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“Out from under Leviathan J. Olson”

The story of Jonathan Williams’ *Jammin’ the Greek Scene*

Andy Martrich

Jonathan Williams’ three-volume set *Poems: 1953–1956* (Jargon 13) comes out of a formative and very productive period for Williams as a publisher and writer. From 1953 to 1956, Jargon¹ published its first books,² eleven publications in total, which included some of its most beautiful and coveted productions, e.g., Charles Olson’s *The Maximus Poems/1-10* (Jargon 7) and Louis Zukofsky’s *Some Time* (Jargon 15). It was also during this time that Williams was exploring and shedding influences to refine his own work as a poet, particularly at Black Mountain College³ under his mentor Olson’s (often imperious) tutelage. *Jammin’ the Greek Scene*, which was scheduled as the third and final book of *Poems: 1953-1956*, is perhaps exemplary of Williams’ poetic development, and is his only book to contain an introduction from Olson. It’s also Williams’ first openly queer import, signaling a foray into the sexual content characteristic of his later work. Yet, aside from six scattered proof copies,⁴ *Jammin’ the Greek Scene* has remained unpublished for over sixty-five years, and is a bit of an anomaly in Jargon’s bibliography.⁵

Jammin’ was initially slated to be published as Jargon 13c in an edition of 300 copies alongside the first two volumes of *Poems: 1953–1956: Amen/Huzza/Selah* (Jargon 13a), and *Elegies and Celebrations* (Jargon 13b), which came out in October 1960 and Summer 1962, respectively. *Jammin’* was forecasted as early as 1956 and as late as 1966, but only published in “scraps and pieces,”⁶ e.g., the appearance of “The Switch Blade (Or, John’s other wife” in *The New American Poetry*:

men share perceptions (and
their best friends' wives, in lieu of

a perverse tangling of arseholes

— so if you don't dig that sound get down together
on the wrestling mat mit your
Blutsbrüderschaft ,

Mr Caesar, Mr Seizure, Mr Man

(every man's woman and every
woman's man, said Suetonius⁷

The anthology situated Williams as a member of the Black Mountain Poets—with Olson at the groups' center—a label that would follow Williams throughout his career despite his rejection of it. Nine years later, nearly half of the *Jammin'* manuscript was featured in a section titled "From: Jammin' the Greek Scene" in *An Ear in Bartram's Tree: Selected Poems, 1957–1967*, but why it never came out in its entirety is somewhat mysterious.

In an email from Thomas Meyer⁸ to Jeffery Beam in 2008, he wrote that the reason *Jammin'* wasn't published "is still an unanswered question," and went on to suggest that Williams' enthusiasm for it may have dwindled after the publication of the first two volumes.⁹ Meyer is onto something here, and there's even evidence that Williams had cooled on the entire series as early as 1957, e.g., in a Jargon newsletter dated the same year, Williams wrote:

Since the Guggenheim Committee apparently liked the ms. of some of [*Poems: 1953–1955*]¹⁰ enough to grant me a Fellowship, I will try to get them finally published, as early in 1958 as possible. The problem of old work, and how to stay interested in it.¹¹

Around this time, Williams was working on *The Empire Finals at Verona* (Jargon 30), which followed a similar theme to *Jammin'* while taking it to another level in terms of production and Fielding Dawson's collaborative role as artist and co-designer.¹² In

England's Green & (A Garland and a Clyster) was published in 1962 by The Auerhahn Press, which Williams considered to be his first book in his own voice, implying that his previous books had been weighed down by certain influences. Clearly, he felt the need to move on from his early work; however, in a lecture delivered for the Hanes Foundation in 1989, Williams pointed out that the proof contains a vital clue by way of Olson's introduction:

"Why didn't [*Jammin' the Greek Scene*] get published?" [...] "Money, most likely." But also something Olson put his finger on: "I'm sure we got askance from utter shyness. They made us shy, the whole thing fronted so. We winced. And we's wincin' back. I mean, we's shy. Bro Jonathan, he shy."¹³

Olson suggested that Williams was too timid to publish *Jammin'*, a strange accusation to come from the book's intro. Why would Olson write this? We may only speculate, but it likely had to do with the role of obscenity in *Jammin'*.

At first glance, the title may not appear to be suggestive of anything "obscene," rather it seems to indicate that Williams is running Greek mythology through an instrument, with immediate reference to his use of the musical phrase, and this is partly correct. As Ronald Johnson wrote:

If we take lyric in its first sense as song from a lyre, then we understand that in Williams' poetry, from the early book *Jammin' The Greek Scene* [...] in which he turns up rather like Edith Sitwell playing Ovid on the saxophone in a New Orleans dive [...] his words present themselves, one after the other, as equivalents of notes of music plucked still ringing from the air. He stands as one always in dialogue with Orpheus himself.¹⁴

Williams confirmed the central role of sound in *An Ear in Bartram's Tree*, where he wrote that the idiom "jammin'" is taken "from Charles Brown, Bud Powell, Blakey and Miles," an important point that he left out of his statement in the proof. Since *An Ear in Bartram's Tree* marks the first time these poems were published together under the *Jammin'* moniker, the initial impression of the word is related to slang and affiliated with

jazz. Williams continues with an anecdote, apparently gleaned from Olson,¹⁵ which he attached to the meaning of obscenity:

The results suggest the time Aeschylus put megaphones in the hands of some of his thespian-type Errinys, so six came on, screaming like fifty. People gave birth, etc., on the spot.

The correlation between sex and sound is a main theme here. The words *jazz* and *jammin'* have sexual connotations, e.g., the former's somewhat conflicting meanings of a heterosexual male (i.e., an acronym for "just a man") and "a spontaneous party often ending in a spirited orgy." Jazz has etymological ties to *jasm*, meaning "energy, spirit,"¹⁶ which came to be affiliated with music that was initially called *jas* or *jass*, also slang for sex. The composer and musician Eubie Blake noted that the change in spelling was a thinly-veiled attempt at masking its sexual connotations as the music began to reach larger audiences on the cusp of the Jazz Age.¹⁷ Williams' comparison of an amplified Aeschylus performance to the bebop of the mid-1950s is hyper-sexualized and, according to him, obscene, writing in his statement to the proof that "such sounds were ob scena; therefore, for off-stage purposes."

Following suit, many of the *Jammin'* poems seem to consist of "language being spoken off stage," invoking another definition of *jazz*, i.e., "Unnecessary, misleading, or excessive talk."¹⁸ Williams didn't realize it at the time but discovering the epigrams of Catullus and Martial—the latter Williams namedropped as his mentor for *Jammin'*¹⁹—at Black Mountain reawakened an interest in found speech and material that started in childhood. Much of the language he overheard around his family's summer home in Scaly Mountain, North Carolina,²⁰ eventually made its way into epigrammatic poems,²¹ e.g., "The September Satisfaction of Uncle Iv Owens":

I got
a rat-proof
crib!²²

A proclivity for the homespun and "elaboration on simple words"²³ led to an appreciation and use of a specific kind of epigram, which Williams was experimenting with while

working on *Jammin'*. Although the epigram's Hellenistic progeny took on various styles and subjects, Williams' reference to Martial implies the mode associated with his name, i.e., one that was witty, sarcastic, and "required frank speech."²⁴ The latter refers to Martial's use of obscenity, as well expressed by his "contention that epigrams cannot 'please without cock'"²⁵; however, the emphasis on frankness also reflects the unrefined, earthy language that Williams was introduced to in the mountains of North Carolina.

Jammin' reflects the vernacular more than its companion volumes, with much of the tone, texture, and form emblematic of musicians' speech, broken up as if overheard, discussing what's about to be played rather than actually performing, or just idly chatting away. For example, in "The Priapupation of Queen Pasiphaë"²⁶ Williams wrote:

say, lay
 off the doll biz, Daedalus,
construct me
 a stately mansion, dad, a conveyance
for my
 quote most monstrous lust unquote!
got just the rig, doll, try this
 cow on—
for size...

By fracturing the story of Pasiphaë's curse into one shooting the shit backstage, Williams inserts the possibility for an interlocutor to respond, who in this case calls the storyteller's bluff in the poem's final lines:

white bulls, sacred to poseidon,
don't fool
 that easy, that's
for sure (which is sort of
the first cock & bull story
for sure

If we're to accept the multiple authorship view of the Homeric question—i.e., that Homer consisted of many writers over several generations—the fragmenting of myth into conversational chatter reflects the oral tradition of early-period Homer. Williams confirmed Johnson's notion of the bardic role in *Jammin'* by rendering portions of the epics into their inceptive textless form (before re-transcribing them). This may also be viewed as a projective operation via Olson's belief in an archaic, pre-Hellenic literature apparently resurfacing during the '40s and '50s.²⁷ However, Williams' evident use of childish humor and spoofing—a technique that Robert Duncan treated as a rebuff of Olson's projective verse²⁸—and his emphasis on the sexually obscene may have been a gibe at Olson.

While “The Priapupation of Queen Pasiphaë” refers to the Minoan myth, in some cases the ascribed myth is either not apparent or nonexistent, with not much happening aside from the evident sexual/musical act. For instance, in the two-word poem “The Jam of Sage Euhemerus”:

Whoopee, Priape!

The image of whoopee (i.e., Jazz Age slang for sex) with the fertility god Priapus and his perpetual erection, doubles as an exclamation uttered during the “jam,” whether that be musical or sexual. Easily the shortest poem in *Jammin'*, the ensuing blankness of the empty page may lead to the speculation that Williams is accentuating everything that happens offstage, even silence and awkwardness after bad sex or improvisation. A similar effect occurs in the preceding poem, “Idyll,” with the consecutive space implying certain sounds associated with a sexual/musical act:

a soft heart and a hard

cod

song is down

in the mouth,

heating

Simultaneously, the “song” is “heating” or forming in the mouth—alluding to projective verse and Olson’s proclamation that “the song is heat!”²⁹—and going “down in the mouth,” implying oral sex. Mythology, if cited at all, is used as a vehicle for sexual innuendo, and there isn’t much stock in the details, other than its corollary to a “scene” where it might be concurrently played with musically and deviously. Both “The Jam of Sage Euhemerus” and “Idyll” indicate that the “jam” may also be considered as a nonce poetic form—essentially a half-lyrical, half-projective epigrammatic jest—emphasizing the many “pun chains” and “palimpsests in parvo”³⁰ found throughout the book, starting with the cover. The title *Jammin’ the Greek Scene*—simultaneously reflecting the jam as a purposeful occlusion, a musical performance, and what might happen before or after the show, whether that be chitchat, practicing, or engaging in some kind of sexual act or orgiastic scene—constitutes its own Martialian epigram with shifting meanings. Its poems not only echo what’s happening off stage but also pull the curtain back to reveal the deeds, putting them front and center as the main performance with the aim to “shock and amuse”³¹, in the vein of Martialian obscenity.

Considering the nature of the subject matter coupled with Williams’ direct reference over thirty years later to Olson’s introduction as an inhibition to publishing *Jammin’*, it’s obvious that Olson’s accusations of “shyness” and “wincin’ back” have merit. As Jeffery Beam proposed to me in personal communication, “Later on Jonathan was clearly less shy about publishing sexual content, but perhaps that early in his career, not?” Beam believes this may have had something to do with the project’s overt reference to gay sex—i.e., “Greek” as a shortened form of “Greek love,” a common euphemism for homosexuality—during the bigoted 1950s, writing that Williams’ comment “about being ‘fronted’ and ‘shy’ speaks volumes about the time.” But this presents the necessity for an important distinction—was it Williams’ timidity or Olson’s comment about it that was the bigger barricade? Williams seemed to relay the former in his 1989 lecture for the Hanes Foundation; however, Beam also suggested in our correspondence that Olson—who has at times been characterized as having homophobic tendencies by some of his students (e.g., Rumaker)—likely disapproved of some of the *Jammin’* poems despite his introduction. Although Beam didn’t say this, his

contention implies that Olson's comment about Williams' reticence may have been a tacit (albeit, successful) attempt to prevent the book's release.

In his poem "Maximus to Gloucester: Letter 27 [withheld]," Olson proclaimed, "No Greek will be able/ to discriminate my body"³², and while this line carries weight as a reference to his critique of Western metaphysics, it also reflects certain notions regarding his sexuality as a cis heterosexual white male. Williams and Olson's falling out is often attributed to differing opinions regarding publishing and the Black Mountain community more broadly; although this is true, Ross Hair suggested in his essay "'Hemi-demi-semi barbaric yawps': Jonathan Williams and Black Mountain," that a kind of sexual tension may have been a factor as well:

Olson may have proclaimed that 'the song is heat!' and proposed a proprioceptive, 'corporeal poetics' very much centered on physiognomy, but in his own lifetime, Williams implies, Olson was 'a cold man pretending to be hot.'³³ [...] Olson was one of the many heterosexual male 'counter-cultural' poets of the 1950s who remained ambivalent about, or resistant to, what [Rachel Blau] DuPlessis describes as "the sexual frankness and body consciousness of gay male poets."^{34 35}

Hair explored this idea across several poems, including "Funerary Ode to Charles Olson"³⁶—where Williams casted Olson as Orpheus—and *Jammin's* "Always the Deathless Mu-sick," noting that not only is its title a reference to Olson's "Maximus to Gloucester: Letter 2" but also proclaims that "Orf's awfully gay/ despite Eurydice." Williams' use of Olson as an orphic proxy perhaps ends up revealing a shortcoming in Olson's poetics, hinting that Olson may not have taken "openness" as seriously as the "40 hours a day [...] price"³⁷ he himself required. This can also be observed in how Williams challenged heteronormative biases by using projective technique to transmit other homoerotic anecdotes, e.g., in "The Honey Lamb":

the boysick, by gadzooks thunderstruck, Rex Zeus, sex expert, erects
a couple temples
and cruises the Trojan coast

eagle-eyed, spies,
swoops, swishes
into town;

ponders whether tis nobler...or
to bullshit, leeringly,
brown, or go down
on, on

that catamite cat,

Kid Ganymedes,
mead mover

erst-while eagle-scout
bed mate

In the Tenth Book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Orpheus sings about Jupiter's transformation into an eagle for the abduction of the adolescent prince Ganymedes—a mythological symbol of homosexual desire—to become both his lover and cupbearer to the gods. Williams overtakes the orphic role via his own rendition of the bard's tale in the projective style of Olson, subsequently spoofing both through obscenity and slang, and ultimately presenting Olson as a kind of sexually half-assed orphic Zeus.

Jammin', then, isn't about Greek mythology per se, but rather a kind of exposure; and if its primary objective is "to draw a bead [*sic*] on the old androgynous gods, to make them come clean from the torpor of pious mythographers" as Williams wrote in his statement, then this may also imply exposure corralled by a sort of caricaturist methodology. Williams tells us that "The facts [...] are courtesy of Golding's Ovid, studies by Jane Harrison and Robert Graves' edition of the Greek Myths." He wasn't the only one at Black Mountain College engaged by these texts, which were being taught in Olson's classes. Graves' writings on the subject, notably *The Greek Myths* and *The*

White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth are cited as having direct influence on *The Maximus Poems* (particularly the latter two books), and Robert Creeley's *A Form of Women* (Jargon 33).³⁸ But there's nothing in *Jammin'* to suggest that Williams actually read these books. He very well may have, but it's just as easy to assume that he flipped through "the facts" and pulled out various references, as a spoofing of the act. *Jammin'* certainly toys with the idea of what a poem can be. This calls to mind Amiri Baraka quoting Olson in *The New American Poetry*, i.e., "Who knows what a poem ought to sound like? Until it's thar'." Some of Williams' poems, e.g., "The Jam of Sage Euhemerus" seem to have been purposefully stopped short of Olson's "thar."

Williams and his Martialian "frank speech" also test the notion of what can be codified as poetic language, including appropriated menacing. In the second poem of the proof, "Catullus: Carmen XVI," Williams starts off with a warning:

I'll pedicate and irrumate
you, Mr Pathic and Miss Catamite!

You two who dig me 'immodest',
just because of some voluptuous-type sounds.

The title clearly cites "Catullus XVI," a poem that was considered so offensive that a full English-translation didn't appear in print until the twentieth century, nearly 2000 years after its writing. Its first line is particularly shocking, threatening two of Catullus' critics with "Pedicabo et irrumabo," i.e., sodomizing and face-fucking, respectively.³⁹ The beginning of Williams' poem is an adaptation of the original, and goes on to proclaim:

We Sacred Poets come on chaste —
yet our verse
is as wide as
the world

Williams associated "frank speech" with an all-encompassing poetic language, and what might be thought of as the obverse of the obscene or the vulgar, i.e., cleanliness. As he

wrote in his statement, “Only way to have clean, vatic-variety ears is to let all sorts serpents lick them, swore Hercules.” Although Olson accused Williams of shyness, he also noted that Williams’ use of parody and “vulgarism” wind up as a kind of honest representation of mythology, especially when contrasted with mythology depicted by “pious mythographers.” In his introduction, Olson wrote:

Everything got treated as scalar for the 2500 years immediately preceding. And indeed the Gods [...] What Brother Jonathan does in hyar is to keep up the velocity at the same time that the things are let be. Ganymedes, or Echo, or that one lo, get back, by vulgarism, their patent vector powers. In his lightness the spoof⁴⁰

Olson acknowledged the unique role of “vulgarism,” and by default the obscene, as an accurate premise by which to depict the gods, even to the extent that such a portrayal may end up reinstating their authentic “powers.” It’s with an eye to such flattery that Olson’s introduction is often referred to as an accolade, e.g., by Ronald Johnson and Eric Mottram. Paul Christensen echoed this sentiment in *Charles Olson: Call Him Ishmael*:

[Jonathan Williams’] humor is in control in the beautifully witty poems of *Jammin’ the Greek Scene*, where the imposing conceptions of Greek mythology are translated into American slang. Olson wrote a foreword to these poems, praising the frank, honest, and amusing use Williams had made of his subject and arguing that Williams’ attitude was one that Americans had to acquire after so long a reverence for Europe.

Christensen’s sketch isn’t inaccurate, but it ignores the possibility that Olson’s introduction may have been tongue-in-cheek at the very least.

In Williams’ early days at Black Mountain, Olson’s tyrannical coaching had Williams’ friends and mentors (e.g., Edward Dahlberg, Louis Zukofsky, and Kenneth Rexroth) accusing Olson of bullying.⁴¹ As Duberman wrote, “Among the divergences was Olson’s occasional tendency to treat Williams like a servant” and “to patronize his talents as a poet.”⁴² The poet Susan Howe testified to the distinction between influence

and outright apprenticeship when noting Olson's impression on her own early writings, saying that "[Olson] showed me what to do. Had he been my teacher in real life, I know he would have stopped my voice."⁴³ Fortunately, Williams concluded that he had to "get out from under Leviathan J. Olson"⁴⁴ and slip Olson's influence for his own good. As Ross Hair explained, Williams "found his own voice [...] by assimilating Olson's dominant voice with other valuable models and influences," perhaps most notably, Dame Edith Sitwell,⁴⁵ who was considered anathema to Olson and perhaps Black Mountain more broadly.⁴⁶ While Williams was indeed a part of Olson's group, Duberman revealed that "Olson was more interested in [Ed] Dorn, John Wieners, and later LeRoi Jones and Ed Sanders than in Williams."⁴⁷ Olson's introduction to *Jammin'*, which could easily be construed as a generous compliment, also included reference to Williams' "lightness" and use of "the spoof." As already mentioned, the latter is cited (by Duncan) in opposition to projective verse, and the appearance of it in Olson's note, coupled with accusations of cold feet, raises some red flags. Perhaps this is an early example of a criticism that Williams faced throughout his career, i.e., as a poet of light verse; however, a closer reading of *Jammin'* exposes the depth of Williams' early epigrams, ostensibly set up to poke fun at conservative renderings of Greek mythology, while just below the surface spoofing Olson alongside his poetics.

If we take the proof as the definitive setup for *Jammin'* (as opposed to the selection published in *An Ear in Bartram's Tree*), we first encounter the four-line epigraphic poem "Paen to Black Mountain":

thar'll be
Paideuma in the sky,
in the sweet,
by and by

Initially, this little poem may seem out of character with the objectives laid out in Williams' statement; but when considered in the shadow of Olson's introduction, which it directly follows, it introduces to the reader an approach for engaging with the proceeding poems. Williams conjures Olson's voice by adopting his use of the

dialectical variant for words ending in -ere (in this case, “thar’ll”), a technique employed throughout *Jammin’*.

But perhaps the most striking word of this little poem is “Paideuma,” an intricate expression coined by the German Ethnologist Leo Frobenius, who defined it as “the soul of a given culture in history.”⁴⁸ While it may be mistaken as a synonym of the word *zeitgeist*, paideuma differs by its unique prosopopoeial implications, with culture treated as an actual entity with spiritual qualities, and the role that education plays in the development of its “soul.”⁴⁹ This compliments the paen as a song of praise; although historically tied to the worship of Apollo,⁵⁰ the use of paideuma here indicates praise to a cultural/educational organism, evidently Black Mountain College as revealed in the title.

The notion that the poem may be a whimsical celebration of Black Mountain at its closing in 1957 is reinforced by its use of the nineteenth-century Christian hymn “In the Sweet By-And-By.” Consequently, it takes its final two lines—“in the sweet/ by and by”—from the hymn’s chorus, therefore summoning the lyrics that follow—“We shall meet on that beautiful shore”—as a ghost line constituting the poem’s actual ending, perhaps evoking the closing image of Black Mountain’s Lake Eden campus. But of course, as with the majority of poems in *Jammin’*, “Paen to Black Mountain” is a double entendre; the shift in meaning occurs when read in mind with the hymn’s numerous parodies, the most famous being Joe Hill’s 1911 song “The Preacher and the Slave,” which is the origin of the skeptical phrase “pie in the sky,” i.e., “You’ll get pie in the sky when you die (that’s a lie!)”⁵¹

The pun “Paideuma in the sky,” sung in a mock Olson voice, suggests a fantasy or wishful thinking rolled back on Black Mountain and its patriarch as another sort of caricatured mythology. Parody of one mythology is set up to lampoon another; in this case, Williams’ own mythology, with Olson as his Orphic Zeus, and Black Mountain as a crumbling Parthenon. As Williams wrote, “Princeton was one club, and Black Mountain was another. I made distance from each as quickly as possible.”⁵²

If we take “Paen to Black Mountain” as a Martialian epigram, then it’s both “a means of commemorating and preserving” and “an elegant waste of time not intended to outlast its occasion.”⁵³ With Black Mountain and Olson chronicled as transitory

parody, they're made easier to get away from. What better way for Williams to signify this break than with a final prank—getting Olson to write an introduction to a book that was to feature such frivolous limericks as:

A dizzy old goddess named Demeter
Got pomegranate seeds in her catheter;
She lit a Pall-Mall,
Slapped Kora in Hell,
And yelled for her son-in-law, Lucifer.

It can be argued that Williams went even farther by getting Olson to essentially give his okay to a text that is at odds with his politics. "Paen to Black Mountain" marks the inclusion of Christian mythologies via its use of "In the Sweet By-and-By," which likewise introduces context for the particular sort of piety of those "pious mythographers," i.e., reverence for the American religion, which distorts all preceding mythologies—Greek or otherwise—in its own capitalist funhouse mirror. This suggests that Williams intended to jam the American mythos by way of its moral treatment of mythologies (and much else), thereby exposing aspects of its bigotry. In one of the final poems in the *Jammin'* sequence, "The Beast-Scene," Williams wrote:

"you can tell
what sort a man is by his
Creature
that comes oftenest
to the front"

whar?
Fraternity
where?

The poem starts out by quoting Mr. Raven from George MacDonald's 1895 novel *Lilith*, a book replete with Christian mysticism. Mr. Raven's preceding lines are as follows:

Every one, as you ought to know, has a beast-self—and a bird-self, and a stupid fish-self, ay, and a creeping serpent-self too—which it takes a deal of crushing to kill! In truth he has also a tree-self and a crystal-self, and I don't know how many selves more—all to get into harmony⁵⁴

The title suggests that the “Creature that comes oftenest to the front” is the “beast-self,” revealing the title as a pun with anti-war connotations. The poem continues to echo Mr. Raven, who after taking Vane, the novel's protagonist, to “the region of the seven dimensions,” points out the deficiency of Vane's human-centric conceptions of place and position.

Again, Williams channels Olson's voice via the dialectical variant “whar?”, only this time it sounds a lot like “war,” in association with “Fraternity,” a nod to Olson's political conservatism in opposition to pacifism. As Rumaker reminded us in *Black Mountain Days*, Olson had decidedly broken from Black Mountain's “Quaker, passive-resistant past,” noting that he taught his students that they should prepare “for the marauders over the hill,’ as well as the marauders in oneself.”⁵⁵ The Olson/Mr. Raven figure orders Williams off to war in the poem's final line, “Join Up — or, Go to the Jungle!”—calling to mind Olson's cold shoulder when refusing to support Williams' conscientious objector status. After being threatened with substantial jail time, Williams was drafted into the army in 1952; but he maintained his pacifism while serving—refusing to pick up his weapon when initially assigned to a rifle company in Fort Knox, Kentucky, and eventually being sent to the medics.⁵⁶ “The Beast-Scene” recalls Williams' anti-war stance and suggests that the preceding poems be read in a similar light, i.e., as a peaceful protest against moralism and its various hypocrisies, including war and violence.

Did Olson miss these political undertones, the evident parodying of himself and projective verse, and the satirizing of his own heteronormative bigotry when giving his ostensible stamp of approval? (It's possible. Perhaps Olson was too smart to be fooled in this way, although his tremendous ego, or addictions, could've prevented him from noticing certain implications). Could he have been perfectly aware of the extent of Williams' hijinks, in turn providing a counter prank in the form of an introduction, which would have a role in preventing the book's publication? (This adds an intriguing layer to

the book's mystique, but it seems too calculated; on the other hand, it certainly wasn't beyond Olson's skills as a rival). Was he in on the joke and being a good sport? As far as I can tell, the answers aren't in the archives, but I'm more inclined to believe the latter. While Olson may have treated Williams poorly at times, they were close friends, and Williams was valuable to Olson, particularly as a publisher. Not only was Williams the first to take a risk on *The Maximus Poems*, but he was also publishing others affiliated with Olson's circle throughout the 1950s. As Williams told Dana, "Olson had aspirations of me coming in and having the Jargon Society of *my* thing, and then becoming publisher to the college and printing a program of books he was interested in, i.e., *his* list." While this appears to be a compromise, it could have been an attempt to gain more control over Williams and get him to move on from Jargon, a name that Olson didn't exactly care for.⁵⁷ Williams accepted the role as Black Mountain's publisher, but the college closed shortly thereafter. It's unlikely that Williams would've been able to maintain both operations, given the combination of Olson's domineering expectations and Williams' sensitivity to Jargon's sustainability (i.e., threatening to end Jargon pretty much from its inception).

Whether *Jammin' the Greek Scene* was shelved due to a lack of finances, disinterest, a reluctance to publish "obscene" material, or all of the above, it represents a turning point where Williams was coming into his own as a writer and publisher. It's also one of the strangest peripheral records of Black Mountain College's demise; as a literary representation of the iconic teacher and student bickering, simultaneously praising and slighting each other. The break with Olson didn't happen overnight. Although their relationship was complicated from the beginning, the 1962 publication of *Untitled Epic Poem on the History of Industrialization* (Jargon 44) by one of Olson's great antagonists, Buckminster Fuller, seems to have been a parting shot.⁵⁸ But *Jammin'* was already full of patricidal imagery, e.g., "The Case of the Castrated Space Cadet," where Williams assumes the role of Cronos, "grabs Dad by the nuts,/ and cuts him"; "Always the Death Less Mu-Sick," where his Olsonian "Orpheus /floats out to sea, he/ bleed indefinitely"; and in "Stag or Drag (Come as you are" where he even references a murderer's message left at the crime scene, "Stop Me Before I Kill More"—Williams appears to have been more than ready to overtake daddy Olson. He noted that

“Olson and I hardly met the last ten years of his life”⁵⁹, which was something that Williams regretted; but the split wasn’t only necessary for Williams’ development as an artist and publisher but his mental health, and that of others; occasionally he’d “take people to his family’s summer home in nearby Highlands to protect them from, or nurse them through, a crack up.”⁶⁰ Perhaps, then, *Jammin’* was written out of necessity, which shines peculiar light on the language in Olson’s introduction. Maybe Williams wasn’t shy about publishing “obscene” content, but reluctant to share, however masked, the details of the strained relationship with his mentor.

¹ Jonathan Williams founded Jargon in June 1951, just before coming to Black Mountain College. For the first seventeen years of its existence, it would be known variably as “Jargon Books,” “Jargon Press,” and “Jargon.” Today, it’s most well-known as the Jargon Society, the name it adopted after receiving non-profit status in 1968.

² The preceding Jargon publications were folded single-sheet objects of varying length.

³ Williams attended Black Mountain on and off from 1951 until its closing in 1957.

⁴ Jaffe, James, “Re: Jargon Society Inquiry.” Email. 24 April, 2021, Unpublished.

⁵ Of the 117 books in Jargon’s book series, there are five projects that were never published, including *Jammin’ the Greek Scene*.

⁶ Johnson, Ronald, “Jonathan (Chamberlain) Williams” in *Jacket Magazine*, 2009.

⁷ *The New American Poetry*, ed. Donald M. Allen (Grove Press, 1960), 107.

⁸ The poet Thomas Meyer was Williams’ partner from 1968 until William’s death in 2008.

⁹ Beam, Jeffery, “Re: Jargon Research Inquiry,” Email. 1 July, 2021, Unpublished.

¹⁰ *Poems: 1953-1955* was the original title.

¹¹ Williams, Jonathan, “JARGON (in conjunction with the MACON COUNTY MESHUGGA SOCIETY) offers its Xmas Mish-Mosh Message and Winter-Solstice Jeremiad to the Citizens of Tophet, Gehenna & Beulah Land” (Highlands, NC: The Jargon Society, 1957).

¹² Dawson contributed a drawing to be used on the cover of *Jammin’ the Greek Scene*, but Williams didn’t include it in the proof.

¹³ Williams, Jonathan, *Uncle Gus Flaubert Rates the Jargon Society in One Hundred Laconic Présalé Sage Sentences* (The Hanes Foundation, 1989).

¹⁴ Johnson, Ronald, “Jonathan (Chamberlain) Williams” in *Jacket Magazine*, 2009.

¹⁵ Williams, Jonathan, *Jammin’ the Greek Scene* (Proof) (Unpublished, 1959).

¹⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Accessed October 2021.

¹⁷ Vitale, Tom, “The Musical That Ushered In The Jazz Age Gets Its Own Musical” at npr.org. Accessed November 2021.

¹⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Accessed October 2021.

¹⁹ Williams, Jonathan, *Jammin’ the Greek Scene* (Proof) (Unpublished, 1959).

²⁰ Williams was born in Asheville, NC, and raised in Washington D.C. His family kept a summer home that his father named “Skywinding Farm” in Scaly Mountain, which Williams eventually inherited.

²¹ Hutcheson, Neal ““Inclemented that Way” – Jonathan Williams – Final Script – Talk About Writing: Portraits of North Carolina Writers,” in *Jonathan Williams: The Lord of Orchards*, eds. Jeffery Beam and Richard Owens (Westport: Prospecta Press, 2017), 379.

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- ²² Williams, Jonathan, *Blues and Roots/Rue and Bluets: A Garland for the Southern Appalachians* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press).
- ²³ Hutcheson, Neal, ““Inclemented that Way” – Jonathan Williams – Final Script – Talk About Writing: Portraits of North Carolina Writers,” in *Jonathan Williams: The Lord of Orchards*, eds. Jeffery Beam and Richard Owens (Westport: Prospecta Press, 2017), 380.
- ²⁴ Henriksen, Christer, *A Companion to Ancient Epigram* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 119.
- ²⁵ Henriksen, Christer, *A Companion to Ancient Epigram* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 4.
- ²⁶ This is the version from *An Ear in Bartram’s Tree*; the proof version is slightly different. Williams tinkered with the *Jammin’* poems at least until the publication of *An Ear in Bartram’s Tree* in 1969.
- ²⁷ Carlson, Gary Grieve, “At the Boundary of the Mighty World: Charles Olson and Hesiod” in *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* Vol. 47, No. 4, 152-150.
- ²⁸ Christensen, Paul, *Charles Olson: Call Him Ishmael* (University of Texas, 2012).
- ²⁹ Hair, Ross, “Hemi-demi-semi barbaric yawps”: Jonathan Williams and Black Mountain” in *Black Mountain Studies Journal*, Vol. 3.
- ³⁰ Mottram, Eric, “An Introduction: Stay in Close and Use Both Hands” in *Niches Inches: New & Selected Poems, 1957–1981* by Jonathan Williams (Corn Close, Dentdale, 1982).
- ³¹ Nisbet, Gideon, “Conversing the Classics (Series II) – Martial” (Classical Youth Society Ireland, March 2019). Accessed November 2019.
- ³² Moore, Richard O., dir., *USA: Poetry* (1966).
- ³³ Browning, John. “Interviews Jonathan Williams and Thomas Meyer,” in Winston Leyland, ed. *Gay Sunshine Interviews: Volume 2*. San Francisco, CA: Gay Sunshine Press, 1982: 281-88.
- ³⁴ Clark, Tom. *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet’s Life*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2000.
- ³⁵ Hair, Ross, “Hemi-demi-semi barbaric yawps”: Jonathan Williams and Black Mountain” in *Black Mountain Studies Journal*, Vol. 3.
- ³⁶ “Funerary Ode to Charles Olson” appears in Williams’ *The Loco Logodaedelist In Situ: Selected Poems 1968–70*.
- ³⁷ Olson, Charles, “Projective Verse” in *The New American Poetry*, ed. Donald M. Allen (Grove Press, 1960), 389.
- ³⁸ Christensen, Paul, *Charles Olson: Call Him Ishmael* (University of Texas, 2012).
- ³⁹ Davis, Lauren, “A Latin Poem So Filthy, It Wasn’t Translated Until The 20th Century” in Gizmodo (June 11, 2014).
- ⁴⁰ Williams, Jonathan, *Jammin’ the Greek Scene* (Proof) (Unpublished, 1959).
- ⁴¹ Hair, Ross, “Hemi-demi-semi barbaric yawps”: Jonathan Williams and Black Mountain” in *Black Mountain Studies Journal*, Vol. 3.
- ⁴² Duberman, Martin, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (Northwestern University Press, 1972), 383.
- ⁴³ DuPlessis, Rachel Blau, “Manhood and its Poetic Projects: The construction of masculinity in the counter-cultural poetry of the U.S. 1950s” in *Jacket Magazine*, 2006.
- ⁴⁴ Duberman, Martin, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (Northwestern University Press, 1972), 383.
- ⁴⁵ Hair, Ross, “Hemi-demi-semi barbaric yawps”: Jonathan Williams and Black Mountain” in *Black Mountain Studies Journal*, Vol. 3.
- ⁴⁶ As Ross Hair reiterated in “Hemi-demi-semi barbaric yawps”: Jonathan Williams and Black Mountain,” Robert Duncan declared that at Black Mountain “It’s easier to announce that you are a homosexual than to say you read Edith Sitwell.”
- ⁴⁷ Duberman, Martin, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (Northwestern University Press, 1972), 383.
- ⁴⁸ Johnson, R. Michael, “Mediation of ‘Paideuma’” at *The Overweening Generalist* (Blogspot), 2011. Accessed December 2021.
- ⁴⁹ Ezra Pound complicated the word further in *Guide to Kulchur*, where he defined it similarly to Frobenius as “the tangle or complex of the inrooted ideas of any period,” but used it with shifting implications.
- ⁵⁰ Harrison, Jane Ellen, *Myths of Greece and Rome With Emphasize on Homer’s Pantheon* (Kindle Edition). e-artnow, 2021.
- ⁵¹ Fowke, Edith, and Joe Glazer, *Songs of Work and Protest* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1973), 156.

- ⁵² Williams, Jonathan, *Blackbird Dust: Essays, Poems, and Photographs* (Turtle Point Press, 2000), 119.
- ⁵³ Fitzgerald, Williams, Martial: The World of the Epigram (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 3.
- ⁵⁴ MacDonald, George, *Lilith Annotated* (Kindle Edition, Independently Published, 2021).
- ⁵⁵ Rumaker, Michael, *Black Mountain Days* (Kindle Edition). Black Mountain Press, 2003.
- ⁵⁶ Dana, Robert, *Against the Grain: Interviews with Maverick American Publishers* (University of Iowa Press, 1986), 208.
- ⁵⁷ In a letter to Williams from 1953, Olson writes, “i wondered how you have planned to define yourself, on such books as [...] this [Maximus] frankly, my own verse is such [...] that if you call it ‘Jargon’, i shall feel uncovered” and suggests that Williams use a different name for the publisher.
- ⁵⁸ Hair, Ross, “Hemi-demi-semi barbaric yawps”: Jonathan Williams and Black Mountain” in *Black Mountain Studies Journal*, Vol. 3.
- ⁵⁹ Williams, Jonathan, *The Magpie’s Bagpipe: Selected Essays*, Ed. Thomas Meyer (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982), 7.
- ⁶⁰ Duberman, Martin, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (Northwestern University Press, 1972), 395.