however, the epiphany is closely related to the vertical axis of space, since the persona found himself 'peeing / under a thin new moon . . .'. This is the aspect of the present poem that relates it to other epiphanic poems of *Maximus,* such as the following one:

> I looked up and saw
> its form
> through everything
> – it is sewn
> in all parts, under
> and over
> (*M* 343; see also 387, 564, 625)

Olson consistently identifies the human being with the vertical axis of space. Through its vertical position, the human being ex-sists, and by becoming conscious of its vertical axis the intimate limits of the individual are opened to the human universe. Verticality penetrates the subject and relates it to the totality of existence. In notes for the sciences of man, Olson states, for example, '. . . that horizontality is actually an axis of which each one of us is the vertical axis to make it all "live" from start to finish' ('Beginning' 21). Similarly, he defines mythology in *Special View* as 'the kosmos inside a human being' and maintains that '. . . the best image I can offer you . . . of mythology . . . is a shaft. We are now at the most vertical of all the several quanta of experience, the person's own private quantum' (*SVH* 53). Hence, by focusing on the vertical axis, the persona in the above poems becomes conscious of its place in the human universe, becomes aware of its total 'form', of the seams that hold it all together 'under / and over'.

According to Olson, the human universe represents the truth of the human condition, and while Olson's conception of this truth with respect to the individual as suppressed content relates his philosophy to Bataille's thought, an interesting connection between *Maximus* and *The Anathemata* can be established at this point, too. Like Bataille's 'community' and Olson's human universe, the twentieth-century typology that has been observed in Jones's poem dispenses with transcendental foundations and thus lacks an 'outside'. In contrast to traditional Christian typology and like Olson's 'human universe', it reveals a truth that is immanent in humanity, namely that 'man' is fundamentally a 'sign-maker' or 'artist'. This connection between Jones and Olson is intriguing because *Maximus* also employs typology, and

a kind of typology, moreover, that, like Jones's, does not gesture towards a transcendental ground in which it is based but, on the contrary, reveals a differential relationship between type and antitype. This, of course, is in keeping with Olson's conception of the human universe as 'field' in which everything moves or exists simultaneously. In her study of the symbolism of 'American classics', Ursula Brumm comments on the importance of typology in Puritan literature. Puritans were attracted to typology, she states, because it represented a source of reassurance in the forbidding new land: '[T]he emigration to the American wilderness was an exodus of the children of Israel to a "second Jerusalem"' (33). Olson was evidently aware of the Puritans' typological interpretation of their world, for he plays with and undermines it in '*Stiffening, in the Master Founders' Wills*', where he refers to the second wave of Puritan emigrants who settled in New England in 1630 as 'Moses men' and states that 'Canaan', the Promised Land, was then already 'Cane's' (*M* 134). Olson subverts the optimism the Puritans expressed through typology because he associates their arrival with the beginning of the systematic exploitation of the new land (*M* 137–9; *Guide* 193). Besides the Puritan tradition, however, Olson's typological imagination must have been fostered by his notion of humanity's westward motion and, particularly, by the relationship between Tyre and Gloucester that is established via the figure of Maximus. It is particularly in these contexts that an equivalent to Jones's 'twentieth-century typology' can be discerned in *Maximus*. A very short poem that illustrates this reads:

> 128 a mole
> to get at Tyre
> (*M* 250)

Butterick clarifies: 'The Phoenician city of Tyre had been an island close to the shore until a mole or causeway linking it to the mainland was built by Alexander the Great during his siege of the city in 332 B.C.' (*Guide* 360). Comparable to Tyre, Gloucester is separated from the mainland by the Annisquam, a tidal river, and only connected to it through the A. Piatt Andrew Memorial Bridge over which highway 128 passes (*Guide* 8-9 and 360). Tyre, consequently, could be considered a type and the north-westerly removed Gloucester its antitype. To the extent to which 'mole' refers to the 128 and Tyre to Gloucester, just as the new land was considered a second Jerusalem by the Puritans and their leaders were compared to Moses, this is

the case. Yet, as a result of the mere juxtaposition of the 128 and the mole, and by implication of Gloucester and Tyre, the relationship between the two cities in these lines is more complex. Gloucester is not only compared to Tyre but also vice versa, and the same holds true for the highway bridge and the mole. Type and antitype, in other words, cannot be distinguished, and as a result, the teleology of conventional typology is suspended.[11]

'Bk ii chapter 37', a poem of the second volume, provides a more elaborate instance of 'twentieth-century typology', and illustrates that the above example is not an isolated case:

> I. Beginning at the hill of Middle Street the city
> which consists mostly of wharves & houses
> reaches down to the sea. It is bounded
> on the one side by the river Annisquam,
> and on the other by the stream or entrance
> to the inner harbour. In the Fort at this entrance
>
> are the images of stone and there is another
> place near the river where there is a seated
> wooden image of Demeter. The city's own
> wooden image of the goddess is on a hill
> along the next ridge above Middle Street
> between the two towers of a church called
> the Lady of Good Voyage. There is also a stone image
> of Aphrodite beside the sea. 2. But the
> spot where the river comes into the
> sea is reserved for the special
> Hydra called the Lernean monster,
> the particular worship of the city,
> though it is proven to be recent
> and the particular tablets of Poseidon
> written on copper in the shape of a heart
> prove to be likewise new.
> (*M* 254)

The references to Middle Street, the wharves, Annisquam, and the Lady of Good Voyage suggest that the primary subject of this poem is Gloucester, and that references to Greek antiquity are imposed on the cityscape. Statues of Gloucester are

[11] According to 'conventional' Puritan typology, Tyre would be considered the type and Gloucester the antitype. However, already the withheld '*Letter 27*' suggest a reversal of the relationship between type and antitype when it states that '. . . I compell / backwards I compell Gloucester / to yield, to change / Polis / is this' (*M* 185).

compared to images of Demeter, Aphrodite, and the Hydra, and, as Butterick notes, certain 'commemorative plaques' are compared to the 'tablets of Poseidon' (*Guide* 367). Thus far this poem represents an instance of 'conventional' typology. Ancient Greek mythology foreshadows and is fulfilled in the antitype represented by Gloucester. However, this is not the only way of reading this poem. Butterick elucidates 'Bk ii chapter 37': 'The poem is based on a book and chapter of Pausanias' *Description of Greece*, with Gloucester references in place of the original ones' (*Guide* 365). The relationship between ancient Greece and Gloucester, thus, again, is suddenly reversed. It becomes undecidable whether the poem represents the poetic persona walking through Gloucester and comparing some of its sights to Greek antiquity, or whether he is reading *Description of Greece* and replaces some elements with references to Gloucester. Type and antitype, again, become indistinguishable, and this is of fundamental significance because the differential relationship between types and antitypes is capable of reconciling formal or structural openness with the postulation of an organic totality. Mellors misses or dismisses this when he maintains that 'Olson's commentators and biographers have tended to elide [the] tension between an essentially typological poetic, which assumes a matrix of symbolic unity, and a poetic of *bricolage*, in which competing fragments resist textual closure' (33).

The epiphanies or ecstasies of *Maximus* and 'twentieth-century' typology illustrate that Olson conceived the human universe as immanent totality by internalising the limits or the 'outside'. The truth that is revealed when Merry is torn apart or the truth to which the typological relationships examined above point is not located in a transcendental beyond but is a truth that is an inherent part of the human universe. The problem is only that despite Olson's efforts to locate its foundation within it, the human universe cannot completely exist without outside. Like Bataille and Williams, Olson is guilty of idealising the 'other', and this is one manner in which the totality of the human universe turns out to be exclusive rather than inclusive, or, in other words, one way in which the 'outside', in Olson's thought and poetry, persists or reasserts itself. In *Out of the 'Western Box'*, Kim maintains that Pound and Olson overcome the 'Western monoculturalism' of T.S. Eliot's poetry and the kind of poetry favoured by the New Critics more generally, by admitting

influences of non-Western cultures in their works (5). While Kim acknowledges a tension in Pound's poetry between openness towards the 'other' and a tendency or temptation to assimilate it to Western discourse, he maintains that Olson is more successful in admitting cultural diversity because he overcomes Pound's egocentrism (6–8). Olson 'aimed at subverting the literary and cultural Empire of the West that appropriated the Other', Kim observes, and he explains that '[f]or example, the second volume of *The Maximus Poems* extensively borrows various creation myths from Egyptian, Assyro-Babylonian, Phoenician, Greek, Indian, Chinese, Teutonic, and American Indian cultures in order to negate the conventional discourse of the homogeneous origin of the West . . .' (73, 80). Kim is right to some degree, but he does not appreciate that Olson does not just '[subvert] the literary and cultural Empire of the West' but that he inverts it. As a consequence, Olson does not achieve cultural pluralism but merely turns the hierarchy or power relationship between the 'self' and the 'Other' upside down. He opposes other cultures, cultures of the past or of primitive peoples, to the alienation and corruption of the West and associates them with the capacity of living in an authentic relationship with the human universe. This results in nostalgia or the kind of primitivism that can be observed in 'Human Universe', where he considers the Lermeros' uninhibited attitude to their own 'flesh', describes their 'animal human eyes' and refers to them as 'curious wandering animal[s]' ('HU' 158). 'O, they were hot for the world they lived in, these Maya, hot to get it down the way it was – the way it is . . .', Olson states at the end of 'Human Universe' ('HU' 166). The Maya, according to Olson, were in possession of the 'Truth', but it is now still up to Olson, a Western male poet, to liberate or reveal it.

Depending on one's perspective, another way in which the 'outside' persists in Olson's poetics is in the form of negative capability or the 'heterogeneous', that is, in the form of all that which cannot be explained by logic or reason, or cannot be grasped by discourse. This is the 'outside' that is declared 'none', and it closely parallels Bataille's 'nothingness' or the notion of the 'Unknown' Williams develops in *Embodiment*. The similarities between Bataille and Olson in this respect become particularly apparent insofar as both also refer to the realm outside discourse, reason or logic as the 'heterogeneous'. Like Bataille's 'nothingness' or Williams's 'Unknown', however, 'heterogeneity' or negative capability introduces two related

problems. Firstly, as has already been seen, 'negativity', whatever name it is given, is a precarious concept because it is constantly on the verge of turning into an ideal. Secondly, negative capability or heterogeneity, like the corresponding concepts in Bataille's and Williams's works, introduces the problem of the *volo* because it refers to contents that, by definition, cannot be explained or represented, which means that the reader has to take the writer's words, or else is vulnerable to the accusation of having failed to understand. In the realm of poetry, the notion of *volo* is closely related to the conception of the poet as seer, shaman or genius. This Romantic notion of the poet is irreconcilable with the egalitarianism of Olson's human universe or polis, yet it is widely appreciated that Olson all too readily assumes such positions of authority. Walker, a particularly unforgiving critic, discerns in *Maximus* 'a tendency toward the authoritarian', a 'rhetoric of authority', and maintains that Olson '. . . simply excludes the audience that fails or declines to agree with [his] initial and very large assumptions' (211, 230). However, not just Olson's poetry, but his lectures, too, abound with puzzling, esoteric pronouncements, and one good example for this are the Beloit lectures. Chad Welsh describes that Olson, in their course, alienated the largest part of the audience: '. . . by the end there was a small but intense band of disciples who pursued him and seemed to know exactly what he meant by even the most non-Euclidean statement' (Walsh qtd. in Olson, *Muthologos* 239). The refusal to admit disagreement of which Walker accuses Olson and the silent understanding between Olson and the small, elect group of 'disciples' Welsh describes illustrate the *volo* Olson's thought entails. Olson, however, did not only assume the role of seer but also the closely related position of educator. In 'The Gate', he maintains, for instance: '. . . the poet is the only pedagogue left, to be trusted' ('Gate' 170). As poet-pedagogue, Von Hallberg explains, Olson assumes a position that resembles Pound's, and yet he is keen to distinguish between the two. 'What makes Olson different from Pound', Von Hallberg maintains, '. . . is his willingness to make . . . his point directly and explicitly . . .' (60). Olson is less oblique than Pound, according to Von Hallberg, and hence more democratic since it is possible to follow his reasoning, and therefore also to disagree with it. This might be true of Olson's earlier writings, specifically of volume one of *Maximus*, which Von Hallberg quotes to illustrate his argument, but not of his later works, as the Beloit lectures illustrate,

for instance. Von Hallberg emphasises that, unlike Pound, Olson actually worked as teacher at different stages of his life, yet these practical experiences do not necessarily turn Olson into a 'better' pedagogue (59-0). In fact, one basis on which Olson establishes his authority are his new sciences of man, this utterly eclectic and idiosyncratic synthesis of countless specialised fields, which he developed while teaching at Black Mountain. As 'founder' and only 'specialist' of the sciences of man, Olson, and Olson alone, is in the position to perceive and communicate 'the truth'. Martin B. Duberman quotes student notes related to Olson's sciences of man and provides the following class room impression of Olson at Black Mountain: '. . . now and then Olson would take off on something he'd just read, or on somebody that happened to be on his mind, and some of the rambles that ensued were hair-rising' (373). Olson's speculations left some of his students in awe but inspired others with rage. According to his detractors, Duberman explains, Olson 'had the same lack of respect for exact knowledge . . . as his mentor, Pound, and in turn inculcated in *his* disciples an easy dismissal of the hard-earned expertise of the specialists' (374). Francine du Plexis Gray, who experienced Olson at Black Mountain and, according to Duberman, is 'one of Olson's harshest critics', for instance, maintains that 'the milieu [Olson] cultivated at the college was at once "iconoclastic and dictatorial"' (du Plexis Gray qtd. in Voyce 32; Duberman 376).

Halden-Sullivan also considers Olson's pedagogy and she makes an interesting observation. 'The poet is a teacher, not just an artificer, who demands a kind of trust that is never given casually', she remarks, and adds:

> . . . both writing and reading projective verse demand trust. Olson's reader must rely on him to be able to present the precise 'evidence of what is said' of the world 'equal' to experience. The rigor of the projective enterprise requires a special bond between the poet and her or his undertaking and between the poet and the reader. Involvement with projective verse also demands a kind of intuitive 'leap'. (131-2)

Projective verse requires the reader's trust because it is impossible to verify whether or not Olson's poetry constitutes an authentic expression of the experience of the human universe, whether 'what is said' is '"equal" to experience'. This is another way of saying that Olson's poetics involves a *volo*. In *The Topology of Being*, Halden-Sullivan aims to show 'how . . . [Olson's] notions of the world, the human mode of being, and language are related to the hermeneutic phenomenology of

Martin Heidegger' (1). She compares the ontology of Olson's poetics with Heidegger's ontology, and locates in Olson's writings, for example, a notion of truth that closely resembles Heidegger's concept of truth as *aletheia*, or, as stated above, she associates the relationship between the local and *polis* with the relationship between the ontic and the ontological (54–8, 83). Considering this, Halden-Sullivan's characterisation of the *volo* as 'leap' is intriguing, because it is tempting to identify it with the change in perspective from the ontic to the ontological, and, moreover, to rethink the *volo*s that have been located in Bataille's and Williams's works, likewise, as 'leaps' towards new ontologies. These leaps, in all three cases, however, are only reluctant ones, or perhaps rather leaps to and fro, and this is precisely what identifies these works as 'late modernist'. To argue so is in keeping with McHale's definition of 'limit-modernist' texts as texts in which epistemology 'tip[s] over' into ontology or vice versa. Accordingly, it is possible to maintain that the readers who celebrate Olson's works do so because they take the leap towards a new ontology with him, while the others, who consider Olson a charlatan or dictator, apply epistemological criteria to Olson's ontology.

The problem, however, is not only that some, perhaps even most, readers decline to take the 'leap' with Olson, but that Olson himself only makes a half-hearted attempt at it. In Bataille's words, as quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, Olson does not completely renounce '*the desire to be everything*', in which case, paradoxically, he would become one with everything, but occasionally gives in to it. In particular, to the extent that Olson's poetics depends on the notions of negative capability or heterogeneity, and consequently to the extent that it casts the poet as seer, genius or educator, it remains with or returns to a metaphysics of the subject. As process or performance, projective verse comes into existence at the very moment of composition or reception and, thus, overcomes the dichotomies between reader or writer and text, and between poet and reader. Olson's notion of projective verse in this respect is reminiscent of Bataille's 'dramatisation'. Yet, for example, the 'epiphanic' poems that highlight the vertical axis of space considered above are not projective in this regard because they are utterly discursive, descriptive, subjective and introspective. The 'pragmatic strand' of Olson's poetics, which has been identified above, the notion that an 'action' of some sort is required to overcome the

contemporary alienation and realise the human universe, poses a similar problem. This adherence to a metaphysics of the subject has serious consequences, for rather than growing beyond his individuality to a 'Maximus', to a being of projective size, Olson, or the poetic persona, remains limited to and even trapped in his personality. Analogously, rather than becoming a 'book of the world', *Maximus* merely amount to a book *in* a world, and, as a result of its unsuccessful attempts to distance itself from and overcome this world, even merely to a relatively irrelevant one. *Maximus* betrays clear signs that Olson became increasingly aware of these difficulties. Bram remarks, for example: '. . . a sense of failure and seclusion is already visible in the second volume . . . , and certainly in most of the "letters" in the last' (136). It is not accidental that Bram locates the beginnings of this development in volume two. While volume one primarily focuses on the history of Gloucester, the poems of volume two, which revolve around Dogtown, are heavily influenced by Olson's new sciences of man. Accordingly, from volume two onwards, Olson more frequently assumes the role of poetic genius. Clark supports this reading for he recounts that in the years following the publication of volume one, '. . . Olson became . . . an intuitive dogmatist of private vision, a shamanic votary . . . committed . . . to his own spiritual exercises . . .' (282). Yet, a genius or shaman without big audience is not of much use, and Olson's poems consequently become increasingly personal and introspective. Isolation and loneliness in particular become dominant motives in late *Maximus* poems, as the following excerpt illustrates:[12]

> Now date August 1965 returning
> Gloucester from as far out in the world as my own
> wages draw me, and bitter
> police cars turn my corner, no one in the world
> close to me, alone in my home where a plantation
> had been a Sunday earlier than this been
> proposed, it is Osman (or Osmund) Dutch's
> name, and Gallop whom I am closest to,
> it turns out, once more drawn into the
> plague of my own unsatisfying possible identity as
> denominable Charles Olson add here as 4's
> on a weather shingle our
> names

[12] In addition to the poetic difficulties Olson encountered, the subjects of isolation and loneliness in *Maximus* certainly also reflect personal problems with which Olson struggled in the sixties and later, such as the death of his wife (Clark 308–312).

Charles Olson
Osmund Dutch
John Gallop
Abraham Robinson, our
Names (written 28
Stage Fort Avenue Gloucester
August 22nd 1965
(*M* 450)

Maximus and Olson have so much in common, Butterick grants, '. . . that it seems pointless to minimize the identity . . .' (*Guide* xxviii; see also J. E. Miller 213; Bram 136–42). The present excerpt, however, even identifies the poetic persona with Olson. Olson feels utterly alone in the hostile world of police cars, and the only people to whom he is close are the early settlers of Gloucester such as Osmund Dutch, John Gallop and Abraham Robinson. When the search for a 'human universe' descends into escapism as it does here, it becomes important and inevitable to acknowledge the failure of the project. However, Olson blames nobody but himself. The problem is that he is not able to transcend his individuality, his 'own unsatisfying possible identity as / denominable Charles Olson . . .'. The loneliness he describes in the first lines is doubly painful, for it is not only disagreeable by itself but also a reminder of this failure. In the human universe, Olson would not be capable of feeling lonely and would exist in a 'community' of some kind with 'Osmund Dutch', 'John Gallop' and 'Abraham Robinson'. Now the question emerges again of whether *Maximus* cannot after all be considered a poetic sequence, since it becomes increasingly subjective, introspective and thus lyrical. Yet, the answer to this is still 'no'. *Maximus* is not a poetic sequence, because its lyricism represents the failure of Olson's project to write an epic, and a poem that was meant to be an epic but fails in some respects does not by default become a lyric. Olson pushes the project of writing a late modernist epic further to its impossible conclusion than Jones and Williams.

Conclusion: The Late Modernist Epic as Impossible Totality, rather than Total Impossibility

The present dissertation has had chiefly two objectives: firstly, to argue and illustrate that epic poems kept being written as late as the second half of the twentieth century; secondly, to describe and analyse the specific formal, political and philosophical problems the epic genre in the second half of the twentieth century posed to poets. The first objective is relatively easily summarised. *The Anathemata*, *Paterson* and *The Maximus Poems* are epics because they all attempt to represent – in both senses of the word – 'communities', and because Jones, Williams and Olson intended them to be epics. These poems were all conceived as continuations of particular epic traditions, and all in various ways allude to or participate in these traditions. Of course, based on different criteria, it is nevertheless possible to challenge the conceptions of these three poems as epics, but interpretations of *The Anathemata*, *Paterson*, and *The Maximus Poems* as anything other than epics, the past chapters illustrate, disregard or misinterpret a central aspect of them.

The formal, political and philosophical problems that Jones, Williams and Olson had to confront with their attempts to write epics after 1945 have been examined by associating their poems with late modernism. *The Anathemata*, *Paterson*, and *The Maximus Poems* are late modernist insofar as they all try to imagine a complete, unified, in other words 'total', 'community' that is not based on any transcendental ideal. In *The Anathemata*, this gives rise to the notion of a 'community' of 'man-the-artist', in *Paterson* it results in the conception of an organic community that is based on the individual, which, in turn, is 'given birth' by the community, and in *The Maximus Poems* it leads to the concepts of the human universe or polis. The organic community *Paterson* imagines is intrinsically related to Williams's conception of humanity as organic whole, and all three 'communities' represented in these epics are, thus, in different ways, 'communities' of humanity. As a result, they are all 'communities' that are based on qualities that are intrinsic to them, and they are, thus, 'immanent' rather than 'transcendental' 'totalities'. However, the problem is that the notion of an absolutely immanent totality is

fundamentally impossible, that the reintroduction of transcendental categories remains an ever-present possibility or threat, and Bataille's 'philosophy' of 'community' helps to recognise this particularly well. At the risk of becoming too schematic, it is possible to argue that from *The Anathemata* to *Paterson* and on to *The Maximus Poems*, the problem of late modernisms, that is, the impossibility of an absolutely immanent totality, becomes increasingly articulated. In *The Anathemata*, it has been argued, the concept of a 'community' of 'man-the-artist' emerges as an alternative to the notion of a transcendental Christian 'community'. This can be interpreted as the beginnings of a 'late modernist' poetics, as the change from a conception of 'community' that is based on a transcendental ideal to an 'immanent' 'community'. Yet, in *The Anathemata*, the notion of 'community' as immanent totality is not much further explored and its limitations are consequently not encountered or acknowledged. Jones's notion of 'man-the-artist', for example, depends on a conception of 'human nature' that is exceedingly close to becoming another transcendental ideal. Similarly, the complete closure of *The Anathemata*, its return at the end to the Eucharist with which it begins, is possible only because it does not critically engage with the conception of 'community' as immanent totality, which would result in the realisation of its intrinsic impossibility, or perhaps even because it replaces one ideal with another. In *The Anathemata*, Elen Monica reflects on her acquaintances with sailors who have travelled '. . . from the known to the knowable / and hither again . . .' (*A* 135). *Paterson*, *The Maximus Poems*, but also the *Summa*, however, grant some space, not just to the unknown, but to the *unknowable*, and this is one important manner in which the concept of immanent totality is further explored in these other texts. In addition to postulating the unknowable, Williams attempts to avoid universalising transcendental categories by embracing the pragmatist call to direct, immediate action. Either way, however, metaphysics enters through the back door. The category of the unknowable, in particular, inevitably always introduces a *volo*, which signals the return or persistence of a metaphysics of the subject, because it establishes the poet (or philosopher) as the subject *par excellence*. *Paterson* has been read as tireless effort to conceive 'community' as immanent totality and to circumvent transcendental categories by several avenues, while *The Maximus Poems*, like Bataille's

'philosophy', eventually acknowledges the intrinsic impossibility of an immanent totality. This is all part of Bataille's 'project' and does not represent a capitulation because, according to him, the immanent totality of existence can be realised or experienced by embracing impossibility. Yet, it represents a capitulation of some kind for Olson, because it amounts to acknowledging that epic either descends into subjective lyricism, or else that it is always to some degree exclusive and, hence, potentially totalitarian. At this point at which the impossibility of an absolutely inclusive, non-totalitarian epic seems to (re-)assert itself, the question of the existence of the epic in the twentieth century needs to be raised one last time. *The Anathemata*, *Paterson*, and *The Maximus Poems* are all epics because they represent attempts to continue the epic tradition after the Second World War despite considerable formal, political and philosophical difficulties. In doing so, they encounter certain limits of the epic genre. Whether this means that after 'late modernism' epic poetry has finally and definitely become an impossibility is a question for another project. However, if epic poetry is understood less in accordance with strict formal criteria and more in terms of criteria as the ones established in the present dissertation, it is more likely that after late modernism, epic poetry just further evolved.

All that now remains to be considered are further projects to which the present dissertation could lead. It is intriguing, for instance, that in trying to conceive of non-totalitarian kinds of 'community', Bataille, Jones, Williams and Olson all, in different ways, turn to notions of 'humanity' and imagine 'communities' of 'humanity'. This raises an interesting question with regard to 'late modernism', namely, could 'late modernism' be identified with a return to or a last surge of humanism before the anti-humanism of postmodernism? Or similarly, to what extent does literature after the Second World War react to the catastrophe of the war by returning to or reinforcing humanist values, and what is the relationship of such humanist literature, on the one hand, to interwar modernism and, on the other hand, to postmodernism? It is particularly fascinating, in this respect, that Bataille and Olson, who, it could be argued, more paradigmatically represent late modernism than Jones and Williams, are not unequivocal humanists. As has already been observed, Bataille distinguishes between the human and non-human, yet his conception of

'community' as the totality of existence represents the confluence of human beings with everything that *is*. Olson's human universe bears the mark of its anthropocentrism in its name, but it likewise refers to the totality of existence and thus includes the human as much as the non-human. Another potential follow-up project starts from the notion that the late modernist problem or impossibility of conceiving an immanent 'totality' is only the apotheosis of an aporia inherent in the notion of 'totality'. In an essay entitled 'Ambiguous Universality', Étienne Balibar describes this aporia as the 'equivocity' of universality, and he explains:

> In a sense, this is a common place, which every great philosophy has tried to clarify, but also to reduce, notably by integrating modes or modalities of the universal within a single dialectical progression: just think of Hegel's schema of integration of juridical ('abstract' or 'formal') universality within moral (or 'subjective') universality, itself integrated within 'ethical' or 'concrete' (i.e. social and historical) universality, to become finally a moment in the realization of 'the Absolute'. (146)

In other words, the problem is not so much that the concept of an immanent totality is fundamentally impossible, but that the notion of totality is contradictory. A totality (or absolute or universal) that is not immanent, that depends on anything outside or beyond itself, is not an absolute totality. It is telling that Balibar illustrates this problem with reference to Hegelian dialectic, because Bataille was significantly influenced by Hegel and fascinated by the problem of the 'Absolute' that Hegel exposes and tries to resolve. In a letter to Alexandre Kojève, whose lectures on Hegel Bataille attended, Bataille writes, for example: 'If action ("doing") is – as Hegel says – negativity, the question poses itself of knowing if the negativity of someone who has "nothing left to do" disappears or persists in a state of "unemployed negativity"' (*G* 111; see also 234n1). In other words, the problem is that totality, whatever name it is given, can neither admit anything outside or beyond itself nor do without it. In this regard, it is intriguing how throughout the present dissertation Romantic idealism has repeatedly figured nearly as 'the return of the repressed', particularly with respect to the notions of the 'Unknown' or negative capability in Williams's and Olson's writings, respectively, and with regard to conceptions of the poet as genius. These returns to forms of idealism could be interpreted as signs that totality, be it the totality of the poem or the totality of the 'community' represented, cannot exist without a beyond that simultaneously challenges its status as totality and that

consequently needs to be included, subordinated or sublated in a next move. With this in mind, it would be interesting to examine modernist epics more broadly, including poems written before 1945, in order to determine whether or to what extent they can be considered attempts at coming to terms with Romantic idealism. For example, to what extent can the modernist ideal of the autonomous work of art be understood as continuation of Romantic idealist conceptions of art, and to what degree do modernist epics represent sustained attempts to write the 'book of the world' that could be conceived as the (impossible) culmination of this project? Hegel's account of the epic in his *Aesthetics* would represent an intriguing point of departure.

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