

The Empire of Neomemory

CHAINLINKS

The Empire of Neomemory

by Heriberto Yépez

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TRANSLATORS' NOTE Three translators worked on this version of *The Empire of Neomemory*; each of us translated one chapter. While we were in conversation amongst ourselves and with Heriberto throughout the process, the individual chapters reflect slight differences in each translator's interpretation of Heriberto's work and style, and to some extent of the poetics of translation. In addition, Heriberto was an active collaborator with us in the process of making this translation—adding and subtracting, tweaking and translating alongside us—and his vision informed our translation choices at many junctures. One aspect of the original text that seemed to us especially important to highlight is the frequent use of terms in English. Rather than footnoting each usage, we have indicated terms originally written in English in italics and included them in a list at the end of each chapter. These italics are in addition to the italicized Spanish words in the original text.

COVER IMAGE The image reproduces a page from a flipbook called *Folgers from Black Mountain Groan* by Michael Myers, Ed Dorn, and Teter Holbrook and published by Zephyrus Image in 1977. The book reproduces drawings by Myers of Olson standing in front of a weather map. When the book is flipped he moves his finger back and forth over his lips, mimicking a familiar action used to get babies to laugh.

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THRESHOLD

The cybermnemonic is a means of production for unconnected images. It is a process for the fragmentation of reality, experience, and memory; by means of the cybermnemonic illusion—since the cybermnemonic cannot be anything but fantasy—the Oxident accumulates.

Accumulates images for its reoccurrence.

Language converted into space for only-echo.

The cybermnemonic is the dream of a neomemory.

The cybermnemonic is the foundation of Empire.

Without cybermnemonics there is no *pantopia*.

“America” is the cybermnemonic.



And yet, death—will free us from everything.

Including the “Universe.”

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written for eight hands

*by Jen Hofer, Christian Nagler,
Brian Whitener, & Heriberto Yépez*

I.
AMERICA
PSEUDO-
PATRIARCHY
PANTOPIA

Εδιζήσαμην εμεωυτον
—Heraclitus, B 101

Going Postal

It all begins with a man wanting to deliver a letter. A man looking for addresses; the second in this lineage. He carries with him a sack full of others' words. Words he doesn't know. It all begins with this man knocking on your door. A pantopian's story.

Can a biography explain an empire? Possibly, if there is a shared metaphysics. And if it explains nothing, can you blame the error on madness? In this man's work, we find the workings of an empire, thanks to *co-control by analogy*. I will not tell the story of an individual. I will leave the relation between life and empire open. I will touch the fibers of a corpo-graphy. I will touch the telephysical structure of a government.

Born in 1910 in Worcester Massachusetts, Charles was the son of Karl Joseph, a Swedish immigrant who became a postman after coming to the United States. Charles was to have a lifelong relationship with the epistolary. He was a man who only seemed to think by means of *correspondence*. He was a split man, who healed only in dialogue, under the fantasy that the other was a part of himself, a Humpty Dumpty made of others, put back together again. This man is the mad emissary.

An emissary of the dying gods of the Oxident* and of the nascent empire of the United States. The poet known, almost unanimously, as the father of those so-called “New American Poets”—the generation of the beatniks and the counterculture—and the poet who is, like Pound, Stein, or Ginsberg, a communicating vessel for studying an entire civilization. Olson’s tracks lead us to the avatars of empire. Biocriticism of the geopolitical.

This messenger sent out or acquired his best ideas in letters; even his essays and poems are mail. Life of a wounded Hermes; everything in him was remittance and postal hope.

(*Who* and *letter* are two emissions that co-fantasize each other. The time will come in which no *I* will be able to sustain itself without its character of addressee and sender. Everything will be *postal*; this is the full meaning of *Going Postal*. This postalization will lay the foundation of the empire to come.)

Did Olson feel so far from the world that the closest communication would require the unfathomable distance of the intimate-discursive letter? Throughout his life he remained convinced that living persons and documents of the past were letters received, letters written for him. (In the *panalogy* everything is seen from the perspective of *destiny* or *synchrony*. Everything has become arachnid analogy.) Between him and his closest neighbor there were always centuries of distance. He was already member of a lineage that was itself a gathering of phantasms.

For Pound, the poet was the antenna of a race-epoch; for

* Heriberto uses this term throughout the text, a combination of Occidental and oxidized. It also refers to an “Oxident” that includes Mexico, with the “x” signifying the quincunx, discussed later in the book. He is playing with Peruvian poet César Vallejo’s use of the term in poem LXIII (“Amanece lloviendo”) of *Trilce* (1922). The line reads: “y en mal asfaltado oxidente de muebles hindúes/ vira, se asienta apenas el destino” (“and on the misasphalted oxident of hindu furniture/ veering, destiny hardly settles,” trans. Clayton Eshleman from *The Complete Poetry*, University of California Press, 2009, p. 295). (Trans. note)

Olson, its desperate mailbox.

Olson idealized his father. His life, in many ways, was a continuation of Karl's. (When a father doesn't finish his own life, his descendants continue it, but in so doing they leave their own lives incomplete; an incompleteness impossible to repair, an incompleteness that will be hereditary, in order to continue transfamilial *co-control*, the invisible game of diminished energy, of the transmission of intermittence.) It was his father who instilled in Olson the desire to be a successful student and who interested him in histories of Worcester and Gloucester—histories that then became the epicenters of his poetic work. Paradoxically, Karl saw in Charles everything that he *imagined* that he himself had wanted to be, while Charles saw in his father everything that he needed to understand. When Olson writes "The Post Office" (1948) he recalls that for his progenitor education was the newspaper. Curiously, for Olson, poetry was always reportage. Perhaps no other North American* poet had been as influenced by information from periodicals as Olson. His mature poetry, based on anecdotes, ciphers, and local characters, is representative of a time whose form would be provided by *information*.

What is information? Language transformed in exchange; increasingly static exchange. Information is the world structured by syntagmatic dialogue. Information functions by compression. An era of silence is ruled by the repressive; an era of information by the compressive. Every word becomes abbreviation in a world of compressed individuals, who transmit amongst themselves an increasing amount of compressed information. Each individual is a port of emission and reception, a port that finally will become

* Heriberto uses the common Latin American idiom *norteamericano/norteamericano* to refer to the United States and its subjects. We have chosen to avoid the version of this term that is most idiomatic in the American English context *America/American* because of its totalizing claim, preferring instead to use *North America(n)* where the U.S. context is clear and *USAmerica(n)* where it is less clear. For more discussion of this issue see the notes on translation process that follow the text. (Trans. note)

a point, an atom of information. Their only happiness: to become an infomeme of some cybermnemics.

Of his mother, Mary, Olson doesn't appear to have had fond memories. He turned her into patriarchal memory, probably because that was how she auto-memorialized herself all the time. Olson said he inherited his laziness and indecision from her. (She was the source of the wound, no doubt.) Mrs. Olson was Catholic, and superstitious; extremely Puritanical in matters of "sin" and bodies. A good portion of that enormous distance that Olson always maintained with respect to his body, he learned from his mother, for whom all corporeality was risk. We cannot understand Olson if we do not understand the abyss his mother sowed between him and his body, early on, to the point of his conceiving of it as his lugubrious satellite or golden cloud. When he got to Mexico, many years later, Olson was mostly surprised at the manner in which the descendants of the Mayans—as he said in "The Human Universe" (1951)—took pleasure in one another, in the natural closeness of their bodies.

It was as if the distance between Olson and his body could only be restored by a complicated postal system. Something similar was the case with women. Olson always maintained distance—like his father, who his mother had chosen precisely for his being a firm man, who became, at a certain moment, an alcoholic. (The firmness of a man is directly proportional to his averted vertigo.) Through his whole life Olson had a fear of the feminine body. Olson knew that to come close to a woman was not only to come close to the open body he had learned to fear through his mother, but also, above all, to come close to a woman, as he knew very well, was to come close to his own body. (Why does woman signify body, psycho-historically? Because the parallel fantasy indicates that *male* signifies *mind*. Genders were put in place in order to survive dualisms.) "Woman" is that which the "male" unknows of himself. And vice versa.

In order to not come close, Olson, very early on, became a devoted student. From a very early age he sought to become cultured. And it is to have another body, to make it possible to flee from the real body, that our civilization teaches us to construct a fantasy body, the body of requested information, the imaginary body that one constructs, we might say, by reading, by selection of others' memories, cybermnemic editing. And for those of us who continue on the path of the imaginary co-body, the body of the poem, the story, the essay, the body, the text—the body is transformed into the replacement-body. I do not want to live here. I want to live in language. The word is the island where I am moving to. The text will become the history of the loss of our body. The text is both the balm and the poison.

Since then, reading Ovid—with the *Metamorphoses* as his preferred book, of course—Olson wanted to exchange his flesh and blood body for a body made of pure utterances. (And more than utterances, utterances as traces of his relation with others.) We cannot overlook the fact that Olson would become famous, precisely for his essay “Projective Verse” (1950)—cited extensively in the autobiography of William Carlos Williams—in which he described how to make a text breathe. I believe no one has noted until now that one of the most paradigmatic essays of North American poetics takes as its fundamental concern how to pass the breath of the body (sexual) to the replacement-body (the textual body). “Projective Verse” is a tract about how to make a text into a living body that breathes—assisted, says Olson, by the mechanographic machine—how to make of the text, one might say, a *Frankenstein* or *spiritual cyborg*. Above all, however, the essay is an instruction manual that indicates how to pass our energy and breath from the body (sexual) into the body (mechanical-linguistic). What Olson was looking for was to transfer his life from the fearsome body into the artificial body. His literature, as strange as this might sound, is prolegomenon to the exploration of the

post-human. Or, better yet, as I would prefer to say: Olson speculates on the *neocorpus*.

In 1920, when Olson was around ten years old, his father applied for a week of vacation in order to visit Plymouth with his son. The supervisor granted permission, but then suspended it at the last minute. The letter-carrier disobeyed the order and left on the trip with his son. They walked on a replica of the Mayflower; they visited tombs and attended a fair. When they returned, the Post Office decided to punish the insubordinate letter-carrier. They severely reduced his salary. They changed his route. This was, in fact, the management's retaliation against the elder Olson's attempts to organize other postal employees for better working conditions and from this moment his fate turned. Olson's father turned into a mostly wretched being. "I better spell the situation out. Postal employees do not have the right to strike...they had my father and they didn't let go. The postal system has resemblances to the army."* It was probably then when Karl's alcoholism became much worse. From this moment, Olson would be witness to a clandestine demolition. The North American system compressed Karl. Upon compression, he reinforced the North American system; Karl compressed others, above all those closest to him. The family is the information produced and the medium by which the produced information is disseminated. The information comprises the fami-lyric form. Family and information are closely related. The family informs the individual, giving him or her the internal form of the family structure in which he or she participates. The subject becomes the synthesis of the family structure. He or she appears separate from it,

* "The Post Office," in *Collected Prose*, Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (eds.), University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997, pp. 220 and 225. For biographical information on Olson I am indebted to Tom Clark's biography *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life*. I want to highlight that Olson phrase, "The postal system has resemblances to the army"—which takes new meanings once we understand his writing is "postal" and thus resembles "army."

but in reality is unable to decompress this information and will reproduce the familiar structure in which he or she was in-formed. Members of the family who were integrated into the subjective system reappear in subsequent generations; they sprout like metapersonas who will substitute for real subjects, superimposed on their existence, replacing them and converting them into clones and cloners of a given familial structure: carriers of multiple interior metapersonas.

Up to the final days, his father *resisted*. Olson said his father was not broken before his superiors. He endured everything that they did to force him to resign. His father, *sentenced*, would not be defeated; he simply died. Note Olson's definition of the resistance of the body and the organism in "The Resistance" (1953), which is no more than a dramatic, secret loa for his father, even though it is dedicated to Jean Riboud. All of his letters were addressed in such a way. Throughout his whole life, Olson sang to his father.

All that his father silenced, Olson turned into song. Olson decided to become an orator. He arduously prepared himself to make his voice heard; that is, his own voice and the voice declaimed and repaired the silences of his father. It was no accident that Olson, then 18 years old, placed third in the 1928 National Oratorical Contest in Washington—which he might have won if he had not come down with a psychosomatic cold. Thanks to the prize, Olson travelled to Europe, where, in Ireland, he met none other than W.B. Yeats.

Olson felt the pride of the proletariat class to which he belonged. At the same time, however, he continued to fantasize about belonging to a spectacular genealogy, and while talking with Yeats about his family, the latter, in accordance with his customary mental illusionism, assured the North American youth that his mother's aunt was Mary Hines (lover of the blind poet Raftery, at one time considered "the most beautiful woman in all of West Ireland"). Olson, from early on, searched for a genealogy. It was precisely

what he was searching for in Mexico, by making himself a spiritual foster child of the Mayans (as he had done with the Sumerians). This search was, in good measure, because he could not accept his real family.

If one looks for a fantasy co-body it is because one has rejected one's real body. On the same trip during which Olson fantasized about being related to legendary figures, a beautiful prostitute in Colonia invited him to go to bed with her. Olson was still a virgin. And, befitting a man that has decided to choose the replacement-body, Olson said *no*. In that prostitute figure, Olson invested attraction and fear, distance and resistance.

Co-body, Short Story, and Bradbury

A very significant expression of American language is “*going postal*.” The *postal*—imagined by Bukowski, the delirious ex-postal employee and writer—has acquired a special status through a series of assassinations and crimes committed by North American postal employees in the last few decades. “*Going postal*” is to go crazy, violent, stressed, *wacko*, *nuts*, to kill *co-workers*, to lose one's head, to *rampage violently*. (*Going postal* is a form of the *snap*, the *flip*, *wang!*) And the *postal*, for North American culture, signifies a form of emotional alienation, of derangement, of being crushed by the quantity of work, by the systematic handling of circulated inventories of information, by the mania of classification, masculine solitude, perpetual pressure, workday alienation, pedestrian semblance of prudence that must be maintained in a social environment of meticulous control.

One of the best stories for understanding the full significance of the postal is “The Great Wide World Over There” by Ray Bradbury: one of his most celebrated stories and included in the collection *The Golden Apples of the Sun* (1953). “The Great Wide World” tells the tale of Cora and

her husband Tom. They live isolated from the world and are illiterate. Cora envies her neighbor, Mrs. Brabbam, whose mailbox is always full of letters from the wide, distant world. But life takes a turn; that summer Cora's cousin Benjy arrives. Benjy knows how to read and write and he redacts letters that put Cora in communication with the exterior world. Cora, for lack of family to write to, responds instead to advertisements and solicits junk mail from various companies. Cora then discovers that the correspondence her neighbor pretends to receive is in fact nothing more than letters she leaves in her own mailbox, in order to hide her complete solitude.

Bradbury's piece is a cryptic short story, whose theme is the place of the writer in rural America. (And the place of the writer in an impersonal society is an alienated one.) I speak of this story because, I believe, it reveals the world in which North American writers of the first half of the twentieth century were created. The world of the closed-off U.S. citizen and the mythology of the exterior world; which includes the fantasy of Mexico as more alive, but also illegal, sexual, and dangerous, that is, "more human."

We must note that the old letters that Mrs. Brabbam periodically reintroduces into her own mailbox so as to appear beloved by the external world, as Bradbury tells us, were stolen many years ago from Mrs. Ortega, the Mexican woman who works in the grocery store. The Mexican occupies a special place in Bradbury's imagination; a topos very similar to that which it occupies in the general North American imaginary: that of a co-body, warmer, and at the same time inferior, ("some") *body* from which information may be stolen, retrieved, "recovered." For the North American, the Mexican is the pseudo-maternal. The archetypal North American mother is cold. Her psyche is dominated by patriarchal heroic information, estranging her from herself and constituting her as a matriarchal monad. The North American, therefore, is in need of warm

feminine energy. He searches for this energy with anxiety, with naïveté, in all sorts of others—other cultures, other women—with an intermittent rancor of not having received it from the original mother, from the progenitive feminine force, such that any aggression received from the substitute neo-mother is responded to with all this accumulated anger. The U.S.-Mexico wars, in good measure, are due to the ambivalent relations between the patriarchy and the American Soul. The United States wishes to receive from Mexico all that it hasn't received from its own matriarch. *I'm-not-here, is the name of the American Mother.*

There are two other Mexican stories by Bradbury in *The Golden Apples of the Sun* that require our attention. "I See You Never" tells the story of Ramírez, a Mexican who travelled from Mexico City to San Diego and then from San Diego to Los Angeles to work. He rents a room from Mrs. O'Brian, but is arrested by the police, since his work visa has expired six months ago. He says goodbye to his landlord with the expression, "I see you never." The celebrated end of the story narrates how, after Mr. Ramírez's definitive farewell, Mrs. O'Brian stops eating, as she suddenly realizes (for the first time) that she will, in fact, never see him again. In this story, once again, the Mexican represents lost love, maternal absence. Mexico is a regression.

In "En la Noche," Bradbury narrates a neoverision of the Mexican Llorona. The story is about Mrs. Navarrez, who spends her nights crying for her husband, Joe, who has been sent off to war. Her neighbors can't sleep because of her sobs, cries, and wails, and the men resolve to choose one of themselves to give her a scampish solace. It is Mr. Villanazul, who steals into her bedroom at night and has sex with her for two minutes, achieving peace for all, including his wife. Both stories revolve around a body-that-says-goodbye. In one, the body of the Mexican who will abandon California; in the other, the Mexican body that has left for the war. I do not believe in hermeneutics, but I do believe in the

hermenautical.* I believe that stories manifest not only the conscious and unconscious life of individuals, but also, due to atrophy, the visible and invisible “History” of the cultures that have given rise to them. Bradbury’s Mexican stories deal with the absent Mexican co-body, its historical arrival and expulsion from the North American body, from its co-presence. And not only does the Mexican co-body determine North American identity, by way of witchcraft (and labor), we might say, but also its literary imagination has been contained by this secret co-body. What Bradbury’s stories insinuate is that American solitude has to do with the separation from Mexico, with the co-bodies always absent, relative to each other, one with respect to both. The United States and Mexico are *doubles*.

It is the Mexican body that co-defines the distant North American body; it is the indigenous body that is the profound co-body of both. I am my absent body.

In “The Great Wide World Over There,” writing towards and about distance defines the story. This is a story, as we said before, about the social place of the writer, about some components of North American writing. One of these writers, Cora, alludes—without knowing it, as do all effective symbols—to illiteracy and to the illusion of receiving news from Afar, fundamental components of what is, for Oxidentals, the text: reception of messages. Another is Tom, the spouse irritated by Cora’s inclinations, the masculine element, suspicious of writing, for whom there is only obeying orders and constructing a mailbox adequate for the letters his spouse will receive. On the other hand, there is Benjy, the young scribe, who writes to survive and who manages to enable Cora—as she wanted—who doesn’t learn to write by herself. And of

* The Spanish here is a play on the word *hermenéutica* or hermeneutics. In place of *hermenéutica*, Heriberto’s text reads *hermenáutica*, which carries the sense of navigation, of hermeneutic interpretation as sea voyage. (Trans. note)

course, finally, we have Brabbam (probably the closest to Bradbury's own self-image) the old woman who pretends to receive letters from far-away places, when, in reality these are letters she stole from a Mexican woman.

There is nothing that is not tragicomedy.

I have gone into some detail with Bradbury because we will see this same fictional story in another biographical variation in the *Mayan Letters* of Charles Olson and Mexico and in its accompanying characters: his lover Frances, his wife Connie, the Mexican Hipólito Sánchez, his correspondents Creeley and Corman. The story of Olson in Mexico—like that of Burroughs or Kerouac—is the story of madness through the delirious mystery of the co-body. It is as if Olson is Cora, ingenuously wishing to have the secrets of the Mexican glyphs read to him by Sánchez; and he is the glutton Benjy writing letters to all sort of places; and he is Tom eternally grumbling about the damned Mexicans and about the domestic chores and Connie's demands; and he is Brabbam, most of all, Brabbam, feigning the reception of letters from afar, when his letters and their alleged replies were letters stolen from Mexican culture. Letters never received.

What is tragicomic about the book is that we are all its constituent parts. We are all of its characters, simultaneously. We cannot escape what we eject from ourselves. A book is the impossibility of the mirror dissolving into its fragments. Not that it is impossible to avoid repetition; rather we have secured for ourselves a civilization in which it is impossible not to fall back into it. Our very name is the unerring principle of the double. The word could be its own nirvana, but it has been sculpted into an illegitimate wave, a frozen wave.

During the 1950s the same story was repeating itself everywhere, as happens in every era. In the micro and in the macro—monstrosity of relapse—the same signified is being shouted: false! False! False! All of this is FALSE!

In an empire, the macro is printed in the micro. The

system's laws seep into everything, to extend the reign of the taut line wire.*

Analogy is eternal damnation. We have learned to love the poverty of forms. We have learned to repudiate what negates the existence of the uniform, what suggests that the One could liberate itself from its similarity to the other. If the analogous did not exist, what would exist instead would be the independent. But this civilization is analogical. This civilization iterates itself in all its subsystems. It repeats its face until it becomes the face of a god trapped inside its fractal.

This is also what Bradbury's story relates, since, in a closed society, writing is a synthesis that converts time into space. The young scribe Benjy was a species of Aleph (Borges) or walking vortex (Pound). In the eyes of Cora, he "had seen cities and oceans and had been in sites where things were better."† Not that this was true, but that closed societies imagine it to be so. The pantopia is the delirium coming out of cultures that have been shrunken down. We must note that, in many senses, Bradbury's story and Borges's are analogous. In both, a minor man of letters becomes the key to envisioning the Aleph, in a house on the verge of vanishing into its provincial ignorance.

As in Baudelaire—by means of the *dandy* (replete, glutted with the images of all things)—in Bradbury there is a hoarder-subject (more vulgar), a young man who, in the eyes of the provincial Cora, has seen everything. But Benjy is not the only Aleph or Vortex of the story. There is also the mailbox, where Cora waits for the whole world to converge, from a free copy of the Sealed Book that spoke of ancient Knowledge lost in the mists of time and Occult Temples

* Here Heriberto uses the phrase *hilo tirante*—which means literally taut wire or the *trama* or plot of something, but which is also a pun on tyrant—an alternate meaning could be tyrannical thread. (Trans. note)

† "The Great Wide World Over There," *Golden Apples of the Sun*, New York, William Morrow, 1997, p. 84.

of Antiquity and Buried Sanctuaries, to packets of seeds of giant sunflowers, to remedies for heartburn, to a biweekly crime magazine, to coin collectors' catalogues, to brochures of novelties, and lists of magic numbers, and recipes for getting rid of arthritis, and samples of flyswatters. Is there any *short story* that is not, in one way or another, a *pantopia*?

North American civilization constantly attempts to represent others, every other. The short story is one of many North American pantopias.

The *short story* is one way out of circular time. As philosophy was the exit route the Greeks took to leave the eternal circling of cyclic time, the *short story* is an abbreviation—mnemotechnic trick—of what was once narrated through repetition, the circular and the periodical. The North American short story knew how to trap in a nut what before had escaped in the long elliptical path of the tiger.

The *short story*, then, is an avatar of Oxidental linear time. It is one of its bodies. Therefore it is possible to understand the world that produced the story, through these stories, not because the world truly fits in a story, but instead because through the short story the *reduction* that culture makes of the world is described. How it fantasizes its containment. Every story is a false Aleph, like that of Garay street. The short story is a particular form of *pantopia*, a miniscule site that pretends to house the totality of beings. The modern short story could only be conceived by empires like Russia and the United States that search for the temporal synthesis of their possessive ambition; while the novel belongs to smaller, we might say, territories, cultures, periods, or even empires that long for spatial expansion.

The story predicts the conversion of our existence into *short story*.

If *History* was the senile invention of Europe, the invention of the *short history*, of the *quick reminder*, corresponds to the United States. The United States made an adaptation of History, turning it into *quick memory*, *briefing*, mere *memo*.

All story has closure as its theme. Reduction. Sudden limits. Born in Poe as an oppressive genre, the story is a capsule of claustrophobia in which time pretends to be trapped in a quick space. The story—temporal narration turned spatial limit—attempts to store away the All thanks to the perfect synthesis and linear time. What genre is more linear than that of the story?—if Europe invented the novel, the neo-Ocident invented the *short story*, and in this mutation we can see the shift that occurred between these Co-Ocidents. In comparison with the long novelistic reign of Europe, that of the United States will be succinct. The North American empire will be brief, as brief, technical, and fantastic as the best science fiction stories.

Olson, Pseudo-Patriarchy, and Melville

In 1928, upon returning from Europe, where he had acquired, via Yeats, a new genealogy—exactly what Olson had been looking for, in different ways, his whole life!—Olson applied to Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. As the years had passed, Olson's distance to the world had increased, initially caused by his height. Olson was six feet, seven inches tall. His body was the giant he most feared.

He already had a strong interest in poetry and in performance, and at times he wanted to become a journalist. He was part of the debate team, already exercising his talent for mnemonics and retention, which did not prevent him from feeling at a disadvantage with his friends, like he was an “intellectual pygmy.” As the years progressed his problems with his father intensified. During his visits home, young Olson's arrogance caused friction with his father. Around 1930, he was working as a postman during the summers. Olson's complex was that he did not want to become his father and yet he followed in his father's footsteps. What you

run from, follows you. What you flee from, shapes you. Tell me who you flee from becoming and I'll tell you who you will be.

At twenty-one years of age Olson began another of the tormented patriarchal relations of his life: his study of Herman Melville. Begun as a master's thesis at Wesleyan, this work would occupy practically two decades. At the beginning he avoided reading critical studies, and for a long time he only consumed Melville's works and collaborated on situating Melville's personal library. His trips to the Northeast were fruitful and from Melville's books and annotations, which were located in his descendants' homes and in storage at various sites, Olson learned the art of "producing" *clues*. It was during the constant, uneven preparation of this work, rewritten numerous times, that Olson learned not only to overvalue, to plagiarize, and to fear the plagiarism of his own ideas, but also to combine his own theses with the unhinged use of academic sources, with a view towards the reconstruction of an *edenic preterit* bound to a prophetic future. Melville became his super-alter-I.

In 1935 Olson's father died of a cerebral hemorrhage. A few days before his death, Karl asked his son Charles to lend him a suitcase. Karl was going to a convention in Cleveland. Worsening their relations, Olson refused, alleging that he would himself use it soon, and fell asleep. Karl became so enraged that Olson then felt guilty at possibly having contributed to his father's demise. This anecdote, related by Olson in his personal diaries, is one of many that reveal a key feature of patriarchal relations. It is the son who refuses to transmit the legacy (the suitcase) to the father. The tyranny does not originate from the father. The tyranny originates from Oedipus.

The suitcase symbolized the new genealogy Olson had acquired in Europe. His fantastic past and his illusory future. His anti-now. By refusing his father, what Oedipus did was refuse the mutual bond. In the "patriarchy" it is the son who

has the power; it is he who grants or denies bonds with the father. One can also see this in the story of Jesus, who, before dying on the cross, accuses his father of having abandoned him. It can also be seen in Sophocles' Oedipus and Shakespeare's Hamlet. All of them are sons that only establish bonds after the death of the Father, when the patriarchy is the empire of the son.

The father is only the authoritarian co-body *a posteriori*.

The father provides the son's physical body; the son engenders the mental body of the father. The father is the grandson of the son. Patriarchy is absurd, a decapitated head used as a helmet. Acephalos charged with the restoration of *capital*, i.e. the *heading*.

When Olson refuses to lend his suitcase to his father, causing, in Olson's imagination, his death, Oedipus kills his father. This is not exactly the parricide that will found (due to Freudian guilt) the patriarchy. With the imaginary assassination of the father—let's not overlook his pseudo-parricidal character—what is avoided is a real connection between Oedipus and his presumed father. Patriarchy only takes place in Oedipus's mind. When the father and Oedipus are actually together, there is friction, separation. When the father is not there, the parricide is hoped for and is, at the same time, the presumed foundation of their bond and the impossibility of lineage. The patriarchy is a fantasy occurring *a posteriori* in the mind of Oedipus, as was his pseudo-parricide. The Father, throughout his life, never has power over Oedipus. Later on, Oedipus will use the name of the Father to punish others. The name of the father will be the disguise of Oedipus's reign.

Freudian psychoanalysis is part of the Oedipal myth. And the myth of Oedipus dictates that it is Oedipus who has killed his father, when this is not the case. And the myth dictates that Oedipus marries his mother, when this is also a fantasy. The myth of Oedipus consists of hiding the control the son desires, attributing it to the father. The myth of

Oedipus is the Oxident's grand projection, in order to rewrite its past as linear and to hide the fantasy of its control in the present. And this includes as well the Artaudian-Deleuzean body-without-organs, and also the anti-Oedipus, which is merely the Osiric archipelago, the language game in which the Father, now the ex-Father, becomes a crippled Ubu. And this includes the loose organs, the parodic temptation to reconstitute the father, a riddle attributable to the retooled power of the son (a puzzle within reach of the redistributive power of the son), supreme lord of neomemory.

Pantopia, Burnout, and Comedy

It is no coincidence that Borges translated (rewrote) Melville's "Bartleby." On various occasions Borges wrote about the fictional relation between father and son, between whom is established the imaginary relation of doubles, mirrors, dreams, or golems. Among many other things, Borges's work is a *metaphysical* comedy about the *apocryphal* nature of the relation between father and son. A labyrinthine and, above all, fantastical relation.

The father is the apocrypha created by the son.

I say comic because, as we know, Borges's relation to philosophy is post-philosophical. Borges saw philosophy as an aesthete (and false European) who arrived at the banquet when it was occupied exclusively by phantasms. A contemporary of critical theory and logical positivism, Borges is one of the multiple (and impossible) deaths of philosophy. I believe that to understand Borgesian irony one must remember how the Argentinean conceived of his own tradition: as a combinatorial free-play, detached from the European legacy.* And we must also keep in mind the

* See his essay "El escritor argentino y la tradición" ("The Argentine Writer and Tradition") in *Discusión* (1932).

concept of irony Hegel described in his *Aesthetic Lessons*. Hegel tied irony to an almost solipsistic I for whom nothing is serious or important because all is a product and axiology of his or her absolute I:

...this virtuosity of an ironical artistic life apprehends itself as a divine creative genius for which anything and everything is only an unsubstantial creature...because he is just as able to destroy it as to create it...So then the individual who lives in this way as an artist...by his being a genius, this relation to his own specific reality, his particular actions, as well as to what is absolute and universal, is at the same time null; his attitude to it all is ironical. These three points comprise the general meaning of the divine irony of genius, as this concentration of the *ego* into itself, for which all bonds are snapped and which can live only in the bliss of self-enjoyment...Out of this comes misfortune, and the contradiction that, on the one hand, the subject does want to penetrate into truth and longs for objectivity, but, on the other, cannot renounce his isolation and withdrawal into himself...[this] is the source of yearning and a *morbid* beautiful soul.*

This irony is very similar to that of Borges (and to Baudelaire's *dandy*), a solipsistic *outcast* who has appropriated everything, recycling and reorganizing it. He can take nothing seriously because it all has the same value; even more so because this value-granting is done by himself. And this value-granting solipsistic subject, capriciously absolutist, has for some time now refused to give value to anything, and so his appropriation of the world—his favorite pantopia!—has led him to burnout and to indifference.

Burnout is the perfect crime. Be it Bartleby, Funes,

* G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991, pp. 65-7.

or *the dandy*,* let's not ignore the fact that the *fed up man*, within the vociferous yawn of his dissipation, hides the fact that he has appropriated All. Burnout is theft.† Weariness is a strategy for appropriating the world. "I am weary of Everything" means I possess everything. Which will always be false. Not only because the All does not exist properly but because to appropriate it is the pantopic and the pantopic is the illusory.

This is the first great trick of weariness: the trick of its appropriation, the trick of its looting. This theft will be hidden beneath the giant complaint, beneath the shouted apathy or the ironic gesture. Boredom is a theft that denies its own agency, its own action, depreciating what it has stolen. The burnt out man appears to get away with what's his, because it can be argued that he possesses it ALL! —and he is satiated with this, Same as Always—he continues arguing that "in truth...I don't want it." Because the All which the burnt out man has appropriated is an All-Undesired, the burnout pretends to reject it, however, as we see, the rejection of the possessed All is the same trick by which he retains it. The burnout is not responsible for his illusion of having it *all*. The burnout is no more than an involuntary comedian. It is not an accident that excess forms the basis of imperial life.

But if weariness is the base of pantopia, what is pantopia? Pantopia is the pseudo-All. Pantopia is defined by its inten-

* Of course for Baudelaire in "On the essence of laughter and in general, on the comic in the plastic arts" (1855), laughter is a manifestation of the superiority of man, a gesture of his bitter omnipotence, so to speak. Also, he says, laughter happens because man is *double*.

† In the original: "Lo *harto* es el *hurto*." Here Heriberto plays on the similitude of *harto*, translated here as *burnout*, but which also carries the significations of *fed up*, *glutted*, or *wearied*—and *hurto* (theft). Throughout the text Heriberto uses three cognates, *harto*, *hastio*, and *hartazgo*, with slightly different shades of meaning. We have chosen to translate them most often in the following manner: *harto*—fed up; *hastio*—weariness; *hartazgo*—burnout. (Trans. note)

tion to impose as cosmic model its anti-temporal inventory, that is, a new version of linear time, its trans-historic consumerism, and imperial memory. Pantopia is the total inventory. If in the *quincunx*, the entities arise, develop and die, wasted in the space-time of which they are emanations and results of forces, in pantopia there has been created the illusion of permanence under the artificial shelter of a total space, in which what once was separated through time is now collected. Pantopia is the absolute (or selective) topological accumulation, in sight of the imperial fantasy of the disappearance of time understood as death.

Pantopia is wanting it all at the same time. Therefore pantopia and fear, pantopia and satiation, pantopia and consumerism, pantopia and empire, are tied together.

Fathers Everywhere: Olson

In 1936 Olson met another of his imaginary fathers: the writer Edward Dahlberg, the man who, according to Olson, taught him to write. Years later, Olson would remember him as the man who plagiarized his ideas about Melville. Meanwhile, it was Dahlberg who fulfilled the role Olson feverishly conceded to other men, that of playing with his ego. Elevating him out of all proportion when necessary, or—Olson's greater need—pummeling him with ferocious critiques in order to cast him down.* Another father whom Olson searched for and maintained all these years was Freud,

* I will not delve into the theme of the guru here. This point by Chögyam Trungpa will suffice: "We begin to play a game, a game of wanting to open, wanting to be involved in a love affair with our guru, and then wanting to run away from him. If we get too close to our spiritual friend, then we begin to feel overpowered by him... You tend to get too close to the teacher, but once you do, you get burned. Then you want to run away altogether... You begin to realize that wanting to be near and wanting to be far away from the guru is simply your own game." (*Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, Shambala, Boston, 2002, p. 43). Again and again, Olson seemed to get stuck in this type of apprenticeship.

who allowed him to interpret his own life. It is curious that again and again Olson fantasized about discovering paternities, whether of paternal origins of some idea, a theme in Melville, or some aspect of his existence. Without a doubt, Olson proved that the Father is an interpolation.

As time passed, Olson's thought became more nationalistic. The wartime environment did not permit much debate. In addition, Olson studied at the American Civilization program at Harvard. His doctoral thesis again revolved around Melville. In 1939 he abandoned the doctorate without finishing said thesis, which was becoming more and more intangible. During his time at Harvard, however, he met many people and, here his oscillation between egotism and insecurity began, as did his hypochondria and somaticization. (For example, from an early age, every time Olson felt he had to prove his masculinity, whether it was due to a competition, exam, deadline, or sexual encounter, he would come down with a cold, making literal the expression *cold feet* which, at root, concerns a lack of received "feminine" energy, a lack of "contact with the earth.") Immersed as he was in fantasies, Olson was also, of course, a great cinephile. Tom Clark has remarked that much of Olson's diaries are dedicated to film commentary. Olson considered Charlie Chaplin the Homer of his time, and in the art of montage, which he practiced in "The Kingfishers," Eisenstein was his teacher. Olson was a member of the Harvard Film Society. Thanks to his talents as an orator, Olson presented the films during the screenings. Here is something that has not been sufficiently noted: Olson thought of the world not like a book, but instead as a film. Olson's models were cinematographic and this was a key source of his parataxis.

Olson was a man created in the Great Depression and guided by Hollywood's vision.

Olson is "America." Nightmare of analogy: Maximus.

In claiming that Olson is America, I don't believe, of

course, that a man can really represent an entire culture. But precisely because America has worked so hard, more than any other culture before it, at being represented by the image of certain personas, Olson represents this impossibility of representing America. Of Olson and America, we can say one thing: *they are not*.

History, Precursor to Pantopia

Shakespeare, Heidegger, Kafka, Borges, and Olson are authors for whom it remains clear that *patriarchy is an artificial linear history*. Patriarchy is not sustained by fathers. Patriarchy is constructed by pseudo-sons. It is sons who fabricate a falsely hereditary line. It is the pseudo-sons who lay the foundation of the Oedipal structure. It is not the Law or the Name of the Father that reigns over the patriarchy, but instead the fantasies of the pseudo-son. The post-Oedipus, the Edited Oedipus, the Patriarchal authority is an illusion created by each generation to keep hidden, by means of this fantasy, its own desire to be dominated and to dominate others, the fantasy that others, not the pseudo-sons themselves, are exercising power. So much has been wrought by men in refusing to accept that we are the most terrible gods.

Linear history, Oedipal history, is our fantasy, and to perpetuate it we invented the myth of an authoritarianism arising from the preterit, even though authority can only be exercised from the present. Borges, whose work was concerned with the manipulation of time, claimed that each author invents his precursors. Or, to put it in Phillip K. Dick's terms, the Oedipal structure is a *Counter-Clock World*, a world where, as in this Dick novel, the libraries destroy books and the dead emerge from their graves. The best-kept secret of linear occidental time is that it is written from the future to the past.