“new books of poetry”: “A”-17

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Zukofsky’s homage to William Carlos Williams was assembled very shortly after the latter’s death on 4 March 1963, and the numbering of this movement out of chronological order was determined by Williams’ birthday on 17 September. The basic idea of “A”-17 is simple enough: a chronologically ordered selection of quotations recording a poetic friendship over the course of 35 years. As conceptually appealing as this tribute in the form of a documentary presentation may be, one might ask whether it retains much interest beyond a first reading—what are we to make of the specific selections and collocations that Zukofsky presents? Given the somewhat rigid design, one cannot expect a neat narrative development and presumably the continuity boils down to recording Williams’ presence in Zukofsky’s own writing and perhaps in American poetry generally. How such an argument is made, however, is not always obvious, and many of the most interesting selections are those that at first glance appear to have little relation to Williams. In what follows I will draw out some of the implicit themes or points Zukofsky makes through the specific presentation in “A”-17.[1] Although formally “A”-17 is not typical of *“A”*, it is typical in that it proceeds by accumulating and intertwining various strands as they arise in process.

I

“A”-17 poses the question of just how to read it. As a general principle, allusion does not play an important role in Zukofsky’s work; that is, his poetry is not appreciably authorized or enhanced by recuperation of the textual origin of names, phrases or sources upon which he draws, even though virtually all his compositions self-consciously rework found materials. “A”-17, however, consists almost entirely of self-quotations, all carefully referenced to point the reader back to the full range of Zukofsky’s own writings, which may appear rather self-serving. Of course in the first instance, this indicates the magnitude of Williams’ presence in Zukofsky’s writing, and it will be primarily in that sense and its complications that I will discuss the movement. If the reader actually pursues the various references, a broader set of relations between the two poets emerges, but obviously these relations will also extend out into other and larger contexts in which Zukofsky’s work and his relationship with Williams are set. “A”-17 offers one of many possible entries into *“A”*, which is true of any movement of *“A”* given its flexible structure on the one hand and Zukofsky’s sense of always writing one work on the other. Or, turning this around, “A”-17 allows samples from across his other writings, as well as their interfaces with another writer, to intrude into *“A”*. In this sense, the movement can be seen as

[1] “A”-17 was first published in *Poetry* (Oct./Nov. 1963), and it has to be said that the layout of the poem there is preferable to the version in the complete *“A”*, which is significantly more cramped and has resorted to various irregularities to fit on the pages. The most obvious inconsistency is the justification of left margins: some prose entries extend all the way to the left margin, whereas all entries should be clearly indented right of the dates on the left and for the most part maintain the same left margin. The *Poetry* version appears as in the typescript, which gives the whole movement a more uniform and lighter look (this version can be found online at the Poetry Foundation website). For further details, see the textual note with the annotations to “A”-17 on the Z-site.

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anticipating “A”-24, a similarly assembled work by Celia from across Zukfosky’s body of writings that offers a possible reading or rearrangement.

If the reader digs up the original contexts of “A”-17’s selections and their biographical relations, there are all manner of hidden connections and private associations. To take an extreme instance, there is the odd three-line entry for 1935 from “A”-8: the first line gives the date, title and author of a work from which Zukofsky quotes a phrase and then adds a parenthetical detail. This is snipped from a much longer passage in “A”-8 that consists almost entirely of a quotation from Charles Francis Adams describing some of the shenanigans of the robber barons in the Gilded Age, but even recovering this context will not reveal its connection with Williams, much less what the parenthesis about ironwork is about. Those familiar with the New York City area might detect a glimmer of light in the mention of the Erie Station in Jersey City, through which one would pass taking a train to or from Williams’ Rutherford. This connection at least is explained by Zukofsky in a paragraph from one of his pieces on Williams gathered in *Prepositions* (47), where he also mentions his interest in the iron girders and vaulting of this classic old station (his general interest in architectural features appears often in *“A”*). That paragraph offers further details and associations of interest, which I will not pursue here. Although the appearance of these few lines in “A”-17 might function as a retrospective gloss on this mysterious detail in “A”-8—also mentioned in the proximity of Williams in “A”-15 (374)—it remains in both movements largely private. The most Williamsesque aspect of these lines is simply the mention of New Jersey as a reminder of its nearness to New York and thus to Zukofsky, and the image of industrial design—the kind of detail out of which Williams helped make it possible to create poetry. Beneath the surface of “A”-17 there is, as one would expect, quite a tangle of such personal connections in the specific pieces Zukofsky presents, which can be pursued by the interested reader in the annotations to “A”-17 on the Z-site. However, biographical explanations are rarely of much interest, and it is hardly adequate to read “A”-17 as simply a string of personal mementos, explicit or implicit.

II

In the commentary on “A”-15, I suggest that the sequence of movements *“A”* 15-17 can be taken as a Williams block, since he figures prominently in the first and the windflower of “A”-16 clearly links the flowers of the concluding stanza of “A”-15 with the “Anemones” that begin “A”-17. My general point about Williams in “A”-15 is that he represents a ground-level perspective, which is most obvious in the linguistic democracy he advocated and practiced that also implies a general perspective on history and politics grounded in a stance firmly in the world. This perspective as manifest in Williams’ writing is his legacy to American poetry and explains why he figures so prominently in Zukofsky’s poem. “A”-15 was written after “A”-17, and there he puts Williams in a larger thematic context, in particular into relations with questions concerning historical violence. In sequence, then, “A”-17 follows up these socio-historical themes with a more personal perspective of Williams concentrating mainly on poetic concerns, but the larger framework for understanding Williams’ importance is outlined in “A”-15. The minimalist “A”-16 makes a transition from big, comparatively abstract historical perspective (“inequality”) to a more specific, imagistic stance (“wind flower”).

Zukofsky does not choose to organize “A”-17 as a dialogue of alternating quotations from both poets, since almost all the selections are from Zukofsky’s own works—the most notable exceptions are the first and last excerpts, plus a few short personal notes clustered in the middle. There are a number of quotations of Williams, but usually they appear as quoted in

Zukofsky's own works. It is the presence of Williams as manifest in Zukofsky's writings that is the primary concern of "A"-17, and this of course extends beyond quotation or explicit reference to a more complicated and at times oblique presence, with this obliqueness becoming more prominent and puzzling as the movement and chronology proceeds. While we can justifiably call this an acknowledgement of influence, Zukofsky was understandably touchy on this point and insisted that "influence" is intricately overdetermined (*Prep.* 135). In a basic sense there is nothing but influence in that one necessarily writes or makes a life out of what one inherits, what one finds to work with by simply being in the world. Literary influence as Zukofsky understood it was a matter of working with others, not least the dead, a collaborative activity, and this is the term I will prefer in the following discussion. We will see instances of garden-variety collaboration between Zukofsky and Williams, but more generally "A"-17 presents the two poets as working together (and by implication with others) in expanding the possibilities of American poetry, and not surprisingly this will include instances where Zukofsky deviates quite markedly from the personal example of Williams.

"A"-17 is one of the few movements of *"A"* that has a title, "A Coronal," which is re-circulated from Williams, as this was the title of the poem from which Zukofsky quotes as the opening gambit of the movement. If this coronal is meant to crown Williams' poetic eminence, it is made from the intertwining of the two poets as manifest in Zukofsky's work. By implication, Williams lives on in the work of Zukofsky and presumably of many others. If the coronal is a symbol of honor, it is perhaps more significantly an image of binding and interweaving: of friends, poets, legacies—and here this includes wives, since the movement is dedicated to Floss Williams and Williams' collaborations with Celia feature prominently in the middle of the movement.[2] The coronal is a funeral wreath presented to Floss as consolation for her loss, that is, as a reminder and active manifestation of the still living Williams.

Although there has been a tendency to situate the young Zukofsky as a belated outsider, who enters the modernist scene through the auspices of Pound and Williams, I have argued that this reflects more our own anxieties and preoccupations than those of Zukofsky (see Z-Notes commentary on "Poem beginning 'The'"). For Zukofsky the context of modernism was empowering, not only throwing open all manner of new possibilities still to be explored but also a sense of participating in a broader effort along with others—two of whom promptly recognized and encouraged him. This is how I read the opening selection of "A"-17, where Williams' work is quoted directly rather than as a quotation within a quotation. The extract from Williams' "A Coronal," published in *Sour Grapes* (1921) well before Zukofsky met Williams, offers readily recognizable Williams concerns: flowers, springtime and erotic pursuit transmuted into language, the play between the tactile world and textualization. Here the opening line refers to the new poets out in front and writing new books of poetry. Zukofsky uses this extract to recall the time when he and Williams first met, which was, at least in retrospect, the time of modernism's springtime, particularly if we keep in mind that both Williams and Zukofsky rejected the end-of-the-world perspective of Eliot or the lost generation pose of some younger modernists. While Zukofsky never took on the nativist stance Williams often espoused, in a less explicit manner he tended to align himself with Williams on this matter, keeping a distance from the romance of the Old World with which both Eliot and Pound identified and whose dark burden of history infected

[2] Williams was very supportive of Celia's music, which he mentions frequently in correspondence to the Zukofskys, often hoping for its performance and publication (*WCW/LZ* 324, 374-375, 401, 408).

their perspectives, particularly as they evolved in the decades between the World Wars. I will return to this issue, but the immediate point is that for the young Zukofsky the entrance into modernism was full of possibilities, invigorating and offering a sense of creative companionship. It is this sense of Williams and the vision of modernism he represented that Zukofsky wishes to affirm.

Williams' centrality in shaping a new American poetry is emphasized in the "Objectivists" period entries under 1930. First, there is the original version in "A"-6 of what would become the opening ploy of "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931" in the "Objectivists" issue of *Poetry*, where Zukofsky deemphasizes the lyric subject. The "melody" is primary, that is, the crafted integrity of the poem rather than self-expression or poetic ruminations. The poet's assertion of a singular voice is immediately counterpointed by and entwined with another, and both definitions of "an objective" emphasize the image and poet/poem as necessary manifestations of the larger world, both physical-scientific and socio-historical. The scientific manner of the first definition of "an objective" is itself a distancing of the conventionally "poetic," as well as a recognition of the poem situated within—both part and product of— the complex of the physical world, a point reemphasized by the interpolation in the following definition of Spinoza's "nature as creator." Williams' importance in the realization of such a poetics is evident in the following two excerpts from key "Objectivist" critical statements, in both of which *Spring and All* is mentioned prominently. The claim that *Spring and All* was the contemporary American equivalent of Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* must have astounded readers at the time, but it is a significant burden of "A"-17 to demonstrate the acuity of this early critical prophecy.[3] Both passages deal with the justification of free verse, still a live issue at the time: the first paraphrases Williams' rejection of traditional poetic language ("crude symbolism") and the latter the rational for non-metered verse. Note Zukofsky's early recognition of the visual form of Williams' lines and stanzas, which would be central to his own practice. By the time of "A"-17 of course the struggle to justify free verse was long won, or so one would think. On the one hand Zukofsky offers a historical perspective on Williams' achievement that lives on in innumerable poets of the present day (1963), on the other he implicitly reminds us of what Williams then and throughout his career was up against. At the time of Williams' death, the dominant and best-known poets in English were still Eliot, Auden and Frost—the former famously declaring there was no such thing as free verse and the last declaring it a cheat's game.[4]

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[3] Williams gave Zukofsky a copy of *Spring and All* (1923), which he had not previously read, almost immediately after they first met in April 1928, and three decades later Zukofsky would assert that it remained his favorite of all Williams' works (*Prep.* 47). According to Paul Mariani, the original *Spring and All* was all but inaccessible except to a few until it was reprinted in the 1960s: published in just 300 copies, the U.S. customs seized most of those sent to the U.S. (*William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked*, 1981: 208-209). *Spring and All*'s publisher, Robert McAlmon, observed that virtually all foreign published books in English were considered suspicious by U.S. customs, which economically doomed Contact Publishing (*Being Geniuses Together 1920-1930*, rev. ed. with Kay Boyle, North Point Press, 1984: 91). In *William Carlos Williams: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Charles Doyle (1980) there are no reviews of *Spring and All* and the editor is compelled to make up the lack with a few vicarious pieces.

[4] See for example Williams' "The Poem as a Field of Action" (1948) in which we hear little about the poem as a field of action, that is, as free verse, but a good deal about the forces

Williams' too would claim there was no such thing as free verse, but what he meant by this declaration was fundamentally different—a point I will return to below.

The final entry from the "Objectivists" period for 1931 rather enigmatically gives Williams' full name in all caps and the title of his poem "March" with a reference to *An "Objectivists" Anthology*. Williams' poem, originally published many years earlier, appears there in the "Collaborations" section, which consists almost entirely of Zukofsky's editing of other people's poems. In this case, Zukofsky maintained the overall structure of Williams' longish poem and left about half the poem intact, but redistributed or entirely rewrote the rest. This might also serve as an oblique reference to the editing role Zukofsky took on almost as soon as the two met, and the remarkable trust Williams had in the younger poet's critical abilities to shape his often unruly work in progress. This of course is what is behind the dedication of Williams' volume *The Wedge* to Zukofsky, mentioned at 1944, which the latter pared down from a much larger and more miscellaneous manuscript. However, no effort is made to indicate the extent of Zukofsky's role as editor, which remained a private matter.[5] Zukofsky's reference to "March" maintains the obliqueness of the nature of his editing, and most readers are likely to assume, reasonably enough, that he is merely indicating Williams' participation in *An "Objectivists" Anthology*. But in Zukofsky's mind there is no essential distinction between editing and composing, it is all collaboration. Zukofsky's own habitual practice was more oriented toward re-working found materials than spontaneous composition. This is what all writers necessarily do, whether consciously or not. Williams' "March" itself presents composition as the necessary reenactment of a primordial human desire, here imaged as the need for warmth in a cold and wind-swept environment (early spring), manifest as the rearrangement of past work, the inherited materials whether aesthetic or simply what one finds to hand. So behind Zukofsky's simple presentation of the designation "March" lies collaborative assumptions with far-reaching implications.[6]

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obstructing its possibilities—of whom he specifically names Eliot and Auden (*Selected Essays* (1954): 280-291).

[5] For more detailed discussions of Zukofsky's hand in shaping *The Wedge*, see Neil Baldwin, "Zukofsky, Williams, and *The Wedge*: Toward a Dynamic Convergence," in *Louis Zukofsky: Man and Poet*, ed. Carroll F. Terrell (1979): 129-142; and Barry Ahearn, "Zukofsky's Editing of the 'Working Copy' of *The Wedge*" in *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky* (2003): 549-554.

[6] We do not know why Zukofsky chose "March" to rework for *An "Objectivists" Anthology*, but the choice is interesting since it was a poem that had already been heavily edited by H.D. on the occasion of its initial publication in *The Egoist*. Although H.D.'s alterations elicited a strong public protest in the introduction to *Kora in Hell*, in the end Williams appears to have accepted them. Zukofsky could not have been unaware of this, and one wonders whether he was working with the original uncut version of the poem. In any case, both public versions of the poem are collaborative efforts. In reviewing *An "Objectivists" Anthology*, Williams mentions the collaborations section as making the point that "the personality of the writer must be suspect" and that since a poem is made of words, those words can be rearranged to their possible benefit. For Williams, this collaborative perspective is directly related to the meaning of "objectivist," a constructive rather than "seductive" model of the poem. The review was published in *The Symposium* (Jan. 1933) and can be found in Williams, *Something to Say*, ed. James Breslin (1985): 46.

III

With this collaborative framework in mind, I want to flesh out the major entries in "A"-17 in flexibly chronological order. Most selections present Zukofsky's dialog with William in terms of poetic form and mutual interests, although often the connection between the poets is less than transparent. The first two chronologically dated entries touch on Bach and Brueghel—the former particularly identified with Zukofsky and the latter with Williams; the former's appearance in Williams' work anticipates the Bach of "A"-1 and latter's appearance in an early Zukofsky poem anticipates Brueghel's prominent appearance in the later Williams (beginning with *The Wedge*). Both these quotations indicate a certain attitude or stance toward writing. "A"-1 is in the mode of a portrait of the artist as a young man, depicting his groping search for an adequate language, material and experience. Here, the poet is not motivated by overflowing feelings but instead recalls a number of possible models and in this case Zukofsky briefly quotes the three poets most important to him at that time: Pound, Williams and Cummings. The Williams quotation is from *A Voyage to Pagany*—recording Williams' encounter with the Old World. More specifically this snippet is from a passage where Williams imagines Bach composing *St. Matthew Passion*, and it is of course a performance of this work that inspired the opening of *"A"*—a performance Williams had hoped to attend with Zukofsky. Celia Zukofsky at least has suggested that *"A"*'s moment of inception was the letter Zukofsky wrote to Williams describing this performance.[7] If the young Zukofsky is not boiling to put pen to paper, evidently Bach is, but more significant is Williams' perception of Bach, his seeing into Bach and breaking down the subjective isolation between them. In his early critical remarks on Williams, Zukofsky notes what is now a critical commonplace—Williams' intense sense of aloneness—but this very feeling drives his effort to break through the alienation of the "various isolated" and realize a sense of existing with others (*Prep*. 151, 53). This aloneness is quite strong in Zukofsky own early poetry, with its typical youthful posturings, but he seems to have shed it quickly around this time—in part perhaps because of the sense of working alongside poets with mutual interests. Brueghel appears in a couple of Zukofsky's early poems and of course will be used extensively by Williams in his final book whose title appears as the conclusion of "A"-17.[8] The excerpt Zukofsky has chosen to present begins with the aspirations of "high art" that are immediately brought down to earth, to the unpretentious art of Brueghel's peasants in "The Harvesters," art's intermingling with the necessities of everyday living and labor. This poem was written within a couple months of their first meeting in April 1928, and whether or not the elder poet was in Zukofsky's mind when composing the poem, it expresses a poetic attitude that both poets shared as emblematized in the work of Brueghel.

The Williams connection is less apparent in the 1933 entry from *55 Poems*. Appearing in the context of "A"-17 one would assume the "friend" to be Williams, even though this is unlikely given that the latter's birthday was in September when one would not expect it to be cold and snowy—although Zukofsky was hardly above recontextualizing poems. The innocent reader would also be forgiven for assuming that the quoted bits from this poem are from

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[7] Celia Zukofsky, Hugh Seidman, Allen Ginsberg & Robert Creeley, "A Commemorative Evening for Louis Zukofsky, "*American Poetry Review* 9.1 (1980): 25. See *WCW/LZ* 4-5.

[8] Brueghel's "The Harvesters," which is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC, is also mentioned at "A"-8.66, and on the following page, Zukofsky describes Hieronymus Bosch's "Adoration of Kings" (also in the Metropolitan) much in a manner of Williams' later Brueghel painting poems.

Williams—written or spoken—but in fact they are straight out of Marx's *Capital*. This is an early example of a found text made to sing simply by shaping it—an interest in using the everyday and ready-to-hand that was central to the poetic practice of both and how Williams defined the "local." The primary reason for this quotation's appearance in "A"-17, however, is that in drawing out the spoken vernacular in this found text, Zukofsky has deployed stepped lines, anticipating Williams' later preoccupation with the variable foot. This is less a question of precedence than the sense of collaborative experiment as the poets explore the possibilities of non-metered verse, following up the promise of *Spring and All*. In this connection, we might note the elliptical reference for 1943 to *Anew* 42 ("You three"), whose open triadic stanza also anticipates Williams' variable foot. Zukofsky adds a brief snippet from Williams' review of *Anew*, which quoted the four-page poem entire.[9]

The longish quotation for 1934 from "'Mantis,' An Interpretation" introduces into the dialog the inevitable differences that will increasingly distinguish the two poets, even while continuing their sense of working together. The excerpts Zukofsky presents here are carefully framed by Williamsesque axioms: the last essentially repeats the anti-symbolic bias already quoted in the excerpt from "Sincerity and Objectification," while the opening line quotes Dante quoting Thomas Aquinas, which is echoed by Williams' "no ideas but in things." The essential question of the relationship between signified and signifier insists on the priority of the signified, that is language as in and of the world—every bit as axiomatic for Zukofsky as for Williams. But for Williams this requires a basis in authentic everyday speech and feeling and a rejection in theory of all pre-determined forms in preference for a conversational improvisation, which also has political implications for a democratic language that must weed out Old World (British) vestiges. For Zukofsky, however, there is no bedrock of authentic speech: one is necessarily always recycling linguistic forms and it is in the recycling where these forms can be renewed and readapted to constantly shifting circumstances. This was not in fact opposed to Williams' own ideas as expressed, for example in "March," but he had a more romantic notion of the imagination's potential for endless reinvention compared with Zukofsky's more constructivist view that one is always inevitably reusing one's cultural inheritance. Thus the debate at the heart of "'Mantis,' An Interpretation" over the use of the sestina, which Williams takes to be inherently obsolete (it is Williams' voice speaking the two lines against "too regular form"), whereas Zukofsky insists it is available for retooling in a contemporary context.[10] Zukofsky is thus able to echo Williams' strictures against symbolism in his own defense since a form such as the sestina draws attention to the formal integrity of the poem as a complex verbal object and away from a fixation on the image of the mantis and its metaphorical meanings—a temptation that still characterizes many readings of "'Mantis,'" just as the quotation marks in the title have a propensity to disappear. Zukofsky's defense of the sestina against Williams' disapproval bears on what would prove a major line of endeavor working in pre-determined restraints that he had already begun with "A"-7 (sonnets) and would pursue in the envoi to "A"-8 (ballade) and most

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[9] "A New Line Is a New Measure" in *Something to Say: William Carlos Williams on Younger* Poets, ed. James E. B. Breslin (1985): 161-169. Although both *Anew* and Williams' review were published in 1946, Zukofsky places the reference under 1943 when the poem was composed and immediately sent to Williams, who promptly declared it Zukofsky's best poem (*WCW/LZ* 334-335).

[10] See *WCW/LZ* 202 for Williams' critique of "'Mantis,'" to which Zukofsky responds with the "interpretation."

spectacularly in “A”-9 (canzones) and “A”-11 (ballade)—and can be seen as extending to *Catullus*. Notably this particular line of work that made Williams uneasy has close connections with Pound (See Z-Notes commentary on “The Measures of Zukofsky, Williams & Pound”).

Just as the sestina form lifts the focus of the poem away from the mantis as a determining image, the brief note on the Red Wheelbarrow poem from *A Test of Poetry* quoted for 1936 points out the significance of the opening, apparently abstract, four words—“So much depends / upon”— which shift the formal complexity of the poem beyond mere farmyard pictorialism. At the same time, Zukofsky’s note points out the class implications of Williams’ ordinary and non-symbolic chickens, which are “gentle” but not genteel. Gentle is a matter of touch, allowing the image or word to lie quietly within its context without unduly drawing attention to itself or asserting itself over others. This “gentleness” is echoed on the following page in a snippet quoted from Williams that Zukofsky included in a catalogue of quotations appended to “Poetry / For My Son When He Can Read” (1946) encapsulating essential poetic values (*Prep*. 217). This quotation is from Williams’ “To All Gentleness,” one of the major poems in *The Wedge* that explicitly defends this egalitarian perspective or what Williams calls “the valid juxtaposition” (*Collected Poems* II, 72). Birds crop up intermittently in “A”-17, and among the notes to Celia (for 1948) is Williams’ request to set one of his poems to something like “Turkey in the Straw”—another good American fowl and tune.

The 1940 passage from *Ferdinand* is a response to Williams’ *In the American Grain*, as toward the end of Zukofsky’s long story the eponymous protagonist drives into and beyond the American West, entering a surreal space designated by Aztec time, that is, a time prior to and other than that parceled out by the calendar and clocks of modernity. Both the dream-like style and nativist materials are unusual for Zukofsky, but indicate an interest complementing that of Williams in exploring the sedimented layers of what “America” means—an awareness older and more hybrid than that of the United States emblematized by the Capitol building, just a century or so old. The common plant Creeping Charlie or Wandering Jew (a “weed”), which appears a number of times in the story (and elsewhere in *“A”*), is obviously enough a figure for Ferdinand, or for Zukofsky himself, or his ethnic heritage, or the immigrant history of the United States beginning with the landing of Columbus, or the very shifting definition of America itself.[11] The memory of the latter arises in the form of a film whose modernist “disjunct” technique (montage) allows the multiple layers of culture and history to be simultaneously grasped so that if the film is about Columbus, its title “translated” indicates the Native-American girl that Ferdinand encounters on his journey as well as “the time” represented by the Aztec calendar. Particularly during the 1930s Zukofsky was much engaged with American history and identity, spurred in part by his interest in Henry Adams and his various WPA research jobs, although this was a preoccupation of American writers generally at this time of intense political debate about the future of the nation. This would manifest itself most obviously in “A”-8 and also to a significant

[11] Creeping Charlie and Wandering Jew are common names for two similar but apparently distinct plants that are often confused and conflated. Zukofsky and Williams discussed their precise identities in relation to *Ferdinand*, although unfortunately Zukofsky’s side of the discussion has not survived (*WCW/LZ* 304-305). In any case, the confused intertwining of these two vine-like plants was useful to Zukofsky’s hybrid orientation, and one might imagine him identifying the former name with Williams and the latter with himself. Williams did not like the ending of *Ferdinand*, the gist of which Zukofsky gives here, but despite his strong objections and advice for revision, Zukofsky does not appear to have made any changes.

degree in *Arise, Arise* (another dream work). However, this venture into the primitive substrata of "America," its roots and rootlessness, was much more Williams' topic, and in his critical remarks on Williams, Zukofsky emphasized the valuable cultural analysis of *In the American Grain*, *A Voyage to Pagany* and not least "the pure products of America go crazy"—a poem whose greatness Zukofsky, as the child of immigrants himself, immediately recognized (*Prep*. 53, 150).

Skipping a couple of pages for the moment, the 1954 entry identifies Williams with American history in a quite different register, as an outlaw folk hero. This poem, I suspect, takes its cue partly from Williams' "The Botticellian Trees"—first published in the "Objectivists" issue of *Poetry* (1931) and mentioned in "A"-17 in the excerpts from *Bottom* for 1960. Zukofsky greatly admired "The Botticellian Trees," which he claimed demonstrated the contemporary viability of the poetic conceit (*Prep*. 150, 213). The intertwining of the real and its textualization was for Zukofsky central to Williams' achievement and obviously relevant to his own orientation. If the Botticellian trees as a poem become the letters of their leaves, here in the fifth "Songs of Degrees" Zukofsky takes Williams' initials and both visually and aurally mimics them with improvisational elaborations. In particular Zukofsky transforms WCW's initials into a landscape over which apparently soars a gull (suggested by the W): the cove of the C reached by ravine and runnel of the Ws, with a concluding dialect pun on "kill" meaning a stream, such as in *Catskill*—an appropriately Williamsesque localism. Some of this may relate to the ubiquitous river and falls imagery of *Paterson*. Of course this pictorial play is a conceit for the expansiveness of Williams' mind as manifest in his writings enacted in the quickness of the verbal movement of Zukofsky's poem. The poem insists on and is generated out of a very tactical sense of the words and letters themselves, which is that expanded sense of existence in the world, which itself necessarily involves being with others implied in any language act: "two faces— / […] of one / sound" (385). The very short line deployed here—an irregular play of two and one word lines—comically mimics the speed of Billy the Kid's draw and almost certainly is indebted to Williams. In the original version of "American Poetry 1920-1930," Zukofsky inserted a footnote pointing out his use of a very short word-count line in Poems 28 & 29 (1930-1931) from *55 Poems* and suggesting that Williams, perhaps not altogether consciously, deployed a similar word-count line in a number of poems in *Spring and All*.[12] The word-count line would become increasingly prominent in the later movements of *"A"*, beginning with "A"-14 whose use of a very narrow line can be seen as anticipated by this Billy the Kid poem. In any case, this kind of visual shaping of lines and stanzas on the page and experiments with speed are something Zukofsky took from and developed with Williams—as opposed to, say, Pound.

One of the striking oddities of "A"-17 is the number of classical references, which is unsurprising from the perspective of Zukofsky's reading, particularly in later decades, but is not necessarily what one would expect in relation to Williams, who famously asserted that *Paterson* was intended as "a reply to Greek and Latin with bare hands" (*Paterson* 2). Actually, Williams was quite interested in the classics, especially in his later years: most obviously with his versions of Theocritus and Sappho, but more generally in quantitative metrics which had also early interested Zukofsky. There is possibly an element of mischievousness in Zukofsky's insistence on placing Williams' poetic values in the context of the classical tradition, but this relates to his collaborative sense of re-working of and in one's inheritance. The brief 1942 entry from *Anew* is simply a very slightly modified quotation out of Plato, unidentified but its classical values are

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[12] "American Poetry 1920-1930," *The Symposium* 2.1 (Jan. 1931): 64.

unmistakable, and one might be forgiven for thinking it contradicts the "Objectivists" period declarations against metered verse. This entry could be read as a counterpoint to the preceding excerpt from *Ferdinand* evoking Williams' interest in the search for chthonic American roots, yet at the same time expressing a similar desire to base poetry on fundamental values with an emphasis here on craft. One might also read this as a lead into the cluster of notes on the next two pages in which Williams asks Celia to set some of his poems to music. In any case, "measure" was arguably Williams' most compulsive and insistent concern especially in his later years. Numbering, measuring and weighing are the active realization of a sense of proportion in the world, what one struggles to realize in any case in the everyday negotiation of living. Plato's "art" is not specifically poetry or even our more general sense of the arts, but active making.[13]

If this seems an over-reading of these few lines, then consider the entry for 1948 where Zukofsky chooses to sum up *Paterson* by quoting Aristotle and George Chapman on Homer. The argument of the *Odyssey* and by extension of *Paterson*, according to Aristotle as glossed by Chapman and by extension Zukofsky, is "a man" or simply "man." This in turn is glossed by a quotation from Williams as the total sense of being in the world and then further as Williams' "Stein-ish definition of substance 'a this.'" This sort of home-grown phenomenology is very characteristic of Zukofsky at this time, as most clearly evidenced in "Poetry / For My Son When He Can Read" (1946), the essay he placed first in *Prepositions* but to which commentators have paid scant attention. This is an attempt to found poetic values on the activity of existence, of enhancing the sense of the tangible density of living in the physical world, and this is what number and measure are about—not the imposition of an abstract measurement (e.g. rigidly metered verse) but a measurement from the inside, from wherever it is one is necessarily situated. The perhaps unexpected reference to Gertrude Stein indicates an insistence on the tangible words in and of the world rather than over against it, and surely there is a punning on Stein's name, meaning stone.[14] The phrase "a this" ultimately comes from Aristotle (someone Williams did not care for at all), who finally must identify "substance" simply as a tangible deictic.[15] If one consults the full essay of which Zukofsky here gives the gist then the point is even clearer: all writing is re-writing and the specific value or measure of Williams' writing (or of anyone's) is the degree it embodies a sense of the density of existence, of words among the world of words. In a single paragraph Zukofsky gives a long list of potential presences in Williams' work: Apollinaire, Gris, Klee, Demuth, Sheeler, Lucretius, Dante, Villon, Chaucer,

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[13] Zukofsky quotes the same lines from Plato in "Poetry / *For My Son When He Can Read*" (1946), in a context that makes clear the wider application of "measure" I am sketching here (*Prep*. 6-7). Zukofsky intended this essay as his major statement on poetics (aside from *Bottom*) and can be usefully read alongside Williams' numerous statements on "measure." Compare for example Williams' long review of *Anew*, "A New Line Is a New Measure," written the same year as Zukofsky's essay; for some discussion of this review, see Z-Notes commentary on "The Measures of Zukofsky, Williams & Pound."

[14] Zukofsky had a significant hand in Williams well-known essay on Stein (see *WCW/LZ* 39-43, 45, 47), and based on a study of the surviving papers, Peter Quartermain has stated that Zukofsky should be considered a collaborative author (*Disjunctive Poetics* (1992): 6, 91). That essay's presentation of *Tristram Shandy* was a precursor of Stein's method was suggested by Zukofsky (see 15 Feb. 1960 letter to Cid Corman (HRC 18.2)).

[15] On "a this" see "A"-12.163.22 and the corresponding note on the Z-site. "*a this*" is also indexed in *Bottom*.

Shakespeare, Henry James (*Prep.* 50). It is not a matter of imitating, alluding to or even being conscious of these works, but of the imagination re-enacting whatever the impulse that gave occasion to such works, which is always a repeating with a difference—or as Williams puts it, always beginning again.

All this relates to some of the *Bottom* entries for 1960, the third of which quotes from *Paterson* V conflating proper seeing with tangible touch, which Zukofsky follows with a line from Villon. If we check the *Paterson* passage, we will not be surprised to find that it is extracted from the pages concerned with Brueghel. The Villon line is presumably Zukofsky's gloss on Williams' lines, and in *Bottom* is the first of a short catalog of quotations from Villon, Shakespeare and Chaucer—all poets of considerable interest to Williams whose works embody a sensual existence in the here and now. This is the fundamental meaning of Zukofsky's compulsive emphasis in *Bottom* on the eye, the physical siting in the world, seeing as touch. Behind Zukofsky's insistence in *Bottom* on eyes, sight, seeing and the like is the ubiquity of this vocabulary in the language of knowledge, but unfortunately the tendency is to detach knowing from its articulation which is the same as reifying knowing as an experience apart from the sensual existence in the world from which its conceptualizations necessarily arise. The first of the three *Bottom* entries in "A"-17describes a painting (visual art), a copy of which Williams had in his work room, purported to depict Shakespeare and Ben Jonson playing chess: the latter has open eyes but stares blindly, while the former has lowered eyes that are absorbed in the movement of his hand. The eye as tactile situatedness in the world is the burden of *Bottom's* extravagant presentation, and for Zukofsky one of Williams' defining virtues: a writing that is a seeing as a tangible absorption in the world and as such a heightened sense of existence. Shakespeare was of course another mutual interest, and early on Zukofsky declared Williams' scattered remarks in "The Descent of Winter" and elsewhere among the best Shakespeare criticism available (*Prep.* 149).

The title of the poem quoted for 1949, simply "W," apparently indicates that this is for and/or about Williams, although one could hardly be expected to guess this. As it is, the title stands as something of a riddle, which the poem's inclusion in "A"-17 offers at least some hope of answering. Aside from the opening line, the poem consists entirely of two quotations from the *Odyssey*. How these relate to Williams remains oblique, although all four crafts praised by Homer—soothsayer, doctor, singer and craftsman—are plausibly applicable to him or perhaps to any proper poet. The second quotation might be read as either a description of Williams and/or his work or imagined as spoken by him—in fact, Zukofsky told Niedecker that he imagined the latter case.[16] My preference is to accept both perspectives as simultaneously in play: the expression of astonishment at Williams' work is at the same time in the voice of Williams and his insistent wonder at the sensuous beauty of the world. The elements of new growth, seeing, touching and eroticism are all familiar Williamsesque motifs, and this quotation when reread becomes an over-the-top bit of seduction, which in fact is its rhetorical intent as spoken by Odysseus to Nausicaä. Again, the speaker's seduction by and of the addressed female mirrors the relationship of poem and reader. What Zukofsky has done is to take W.H.D. Rouse's popular prose translation of Homer and iron out some of the stiffness, imagining, perhaps, how Williams

[16] Cathy Henderson, "Supplement to Marcella Booth's 'A Catalogue of the Louis Zukofsky Manuscript Collection,'" *Lawrence, Jarry, Zukofsky: A Triptych*, eds. Dave Oliphant & Gena Dagel (Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, 1987): 129.

might have phrased it.[17] The poem is a characteristic Zukofsky exercise: essentially a found poem in which he discerns what might initially appear unlikely relationships, but again this is not fundamentally different from his insistence that the sestina, a found form, can be relevantly and imaginatively reused in the present. Here Homer speaks in praise of Williams by anticipating a moment that one can imagine Williams expressing. The title of the short suite to which this poem belongs, "Chloride of Lime and Charcoal," can easily be imaged as belonging to a Williams poem and appropriately refers to a solution used as a disinfectant.

The two *Catullus* versions included in "A"-17 represent early and later samples from that project, as the former does not yet deploy the homophonic technique. But what have they to do with Williams? Catullus II, one of Catullus' best known poems, is a plausible predecessor of Williams' own work in its close observation of the ordinary to express love.[18] It may be relevant that the year prior Williams published a poem on Sappho that borrowed a key image from Catullus' poem—a woman pressing her pet sparrow to her breast—but this remains private. However, if the implication is that Williams helped make possible the language for such a translation, the following *Catullus* poem on the next page marks Zukofsky's sharp divergence from the older poet.

The exceedingly un-Williamsesque *Catullus* LI represents Zukofsky's most advanced reworking with the American language at the time of composition. The result may not sound very much like American as it is spoken, but one could say it manifests an American irreverent reverence for the tradition—at least that seems plausibly the case judging from the howls of protest especially from British reviewers of *Catullus*. In this sense, this "translation" represents Williams' definition of the local as the action of working intimately with what is to hand without inherited preconceptions.[19] It is precisely because Zukofsky is American and lacks a "proper" cultural education and knowledge of Latin that he came up with this specific compositional practice. We can say that this poem represents the culmination for Zukofsky of their collaborative relationship together, however radically Williams' own presence has been sublimated. The Catullus poem translated here does have a more direct Williams connection in that it is a famous rewriting of Sappho's most famous poem, a version of which Williams

[17] Pound had a hand in W.H.D. Rouse's translation of *The Odyssey*, and Zukofsky used it and Rouse's *Iliad* often during the 1950s, particularly in "A"-12 and *Bottom*. Williams read both of Rouse's Homer translations in 1951 (see *WCW/LZ* 444; *Selected Letters* (1957): 297, 307). Zukofsky's reworking of Rouse is typically less a rewriting than a punching out and touch up of the quotation. Rouse's version of the relevant passage is: "Never in all my life have I seen such another, man or woman: I am amazed as I look upon you. In Delos once I did see something like you, a young palm-spire springing up beside Apollo's altar. For I have traveled even so far; and there were many others with me on that voyage which was to bring so much tribulation. Even so when I saw that sapling my spirit was dumbfounded for a long time, for no other trees like that grow out of the earth; and so, my lady, I am amazed and dumbfounded at seeing you, and I am awestruck at the thought of touching your knees"

[18] One of the many versions of Catullus produced during this period, the Penguin Classics translation by Peter Whigham (1966) was dedicated to Williams, and in his acknowledgements the translator mentions that Williams read some of the versions and offered encouragement (10).

[19] See for example "The American Background: America and Alfred Stieglitz" (1934), *Selected Essays* (1954): 150, 157.

incorporated into *Paterson* IV.[20] As such this seems a fairly tenuous reason to include it in an homage to Williams, although the method of "A"-17 does not require overly obvious relationships. The translation stands as an apt example their life-long advocacy of American newness, as Sappho is rewritten by Catullus, by Williams and then by Zukofsky.

However, *Catullus* LI also serves as a fitting epitaph for both Williams and his friendship with Zukofsky. Sappho's poem is one of the great expressions of the affect of love as the inability to adequately express oneself: the need to sing and its always necessary falling short, which feeds the need. The final lines follow a reconstructed missing line set in brackets, which Zukofsky translates as a stage direction: the voice becomes choked with emotion.[21] Then there are images of linked voices or a tongue now quiet, of mowing down as the sun sets, and finally of eyes dragged under leaving night. In context and placement, these lines obviously enough suggest an image of Williams now dragged into death's night. Yet at the same time they offer enough light and sound for the final line's eyes and ears to assert what remains alive, as is hopefully evident in the eyeing and sounding of this poem itself.

Yet this is a poem that while honoring Williams at the same time clearly distinguishes the difference in their working together over decades because no one could imagine Williams writing anything like this. Indeed, it manifests a tendency in Zukofsky that Williams (and Pound as well) could never quite hear or understand, allowing the more antic relations of phonemes and words free reign while at the same time containing them in predetermined formal restraints. Still, one can plainly hear the spoken vernacular persistently asserting itself, as is the case with *Catullus* generally. So the poem represents where Zukofsky's own work stands at the time of Williams' death, as well as marking their differences that nonetheless complement each other while working together in re-shaping the poetic tradition. The entire conception of the *Catullus* project could not have met with Williams' full approval, both in terms of its large-scale focus on a classical poet and the self-imposed restraints of its method, although conceptually he probably would have appreciated its affront to the classicists. Williams required a sense of the vernacular's authenticity to ground what he was after, and Catullus has been a natural candidate for deploying modernist translation practices that attempt to capture the wit and pathos of contemporary speech. While the spoken is central to the Zukofskys' rendering of Catullus, their versions jettison all vestiges of linguistic mimesis, the representation of Catullus as a singular voice, for an exploration of the sound possibilities latent in any language, a language heard in but never spoken by anyone. This is a logical extension of Zukofsky's long held assumptions and practice, and marks a decisive difference from those of Williams.

IV

I have skipped two significant entries in "A"-17—from "4 Other Countries" at 1957 and "Pretty" at 1962—which may strike many readers as the most puzzling inclusions of all. These two entries are linked, I want to suggest, by the word "pretty." Taking "Pretty" first, this poem describes the view from a window as the poet looks down in the evening from his upper story city apartment, primarily of trees and cars. Zukofsky begins with deliberate lameness

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[20] *Paterson*, rev. ed. Christopher MacGowan (1992): 215.

[21] Most texts include three further lines as part of Catullus 51, although most editors agree that these appear tacked on and are unrelated to the Sappho poem. The solution of the Loeb edition that the Zukofskys used is to separate these lines out as a distinct poem or fragment numbered 51a.

characterizing the view as “pretty,” as if the title were not sufficient, which is then described in a manner that from the perspective of visual realism is quite absurd: the streetlights turned on at dusk become fruits which then get mixed in with the cars and their lights that pass by or are parked along the street. On the one hand, as an objective scene, all the details—trees, lights, fruit, cars, their headlights—interpenetrate, are a complex in which there is no lead thread, so that one detail relates to or transforms into a contingent detail. As with any attempt at an objective description, subjective projection soon enough intrudes, thus the lights are like fruit which are like cars. The “view” is dynamic without a fixed center or perspective, despite the starting point at the window, since contingent details all demand equal attention. In this sense the poem can be understood as an example of the old modernist interest in urban simultaneity. But of course we are not actually talking about an objective view, but of a description, which is to say a verbal construction where words lead to words in any number of different ways, yet simultaneously are of and in the objective world. *Pretty* is the way something looks, but to describe it means to enact a way of seeing, a view that is an absorption in the seeing as a sensuous being in the world. The first line of this poem tells us that the poet (and reader) looks down and labels the view “pretty,” but then he or we are drawn out into that prettiness—necessarily as we follow the peculiar path of the words and the dynamic sense of being in a scene they convey. There is no return to the viewpoint of the first line, except what is implied by the mention of “sing” in the final line, which indicates we have been in a song, a made seeing. In terms of the poem, it is difficult to figure out whether the subject of this “sing” is cars, the fruits or their smell, but actually it is the totality of the poem or the scene whose details are inextricable. The view out the window is obviously enough a synecdoche for the world generally, where we always find ourselves and out of which we make and live our lives. This is a poem that is content, an active contentedness with the world for this moment.

Once again we have a poem with a classical reference: Hesperides—a garden famous for its golden fruit, as well as its guardian nymphs who are appropriately associated with sunset and especially its golden light, and also the name of a constellation. While “Hesperides” is introduced to be rejected or fended off—as if to say the view before the poet requires no such literary comparisons—nonetheless the name’s abrupt intrusion infects the poem, adding a whole dimension of fruity relations and references. The allegorical nature of the words themselves and the poem as a verbal contraption is highlighted, so that the final word “mechanics” has less to do with what’s under the hoods of the cars than what we have just seen in operation in the poem. One might recall here Williams’ own pronouncement that a poem is a machine made of words.[22]

What does this have to do with Williams? The poem is not stylistically Williamesque, although its simultaneity is a mode he often deployed. More fundamentally, this poem represents a perspective and poetry that Williams helped make possible. If we recall the opening quotation of “A”-17 where flowers spring up to become books of poetry and the later mention of “The Botticellian Trees” whose leaves become letters, then we can recognize that this is what is happening in “Pretty”—the immediacy of the everyday world becomes textualized which then becomes an object on its own terms. This textualization is not an abstraction of the “real,” but rather an intensification or closer entanglement with the world. Implied is a Williamsesque

[22] The classic reference for this remark is found in the preface to *The Wedge* (*Collected Poems* II, 54), although Williams also used it, appropriately enough, in a talk he gave to Zukofsky’s engineering students at Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute in 1949, when he spoke of the “mechanics” of the poem (Williams, *Autobiography* (1951): 311).

affirmation of existence in this world and an egalitarian recognition of the discrete but always interrelated entities of which it is made up, not least the textual. This is manifest in the Williams-like mix of nature and the mechanized, not to play one off the other or as symbolizing some unbridgeable chasm in humanity under modernity, but as equal entities making up the tangle of contemporary existence.

Turning now to the two excerpts from "4 Other Countries," I suggested a link with "Pretty" by precisely this odd word "pretty" that occurs twice near the end of the second excerpt. Here, just what is at stake in the use of such a word is fleshed out. "4 Other Countries" is a long travelogue poem of the Zukofsky family's European trip in the summer of 1957 and might be thought of as Zukofsky's version of Williams' *A Voyage to Pagany*, both Americans deeply attracted to while often skeptical before the grand monuments of European culture. Predictably, Williams responded enthusiastically to "4 Other Countries" because it deploys flexible quatrains not unrelated to Williams' variable foot, which can be read as lines that have been broken into smaller units allowing for variations in speed (*WCW/LZ* 501-502). Also by Zukofskian standards, the discursive manner and shape of the poem are unusually lucid. But the more consequential reason for the inclusion of these excerpts in "A"-17 is that they evoke the presence of Pound.

The second of the two excerpts includes a quintessential image from the *Cantos*: the gold tesserae shining in the darkness of Galla Placidia's mausoleum in Ravenna, one of Pound's sacred spots. The Zukofskys did in fact visit this site, and as Mark Scroggins has pointed out, a good deal of their trip, especially in troubadour country and Italy, used Pound as a guide.[23] That Zukofsky has Pound in mind here is confirmed in the continuation of this quotation, which alludes to another famous detail from the *Pisan Cantos* of Yeats composing aloud like the crying of a peacock (Canto 83/533-534). For Pound this gold shining in the gloom of Galla Placidia's mausoleum is associated with the entire cultural and spiritual heritage he spent his lifetime nostalgically attempting to preserve, that tradition of light he evokes in so many ways. Zukofsky, however, turns the image of the vaults of the mausoleum with their patterns of gold stars into a rug for his wife, brought literally down to earth.[24] Similarly, he states his preference for quiet over the cry of the Yeatean peacock (a more genteel than gentle bird), an image of the high poetic manner that Pound himself never shook off (it is possible that the juxtaposition of these two Poundian moments was suggested by the peacocks depicted in the mosaics of the mausoleum). In stating his preference for quiet and the more down to earth, both of which he relates to his love for Celia, Zukofsky is aligning with Williams and gentleness. Zukofsky did not adopt Williams' sometime antagonism to Old World culture, and I have already suggested that he seems to emphasize Williams' own engagements with the classical tradition, which certainly jives with his own later interests, especially in the wake of this European trip. But what is at stake is the manner of handling the tradition, what Zukofsky, in the throes of composing *Bottom*, thinks of in terms of seeing. In "A"-15 it is Williams' eye that Zukofsky pays tribute to (362-363), and here in these two excerpts the eyes and seeing are also emphasized, as they are elsewhere in "A"-17. The second excerpt concludes with this odd stress on the visual adjective "pretty," referring either to Galla Placida's tomb (or the rug it turns into), or to the quiet preferred over the peacock's cry, or to "my love," or to all at once. "Pretty" seems a curious word choice here, particularly in an Old World-Poundian context, and its tacit, contrapuntal

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[23] *The Poem of a Life* (2007): 280

[24] Richard Parker has pointed out this domestication of Pound's image in "Louis Zukofsky's London: From Pound to Pastoral," *The Literary London Journal* 11.1 (Spring 2014): 25.

companion is the "beautiful"—the cult of beauty that so enraptured Pound and Yeats.[25] Here, the humble "pretty" is sufficient, ordinary and unpretentious—gentle, perhaps. This can in turn be related to the "Pretty" poem, a stance that accepts what is before the poet which in actuality encompasses the poet. One can well imagine how Pound standing at that window would have produced a rather different poem.

There remains the first excerpt from "4 Other Countries," which appears in that poem apropos nothing in terms of the trip the poem records—merely a lyrical transition or interlude between two sites on the itinerary. However, it surely is not irrelevant that these stanzas appear immediately following the description of the Zukofskys' visit to Rapallo, although Pound was absent since he was still in St. Elizabeths (*CSP* 179-180). As mentioned, the reinsertion of the exhibits presented in "A"-17 into their original contexts is always an option, given that Zukofsky so carefully references them. However, I will leave for elsewhere a discussion of this Rapallo passage, except to suggest that at least in Zukofsky's mind there is a Pound conjunction here.[26] The first excerpt puts into play in typical Zukofskian manner song, eyes and im/permanence. As presented here, it stands as a complete poem and is typical of a type of lyric Zukofsky mastered that insistently folds back on itself. Such deceptively simple poems attempt to enact a reciprocal relationship, and it should be obvious enough that the kiss, the intimacy, the eyes and the heart, as well as the worry and restiveness are about the poem's relationship with any reader. Poems seek others. There is an anxious emphasis here, which might be read in relation to the following excerpt as a remark on the underlying anxiety that drove Pound's work—the desire to preserve in song an old world sense of culture that is certainly a way of seeing. Typically, the lead word "that" challenges us with a couple possible readings: as a deictic adjective or as a conjunction continuing some missing half sentence—something to the effect that, "we poets endeavored so that…" The song at hand is a kiss, a token act of bonding with another that compensates for or overcomes the implied worry of mortality, time, decay, the inevitability of misunderstanding—the anti-kiss. Put like this, this lyric certainly is firmly in the tradition of the ancients, and Zukofsky is someone who very much felt there was very little new to say, if one boils things down to paraphrasable content, while there is always the possibility, indeed necessity to say it new—thus his constant recycling of found materials. This is what poets or these specific poets—Zukofsky, Williams and Pound—are about.

The rest of the extract essentially repeats the same point but here emphasizing seeing as intimacy—obviously relevant to these particular poets—a kiss that compensates for or arises from (the etiology is irresolvable here) the restive, doubt-ridden heart. The word "inverse" that appears in the middle of this broken sentence happily puns with "in verse" and is especially appropriate in a poetry that so insistently doubles back on itself. Here the intimacy of the eyes can be either the seeing of the object or the object imposing itself on the subject, in other words the equal presence of the other. But characteristically the syntax is such that this "inverse" can also be the cancelling or undermining of "intimacy" and therefore appositive with "restiveness." The concluding "of heart" syntactically goes with "restiveness" but particularly because it is set off as part of the next stanza (or here as an independent final line) we readily see its relations with "intimacy," but then we immediately have to inverse this and note how intimacy is inextricably shadowed by insecurity and "worry." Again, all of this can be summed up in the

[25] See Williams' remarks on Pound and the cult of beauty and Zukofsky's response in *WCW/LZ* 316-317.
[26] See the Z-Notes commentary on "The Measures of Zukofsky, Williams & Pound."

venerable topic of intimations of mortality, but what matters is what one makes of it as poetry or living. I want to suggest that this is a statement or better a kiss for Pound, for Williams, for any reader of this poem enacting what their poetry is about beyond all the fury and debate of contemporary history and poetics.

The final question is why Pound? Or, if thinking about Williams inevitably gives rise to thoughts of Pound, why here rather than, say, early in the chronological sequence of "A"-17 where one might think the conjuncture with Pound would be more biographically relevant? That Zukofsky's relationship with Williams can never be adequately considered without taking Pound into account, and vice versa, is true, and too often ignored in discussions of Zukofsky's relations with one or the other.[27] The Zukofskys' trip to Europe inevitably evoked in Zukofsky thoughts of Pound and his fate. The allusion to Yeats is particularly significant since Pound went to Yeats to learn about modern poetry, as in a sense Zukofsky went to Pound, and also to play something of the editorial role as Zukofsky did for Williams. The Yeats-Pound relationship emblematizes a view of old world culture, including the anxious desire to preserve what was clearly passing, that proved fateful for Pound's work and life. In this respect Zukofsky definitely aligns himself with Williams—not so much in the red-blooded anti-Old World polemics, but in the acceptance of an egalitarian hybrid view of culture, which in "4 Other Countries" Zukofsky can discern in the artifacts of the Old World itself.[28] Similarly, as we have seen, Zukofsky notes plenty of the Old World in Williams, who never entirely shook off the temptations of the mythopoetic and was more prone to use classical mythological allusions than Zukofsky. Ultimately it was an egalitarian view of language as a vehicle of seeing, of existing in the world without undue imposition that Zukofsky most prized in and saw himself as working with Williams.

Despite all the critical over-attention given to the brief "Objectivists" episode, Zukofsky over the course of his life did not participate much in the innumerable group activities of modernism and its aftermath. The reasons for this are complicated, but it was not due to some romantic sense of the artist as a solitary sole who must preserve his subjective uniqueness. However idiosyncratic his writings, Zukofsky's poetics were firmly based on an inherently collaborative, that is, social definition of writing and its materials. "A"-17 draws attention to this by documenting a working poetic relationship while at the same time implying the larger field and tasks in which they were necessarily engaged. Late in life Zukofsky would "discover" Wallace Stevens, but he presents Stevens in his lecture as always actively part of Zukofsky's poetic world—Stevens was proximate, a constituent of an overdetermined field of action of which Zukofsky was necessarily a part whether or not he was ever much conscious of Stevens in his own writing. Obviously Williams' proximity to and presence in Zukosky's work was on another scale, and in "A"-17 he wishes both to honor his friendship and work with him one last time.

15 Nov. 2015

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[27] See the related Z-Notes commentary on "The Measures of Zukofsky, Williams & Pound" for further elaboration of this point.

[28] Immediately following the first extract from "4 Other Countries" included in "A"-17, which transitions from the visit to Rapallo, Zukofsky's eye shifts from the famous and elaborately carved pulpit by Nicola Pisano in Pisa's Baptistery in preference for some off-to-the-side rock sculptures by an anonymous artist who worked with rather than against the shape of the original stone (*CSP* 181).