The Measures of Zukofsky, Williams & Pound

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The following discussion is a companion to the Z-Notes commentary on "A"-17, which examines the poetic relationship between Zukofsky and Williams, and consists of three parts. First, there is a biographically based discussion of Zukofsky's relationships with both Pound and Williams, then an examination of Pound's appearance in Zukofsky's post-World War II writings, and finally some summary comparisons of Zukofsky's work with that of Pound and Williams that attempt to define his distinctive swerve from them.

I

The dedication of *An "Objectivists" Anthology* to Ezra Pound affirms that he was "still" (in 1932) the most important poet for contemporary poets, but if one unravels the syntax and semantics of the extended dedicatory statement matters become more complicatedly interesting.[1] Zukofsky says that Pound's preeminence remains "despite" the fact that each line of the *Cantos* consists of at least one complete phrase—in other words, the music of the *Cantos* remains firmly based on the individual line and distinct semantic units. The tacit implication is that there are other poets who allow the formal music to overmaster to a greater or lesser degree the dominance of image or statement to explore a more flexible conception of the line. Two decades later, Zukofsky recalled this dedication as a critical statement pinpointing an essential distinction between the works of Pound on the one hand and that of Williams and Zukofsky on the other (*WCW/LZ* 441).[2] This is a useful indication of how Zukofsky thought about the relative merits of the two contemporary poets who unquestionably were most important to him. The convoluted manner of this dedication might be passed off as simply another example of Zukofsky's incorrigible refusal or inability to say anything straight, a propensity about which both Pound and Williams complained. But I hope to show that its somewhat backhanded expression of undoubtedly admiration is characteristic of Zukofsky's relationship with Pound even beyond the obvious problems of Pound's politics and anti-semitism.

Naturally, Zukofsky has always tended to be read in relation to Pound and Williams, and it is not my intention to rehash in detail biographical tales. My primary point is simply that one can never talk about one of these relationships without keeping in mind the other as they are always triangulated. Zukofsky met both poets more or less simultaneously, and for better or for worse they would sit like two angels on either shoulder, both in terms of his own thinking about poetry and in the prism of his critical reception. Not surprisingly, Zukofsky's relationship with Pound was more contentious than that with Williams.[3] As with everything

[1] The dedication is reproduced in *EP/LZ* 100.

[2] The context of this observation was Zukofsky's effort to encourage Williams, who was suffering one of his periodic bouts of despondency, to proceed with a proposed "Book of Prosody," which would also be an insider's account of American poetic modernism including himself and other like-minded experimentalists (see *WCW/LZ* 250-251). Zukofsky also pointed out the significance of this dedication as a critical statement in a letter to Cid Corman dated 10 Sept. 1959 (HRC 18.1).

[3] On Zukofsky and Pound see Christopher Beach, *ABC of Influence: Ezra Pound and the Remaking of American Poetic Tradition* (1992): 77-83; Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Purple Passages: Pound, Eliot, Zukofsky, Olson, Creeley and the Ends of Patriarchal Poetry* (2012): 59-85; Bob Perelman, *The Trouble with Genius: Reading Pound, Joyce, Stein and Zukofsky* (1994): 176-181; Sandra Kumamoto Stanley, *Louis Zukofsky and the Transformation of a*

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connected with Pound, that relationship makes the more dramatic story, which is magnified by the very different circumstances of the two friendships: that with Pound was carried out entirely via correspondence, whereas Williams fortuitously lived in the same area. The general dullness of the correspondence between Zukofsky and Williams is not due merely to a lack of antagonism in their relationship but to its pragmatic function, above all informing and coordinating meetings and publications—at a time when telephones were not in every home and the postal service was reliable enough for such purposes. Discussions of poetics and other matters of import could wait until the two met face to face, which they did quite regularly, particularly throughout the 1930s. In contrast Zukofsky only saw Pound on three widely separated occasions: his visit of two plus weeks to Rapallo in 1933, briefly during Pound's desperate 1939 trip to the U.S. to lobby against the impending war and in 1954 when the Zukofskys stopped by St. Elizabeths during a summer trip. In this relationship, everything that needed to be said had to be said in the correspondence and that meant on Pound's terms.[4] When Zukofsky submitted "Poem beginning 'The'" to *The Exile*, Pound not only recognized a significant young talent but as always saw a soldier to help with his ceaseless campaigns both poetic and political. The most obvious manifestation of this activity was Pound's convincing Harriet Monroe to hand over an issue of *Poetry* to this unknown poet, and of course Pound's fingerprints were all over the result. Well before that, however, Pound had already put Zukofsky to use and among his usual deluge of advice and prodding he encouraged the young poet to seek out his near-neighbor Williams (*EP/LZ* 7). Zukofsky wrote Williams and within a few weeks they met for the first time in early April 1928. Williams too apparently recognized the young poet's usefulness and promptly handed over the manuscript of "The Descent of Winter," which Zukofsky cut down and ordered into its definitive form, which was published in *The Exile* 4 (Autumn 1928).[5] Already we can discern the configurations of Zukofsky's relationships with both: Pound's relationship with Zukofsky was largely pedagogic, while Williams' was collaborative. In terms of Zukofsky's view and evaluation of the two, Pound stood as the supreme individual talent of American poetry, but Williams was the more important figure for both for himself and the present and future of American poetry generally.

As a number of commentators have pointed out, Pound's relationship with Zukofsky was paternalistic, as Pound insisted and as in fact characterized most of his relationships—including with Williams, which the latter resented no end. Nonetheless, despite the unequal

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Modern American Poetics (1994): 71-108. On Zukofsky and Williams see Peter Quartermain, *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe* (1992): 90-103; Stanley (1994): 109-146; also Tom Orange, "William Carlos Williams Between Image and Object," *Sagetrieb* 18.2 & 3 (2002): 127-156.

[4] The published correspondence between Zukofsky and Pound is far from complete: according to Barry Ahearn the volume of their letters includes less than half of what survives, to which 21 further letters from Zukofsky are added in the *Selected Letters of Louis Zukofsky* (*SL* 4-5). The volume of correspondence with Williams is complete, although three subsequently found letters were published in the *Selected Letters*. Not all correspondence has survived, although Ahearn concludes that the very large majority has.

[5] Apparently, it was at Pound's instigation that Williams entrusted Zukofsky with "The Descent of Winter" materials, typically spotting the editor that he was convinced Williams' work needed (*Pound/Williams: Selected Letters of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams*, ed. Hugh Witemeyer (1996): 82, 85). On a number of occasions, Williams warned Zukofsky not to tell Pound about new journal or publishing schemes, knowing Pound would waste no time trying to take command (*WCW/LZ* 35, 103).

relationships Pound insisted upon, he was rarely put off by the frequent fight-backs he inevitably provoked. If Pound was a compulsive and tireless campaigner for the aesthetic and political values in which he believed, as well as for the concrete individuals, groups and organs he felt would forward those values, there was also the element of the provocateur in his relationships with others, the needling that might bring out latent potential, the stirring up that anyone less hyperactive than Pound himself needed. Pound's individual abrasiveness was of course encouraged and supported by circumstances, especially at the time he was most closely involved with Zukofsky, the 1930s, a period saturated with aggressive and machismo rhetoric right across the social and political spectrum. Zukofsky's own letters to Pound are notably more masculinist—sprinkled with obscenities for example—than was the case with other correspondents. Pound's eccentric letter writing style, a genre unto itself, also tended to compel respondents to meet him on his own ground and terms. The pseudo-colloquial style, elliptical and punning at every opportunity, full of unexplained references, created an ambivalent tonal environment, simultaneously aggressive and humorous, earnest and off-the-cuff, which kept the addressee off-balance. One can see that Zukofsky, along with most other addressees, is often unsure just how to respond, and he is drawn into attempting to echo something of Pound's own manner, as Williams, despite himself, often was too. On the one hand, this inventive discourse was bonding and affectionate, a humorous playing together, but on the other with Pound it is always shot through with his didacticism, his compulsion to make suggestions that constantly veer into imperatives about what others should be doing and thinking.[6] It is notable that at the point in their correspondence when Pound becomes blatantly abusive, Zukofsky drops the imitation of his style in an effort to steer the exchange into a more civil and productive discussion, but quickly realizes the hopelessness of a level playing field with Pound (*EP/LZ* 168-172f).

Zukofsky's relationship with Pound was competitive, which was the only way one could have a poetic relationship with Pound. In many respects, Zukofsky took Pound as a mentor, quite literally taking on board many of his critical positions and directly matching his own wits against specific works by the older poet, and this produced many of his major works in the main decade of their relationship. At a very early age, Zukofsky put himself in training to be a major poet, apparently writing hundreds of poems in his student years in both conventional forms as well as all manner of invented forms.[7] At age 16, having just matriculated at Columbia, he submitted a translation to *Poetry* magazine, pointing out in his cover letter his effort to carry over the original meter (*SL* 22). What Zukofsky did not have, however, was a literary education because the American public school system he attended had a practical curriculum with an emphasis on math and science rather than the traditional classics and humanities. It is notable that To Publishers, edited by Zukofsky and financed by Oppen, took on Pound's collected critical writings, a project that did not get past the first volume, but that volume led off with "How to Read." Zukofsky took Pound's critical writings with their strong didactic character full of reading suggestions as a guide for his own self-education.

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[6] Marianne Moore reportedly was impressed that Mary Barnard had been corresponding regularly with Pound for some time without receiving insults (Barnard, *Assault on Mount Helicon: A Literary Memoir* (1984): 100).

[7] The main evidence we have for Zukofsky's apprentice work is the selection of about 60 poems from 1920-1924 apparently made in 1940-1941 and given the title *The First Seasons* (HRC 13.4), accompanied by a note that they were not to be published. In 1930 Zukofsky mentioned to his friend René Taupin that he had some 800 poems on hand, which could be an exaggeration although quite likely not (letter dated 23 Aug. 1930).

During the year Zukofsky spent teaching at the University of Wisconsin (1930-1931), he at least started learning Provençal and studying Latin metrics (*EP/LZ* 60-61), but more significantly throughout the 1930s he intensely studied Dante and Cavalcanti. "'Mantis'" was written with Dante's sestina in mind, but was also Zukofsky's effort to emulate Pound's "Sestina: Altaforte," as he noted when he sent the poem to Pound (*SL* 112). "'Mantis'" is of course entirely different in manner and tone from Pound's Browningesque and noisy evocation of Bertran de Born, but that is the point: showing he could do it differently. From this perspective, the incorporation of elements of Provence folklore into "'Mantis'" might be read as a critical riposte to Pound's aristocratic romance with troubadour poetry. This then replays itself in a more elaborate and pointedly ambitious manner with the first half of "A"-9, doing what Pound thought could not be done: replicating the intricate rhyme scheme of Cavalcanti's canzone. This canzone itself was Pound's discovery, a poem virtually unknown beyond specialists until he made it the centerpiece of his Cavalcanti essay and produced two different translations, the latter of which became a major statement within the *Cantos*. Zukofsky not only gave himself a technical task that the master craftsman considered insurmountable, but his "translation" of it into the vocabulary and concepts of Marx could not but be a direct challenge to Pound's own very vocal politics and economics (*EP/LZ* 155). Similarly, *A Test of Poetry* became the textbook that Pound proposed but could not produce himself: allowing the juxtaposition of poetic samples to do the critical talking.[8] A high proportion of the selections clearly adhere to Pound's recommendations in his didactic writings.[9] Later Zukofsky offered his own recommendations for young poets in "A Statement for Poetry" (1950), which is content pretty much to repeat Pound's three components of poetry—practical rules of thumb whose value he never questioned (*Prep*. 21-22; see also 78-83, 209-210). "A"-8 too was clearly composed with the *Cantos* in mind: a long collage documentary poem presenting a historical argument in response to the present day crisis, but declaring political allegiances antithetical to those of Pound. All of this is quickly to check off the most obvious manifestations of Zukofsky's intense sense of Pound's mentoring presence, in which one can emphasize on the one hand Zukofsky's attempts to emulate Pound as a high poetic model, or on the other his competitive need to out-do the master. In the end, it has to be said that this checklist includes most of Zukofsky's major pre-World War II achievements. But if a work like the first half of "A"-9 is difficult to imagine both formally and content-wise without the presence of Pound, the end result is quite un-Pound-like and indeed proved difficult for Pound to appreciate, as I will discuss below.

Pound famously dedicated *Guide to Kulchur* (1938) to Zukofsky and Bunting, by which time the Pound-Zukofsky relationship had come apart—at least Zukofsky had realized it was futile trying to have an exchange with Pound. Zukofsky became increasingly exasperated with Pound's intransigence over the course of the decade, although this needs to be understood within a context in which Zukofsky's entire situation was becoming increasingly exasperating: a precarious financial situation and the need to help support his family (father and siblings), difficulties finding free time to write and to get published, disaffection with the organized Left in America, and the general sense of impending catastrophe with fascism's seemingly unstoppable expansion on both sides of the world. Zukofsky seems to have largely shrugged off Pound's increasingly vitriolic anti-semitism as an intellectual muddle, although Bunting blasted Pound when shown some of his letters to Zukofsky (*EP/LZ* 198). But Pound had the hide of a rhinoceros, as Williams once observed

[8] Pound, *ABC of Reading* (1934): 95.

[9] In its original version, *A Test of Poetry* was also to include many samples from Pound—including translations, 19 in all, predominantly from the *Cantos* (HRC 16.7). However, Zukofsky did not receive permission from Pound, compelling him to find alternatives.

(*WCW/LZ* 454), and none of this effected his belief in the higher values of art. His aggressive rhetoric can even be understood as showing a strong element of trust in his interlocutor: telling it straight without the niceties, telling it straight because it was mutually understood that there were larger matters at stake. What bothered Zukofsky was less Pound's anti-semitism per se than simply the intractable dogmatism that rendered futile any pretense of dialogue. Zukofsky sadly realized there no talking with the psychological desperateness that Pound had backed himself into.

Nevertheless, we should not lose sight of Williams' presence throughout. As emblematic of this, one might note that if "'Mantis'" was written to some degree in response to Pound, the attached "Interpretation" was in direct response to Williams, and the very different poetic forms in these companion pieces reflect these two different presences and their impacts on Zukofsky's work. Zukofsky's relationship with Williams was both personally and poetically always more substantial than it was with Pound. One reason Zukofsky could easily shrug off Pound's abrasiveness was his relationship with Williams, who continued to exhort Pound's poetic genius despite losing all patience with his condescending and officious manner. As mentioned, the fact that Williams almost immediately entrusted a major manuscript to Zukofsky's editorial eye established a modus operandi that is impossible to imagine with Pound. Williams took Zukofsky to be a trusted reader, and to a remarkable degree followed his editorial advice, which often involved severe pruning. I have argued that this collaborative relationship is how Zukofsky thinks of his friendship with Williams (see Z-Notes commentary on "A"-17), but the nature of the personal relationship was symptomatic of a poetic stance that had far-reaching implications.

It is difficult to recover just how familiar Zukofsky was with Williams' work at the time they first met. There is no allusion to Williams in "Poem beginning 'The,'" which mentions all his other significant modernist models. Williams evidently gave Zukofsky a copy of *Spring and All* very soon after they met, and a couple years later he declared this book to be the contemporary American equivalent of Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (*Prep.* 198). It is worth keeping in mind that the Williams Zukofsky encountered and learned from was the poet of the experimental works of the 1920s and early 1930s, from *Kora in Hell* through *A Novelette and Other Prose*—work largely under-appreciated until the 1960s. Although he followed and often worked closely with Williams right up to the latter's death, Zukofsky always recognized this earlier work and above all *Spring and All* as Williams' seminal achievement.

If we look for concrete examples of Williams' effect on Zukofsky's work in the manner we listed with Pound, we find Williams' presence to be a more elusive, but my argument would be that is because it is more fundamental and pervasive. We can identify projects where Zukofsky is responding to specific Pound works, but the nature of Williams' work did not give itself to such creative and competitive inter-exchanges. We do not, for example, find Zukofsky experimenting with the combination of verse and prose or the diaristic improvisations that characterize much of Williams' writing of this period, even though Zukofsky was paying close attention to these works. An argument might be made that Williams' experimental, quasi-critical prose of this period had its effect on Zukofsky's own critical style, particularly in certain pieces such as "'Recencies' in Poetry" or "*Modern Times*," which look forward to the manner of *Bottom*—free syntax, broken off statements, sentences that fold back on themselves, in sum a "critical" prose that refuses ossification into propositions. Also those forgotten works of the 1930s, *The Writing of Guillaume Apollinaire* and *Thanks to the Dictionary*, might be viewed as Zukofsky's ventures in this direction.

However, "A"-17 indicates that it is particularly in the shorter poems, which he regularly shared with Williams, where we can discern the latter's presence (see the Z-Notes commentary on "A"-17 for discussions of specific poems). It is not because these poems

seem especially Williams-like, and in fact Williams usually struggled to come to terms with them, although he tried manfully. Not surprisingly, when Williams did respond enthusiastically, it was to those instances that strike us as most like his own poetry—the obvious cases are both mentioned in "A"-17: *Anew* 42 ("You three:—") and "4 Other Countries."[10] Neither of these poems are likely to strike most readers as typical of Zukofsky, but what is notable about his short poems is their restless experimentalism—their manner ranges widely, and linguistically they are often a good deal more far-out and puzzling than the contemporaneous movements of *"A"*, even "A"-7 and -9. Like Williams the visual shaping of the poems and their predominately stanzaic forms is highlighted. There is also the propensity to make poems out of whatever comes to hand, the everyday random details that one encounters, not least raw verbal materials, whose shaping (Williams' imagination) is the intent of the poem. Most of the poems in *Anew* (1935-1944), for example, do not seem to make much sense, yet they are not Dadaistic or surrealistic conglomerations of random materials in all their radical contingency because their shapeliness, particularly visually and aurally, is everywhere in evidence. Like Williams, Zukofsky's short poems often have a strong occasional quality, not the recording of authentic fleeting experience, although the sense of transitoriness as an intensification of experience is common, but that the specific occasion of the poem is what drives it. Whatever the randomly thrown up circumstances and materials—the "local"—that the poem records and writes out of, the forming or writing process necessarily becomes integral to that occasion. However, Zukofsky was never interested in recording or catching process itself, as were the projectivists and other mid-century poets (and a good deal of Williams has been read in this way as well), since he always had a strong sense of the complete poem—not complete in the sense that a proper sentence is a complete statement, but complete in the formal integrity of the poem itself as a distinct verbal object. Zukofsky's poems tend to complexly fold back on themselves rather than pointedly leaving matters hanging, because any entity (including the poem) that sufficiently asserts itself, its singularity, necessarily does so within the manifold relations of being in the world. In this respect, he of course pursues Williams' often stated insistence on the poem as a discrete object, but typically Zukofsky was able to pursue this dictate more rigorously than Williams himself, who found it difficult to entirely jettison expressive traces.

For all the tendency to see Zukofsky as a protégé of Pound, the far larger and more explicit appearance of Williams in the later *"A"* should not come as a surprise. In the commentaries on both "A"-17 and "A"-15, I have tried to demonstrate that this is more than a personal matter: that Zukofsky felt Williams was the more consequential poet in the present and future of his own work as well as of American poetry generally, however decisive Pound's role in instigating modern American poetry in the earlier part of the century. This comes down to the key points that Williams hammered away at throughout his life: a more egalitarian perspective both in terms of poetic language and social stance, which manifested itself in a restless experimentation in search of modern cadences, the persistent beginning again that so marks Williams' work. This relates to Zukofsky's critical observation in his dedication of *An "Objectivists" Anthology*: that for all Pound's mastery, the *Cantos* settle into a set poetic style, however absorbent, which relates to Pound's need for argumentative and judgmental authority—consequently the poetry is never allowed to double-back and qualify itself. Units of meaning or statement are built up phrase by phrase in what aspires to a Dantesque coherence and comprehensiveness. That the tentative doubts that are allowed to enter into the *Pisan Cantos* have been universally acclaimed only emphasizes the limitations of the whole, and such doubts do not extend to a rethinking of his poetic practice, much less his politics. This also has to do with Pound's effort to situate himself as the apex of European

[10] On Williams' responses to Zukofsky and *Anew*, see below.

cultural tradition, so ideally that tradition or idea of the tradition resonates in and gives authority to each line, which at its best it succeeds in doing, as even Williams admitted while convinced this was not the route forward for American poetry. Zukofsky, more respectful of the tradition than Williams, could also grant Pound's poetic mastery, while certain it was a dead-end individual triumph. The fact that Pound never received an homage in *"A"*, as did Williams, may simply be due to the fact that *"A"* was already booked up by the time Pound died in 1972 and Zukofsky was well into the composition of the last two movements. It is probably of some significance that the very last line of the chronological presentation of materials in "A"-23, before the final 26 lines which weave an alphabetical conclusion, is worked from Pound (562.34-35); in fact, from an early piece of critical prose describing Jews sympathetically.[11] But this remains entirely private—a personal emphasis on the Pound he preferred to remember, which he had already stated publically on a number of occasions as I will discuss below. Zukofsky certainly felt Pound's very public political fate, his flamboyantly polemical style, both public and private, distracted from his poetic achievement, and I have suggested on a number of occasions that witnessing Pound's fate—manias that were symptomatic of the tumultuous tendencies of the times—encouraged Zukofsky's constitutional reticence even further, to empty out the argumentative from his poetry.

The above discussion is largely biographical and as such of limited interest. The case of Pound always offers an infinite field for judgmental self-indulgence, but my primary interest is in Zukofsky's public works that relate to Pound and Williams, rather than pretending to solve the mysteries of specific human relationships. The Z-Notes commentary on "A"-15 and "A"-17 discuss in detail the Williams side of the equation, but with Pound's presence inevitably asserting itself as well. The commentary on "A"-17 concludes with Pound's appearance in that poem, but in the following I will examine a few further appearances of Pound in Zukofsky's post-World War II work. Pound represents for Zukofsky something more than a spectacularly difficult personality, as he highlights problems with not only friendship but human relations generally that are symptomatic of the times they lived in, and these ethical problems had a profound impact on Zukofsky's late work.

II

When Pound appears in Zukofsky's post-World War II work, there is always a decided edge, an element of argument, of trying to separate out the great poet and friend from the froth of unfortunate non-poetic baggage. Pound the provocateur is never entirely side-stepped, as is evident in the very need Zukofsky feels to react, even when he is trying to say that the provocative Pound is not the Pound that matters. This is evident in his later public statement on Pound, "*Work/Sundown*" (1948), whose very brevity is integral to the statement. This piece was written for *The Case of Ezra Pound* (1948), edited by Charles Norman, which is to say it was self-consciously written for the debate on the non-essential Pound with the knowledge that there was nothing Zukofsky could say that would be listened to.[12] This is why he begins by saying he would rather say nothing, but that to say nothing would itself inevitably be interpreted as a statement. So Zukofsky defends Pound against personal anti-semitism, implying that his was an intellectual anti-semitism, and his main point is that after the passions of current historical debates fade away, Pound's poetic achievement will remain. As demonstration he quotes a well-known passage from Canto 49, a translation of an archaic

[11] Scroggins, *A Poem of a Life* (2007): 422-423.

[12] Zukofsky's contribution was originally written as a letter to Charles Norman (dated 14 Nov. 1945), which is reproduced in *WCW/LZ* 362-363. Williams, who also contributed to the collection, responded very positively to Zukofsky's statement (*WCW/LZ* 364).

Chinese song presenting a vision of utopian society, what could even be taken as a communist ideal where the state has withered away. Pound would not necessarily have understood the poem in this manner, but Zukofsky is quoting Pound against himself—as is obvious in the additional odd lines quoted that anyone can run to excess (from Confucius) or the ideal of someone who retains "his mind entire" (the reference is to Tiresias in Homer's Hades). Pound obviously enough ran to excess and did not always maintain wholeness of mind.[13] The effectiveness of the ancient Chinese poem as Pound renders it is precisely its tranquility—it is not an image of an archaic ideal that has subsequently gone to hell, but a patent dream that is realized in the speaker's sense of contentment, a speaker whose voice is society's desire for well-being. This is what Pound's poetry is about, as is all poetry or human endeavor as far as Zukofsky is concerned. The mention of Belsen in the final sentence of Zukofsky's short statement is a very rare direct reference to the Holocaust.[14] This sentence is by Zukofsky's standards a strong rebuke of Pound. To say that Pound's finest work will survive even though he "overlooked" the Holocaust is something of a backhanded compliment, even while insisting that biography, that is history, is of little importance compared with the enduring value of art, which is to say what people will bother to read in the future. The very sentence structure concludes by emphasizing Pound's flaws rather than his achievement.

If we examine the other post-war appearances of Pound in Zukofsky's poetry, we find the same vexed handling as in "*Work/Sundown*." In all cases, Zukofsky reaffirms Pound as a friend—he usually says this quite explicitly—yet the manner and/or the context complicates any simple sense of what this means and invariably there is the sense of the unavoidability of arguing with Pound, even when one does not want to and knows it is futile. There is nothing surprising in this—it is difficult to think of any of Pound's friendships (and he was someone who inspired and had the capacity to maintain many) that were not heavily mixed with disagreement, irritation and general provocation. The gesture implied by Zukofsky's claim that he would prefer to say nothing needs to be taken seriously, and it should not be assumed he is interested in putting on public record his view or judgment of Pound. Plenty of people were doing just that and this sickened Zukofsky.[15] Zukofsky's poems on Pound or the poetic appearance of Pound in his poetry are more complicated and interesting than that.

"A"-12

Zukofsky did not refer to *"A"* as an epic, nor are there the typical epic allusions, but in "A"-12 we encounter significant appearances of the *Odyssey*. In a substantial segment Zukofsky reproduces a series of letters from an ordinary American soldier, Jackie, as he proceeds toward the war zone in Korea and intersperses key lines of Homer's description in Book XI of Odysseus' decent into the underworld. Both the introduction of these letters (Malatesta style) and this specific episode from Homer cannot but allude to Pound and the

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[13] Responding to a request for a brief assessment of Pound in 1939, Zukofsky indicated that Canto 49 manifested Pound with his mind entire, which unfortunately was otherwise too often beclouded by his fascist beliefs. Since Zukofsky summarizes Pound's art, in one sentence, as the ethics implied by its accuracy or inaccuracy, he is again implying that Pound's own work implicates itself (*SL* 178). Zukofsky's point seems to have been a bit too subtle and was not used.

[14] The only other explicit reference I can think of is in section 10 of "The Old Poet Moves to a New Apartment 14 Times," which mentions Auschwitz and Dr. Mengele (*CSP* 227). See also *CSP* 111.

[15] I discuss briefly the case of George Oppen's poems on Pound in "What Were the 'Objectivist' Poets?" *Modernism/Modernity* 22 (April 2015): 330-331.

Cantos. I have already discussed this segment elsewhere (see Z-Notes commentary on "A"-12), so will merely reiterate the point that Zukofsky is clearly de-heroicizing and de-romanticizing the Homeric context—Jackie's perspective is simply a common man's description as he heads for a contemporary version of hell, heroic in its own way as he accepts the fate dealt to him by political forces beyond his control, but without any sense of glamour or even higher meaning. Perhaps there is the implication that Jackie is representative of those mostly nameless men under Odysseus who are fated never to return home.[16] In any case, neither Jackie nor the poet are Odyssean figures as such archetypal parallels have become irrelevant. The interminable wanderings of "A"-12 conclude with an overlay of the *Odyssey* onto the Zukofsky family unit, but Odysseus-Zukofsky is not the heroic wanderer but the poet at home whose wife (Penelope) asks him to recount the tales of Odysseus, who in this instance might represent Pound—whose efforts on behalf of himself and his friends, "did not save them" (261). The poet begins his account not with Odysseus but with the rising of the son (Telemachos). Homer, then, is any poem told so that people can be together, to affirm or reenact their love or desire to love and be loved, not an instruction for how to save the world. Given the size of "A"-12, these Homeric moments are hardly sufficient to structure the whole, yet their placement is significant and align Zukofsky's poem closer to Joyce's *Ulysses* than to Pound's *Cantos*.

"'Nor was the prophet'"

Although it would not be immediately obvious to most readers, we know that this poem included in *Some Time* (1956) was written about Pound and responds to a couple passages in the *Pisan Cantos*. However, the argument of the poem does not rely on identifying Pound as its subject—it is not a poem *about* Pound in that sense—and doing so can blind us to its broader implications. As Mark Scroggins has pointed out, the body of the poem was written first in 1953 and then a couple years later Zukofsky finished or reconceived it by adding the two framing stanzas.[17] In between, the Zukofskys visited Pound at St. Elizabeths in the summer of 1954.

To begin with I will focus on the central body of the poem, which offers a reading of Jewish history or identity, although the argument extends well beyond specifically Jewish concerns. An opposition is set up between David and the prophet Ezra, the latter appearing here as the codifier of Judaism, the propagator of the "law of exile." The poet prefers David because of his lack of dogmatism, because he did not feel he had to stake out "his ground." "Ground" is a word of some importance to Zukofsky and appears importantly in "A"-12

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[16] The real-life Jackie did return home with honor, an outcome Zukofsky does not include in his poem. John H. Appleby Jr. (1928-2003) was an acquaintance of the Zukofskys from Old Lyme, Connecticut where they spent several summers in the early 1950s. Appleby would return from the Korean conflict with a Silver Star for valor, but Zukofsky breaks off his letters at the point where he is just about to reach Korea, which was the situation at the time "A"-12 was composed in the summer of 1951. Obviously, Zukofsky could have added further letters, assuming more were sent to him, but it is the manner Jackie confronts the gradual but inexorable preparation for going into combat that interests the poet.

[17] "'There are less Jews left in the world': Louis Zukofsky's Holocaust Poetry," *Shofar* (Fall 2002): 63-75. Zukofsky deleted a line from the original draft of what is now the second stanza that explicitly addressed Pound (see Scroggins, *The Poem of a Life* (2007): 270). My remarks on "'Nor did the prophet'" are indebted to Scroggins' article, as well as to John Taggart, "Louis Zukofsky: Songs of Degrees" *Songs of Degrees: Essays on Contemporary Poetry and Poetics* (1994): 82-113, who discusses in detail the entire grouping of poems that includes "'Nor did the prophet.'"

composed a few years prior, initially in the context of quoting Genesis on the opening page.[18] "Ground" can be something fixed that is measured as being of such and such a size or worth a given amount of money, but also ground can be wherever you happen to be and its measurement what you make of it, how you live in a given space. By identifying David with this latter non-possessive and therefore common sense of ground, the poem then contrasts this with the rebuilding of the Temple on the return from Babylonian exile, the staking out of ground and the fetishizing of a place, objects, doctrine—thus a conception of orthodoxy and purity. This is the Judaism of Ezra and the law of exile because exile assumes there is a fixed homeland, which in turn creates the necessity for conceptions and laws of doctrinal and racial purity to ward off the dangers of assimilation. It is this conception of Judaism that the returning exiles imposed on those who had remained in Jerusalem, and Ezra's rant, causing him to rend his coat and pull his beard, is in response to those Jews who have intermarried with non-Jews. The Book of Ezra concludes with a rather chilling catalog of such inter-marriages which have been forcibly dissolved (wives and children "put away"). The poem says Ezra drinks water without a thought of where it comes from, in contrast to David who refused to drink water when he learned that men had risked their lives to bring it to him.[19] Therefore Ezra also does not see the cloudless morning after rain, an image from David's deathbed advice on good governance—it is the ground, the appreciative sense of being in the world that "never imposes" that must be the basis of human interaction, rather than doctrine.

The referential notes Zukofsky appends to the poem are notable in a number of respects. First, they are listed in reverse order with respect to the conventional sequence of the books of the Old Testament, which is to say in roughly reverse chronological order. The end (or beginning) point is the chapter in Genesis describing Abraham buying the field of Machpelah as a burial ground for his wife, Sarah, which then became the tomb for himself and other patriarchs and matriarchs. This is the earliest purchase mentioned in the Bible and marks a fixed homeland that defines exile (Jacob and Joseph, who both died in Egypt, were embalmed so that their remains could be brought back to be buried at Machpelah). So the genealogy of the purchase of Machpelah leads forward to the Temple and Ezra. In contrast, the poem observes that a tree anywhere is as good as the tree in the field of Machpelah. The references Zukofsky gives provide the sources for many of the Biblical allusions in the poem but not all. The first six chapters of the Book of Ezra recount the rebuilding of the Temple and Jerusalem, but do not mention Ezra, who only appears in chapter seven and after. Zukofsky's reference to the earlier chapters, then, puts the emphasis on the return from exile and the building of the Temple, the historical events and their consequences of which Ezra himself is merely a significant symptom. On the other hand, there are references that are not alluded to in the poem itself, unless very obliquely—specifically the two verses from I Chronicles that both mention David assigning the singers and musicians to play before the tabernacle, the movable ark. This is the ground that can be anywhere measured out and made sacred by song. This is the antithetical perspective to the purchase of Machpelah, although actually it is prior, the sensual existence necessarily assumed by any act of abstraction and fixation.

The argument of the poem establishes two definitions of the same name designating a culture, people or nation, which could be "Jews" but can just as easily be innumerable other possibilities. The fact that David is the archetypal poet of the Jewish nation, whose Psalms (whether literally composed by him or only in his spirit) define a sense of cultural identity, is

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[18] See "A"-12.126. Other significant recurrences of "ground" in "A"-12 appear in the context of Lucretius (167) and a key horse-poetics passage (175, 179). See the Z-Notes commentary on "A"-12 for discussion.

[19] This incident of David and the water is referred to in "A"-8.93.

central to the various other implications this poem associates with him. As a reading of Jewish identity, the argument of "'Nor did the prophet'" is perfectly consistent with a careful reading of "Poem beginning 'The'" and "A"-4 (see Z-Notes commentaries). As a reading of history, this is one of Zukofsky's innumerable variations on the problem of abstraction: the reification or ossification of concepts that are then applied to the real, the sensuous existence in the world from which those concepts necessarily arose in the first place. This is the essential burden of *Bottom*, which Zukofsky was in the middle of when he wrote this poem.[20]

Obviously there is little difficulty plugging Pound into this reading. Central to Zukofsky's presentation in this poem is that there is a sense in which Pound is more Jewish than Zukofsky himself: Pound not only has the more Jewish name, he took on the role of his Old Testament namesake, damning his culture, predicting doom, becoming entangled in all manner of arguments about doctrinal truths and purity. But from Zukofsky's perspective, Pound has taken on a misconstrued Jewish role model—whereas in David the poet determines his actions as a king, in Ezra ideological dogmatism has suppressed the poet. Scroggins has pointed out that the quoted line dismissing David in the second stanza is in the voice of Pound and probably refers to a few lines in the *Pisan Cantos* that relate to the restoration of Zion, of which in this instance Pound approves (*Cantos* 74/429). It is notable, however, that this is not an actual quotation but a paraphrase, as if Zukofsky is disguising his own allusion.[21] Of course the temple that Pound wants to rebuild is that of a certain conception of Old World culture and of the sacred. As a critical response to Pound, Zukofsky's poem indicates in its allusion to the purchase of Machpelah an agreement with Pound's economic version of the fall that blights the cultural values he wishes to preserve. This is also hinted at in the somewhat unusual statement that David "never chartered" his ground—a term that embodies a number of useful meanings: a charting or mapping of territory, the establishment of ownership and property (and who can lend or charter) as well as of law and doctrine (it is hard not to hear Blake's "chartered Thames"). Thus Zukofsky calls on Old Testament authority for a reading of history that displaces Pound's focus on usury and banks, with its attendant propensity to slip into anti-semitism, to that of private property or more fundamentally to an entire mode of thought or stance toward the world that claims ownership and craves fixation, an orientation that measures without ever finding one's measure.

It is at least possible that Zukofsky has in mind here an incident he refers to with touch of annoyance in "A"-12.144, when Pound asked him to query his orthodox father about his interpretation of Leviticus on usury. Essentially the question is whether or not there is biblical authority to practice usury in relation to non-Jews, to which Zukofsky's father answered "no," usury is always unethical and moral principles are equally applicable in all human relations, although there were historical circumstances that prompted some to bend scriptural interpretation (*EP/LZ* 181-183). In "A"-12, Zukofsky seems implicitly annoyed with himself for having mediated Pound's question and his father's response in the first place, when he should have known Pound was not really asking a question. Pound was incapable of perceiving the irony of his scrutinizing the legalistic minutia of Jewish scriptures as a historic explanation for their economic crimes, when it was precisely that sort of mind-

[20] There is at least one passage in "A"-12.140-142 concerned with movable alters, fixed temples and the historical problem of abstraction (see Z-Notes commentary on "A"-12). There is a related passage that mentions the rebuilding of the Temple in *Bottom* (103-104).

[21] It is of course possible that Zukofsky is quoting more or less what Pound said to him vive voce, but in that case the allusion becomes even more obliquely private, beyond the reasonable reach of any reader.

set that would allow Jews or anyone else to interpret the passage as applying to some people and not to others.

However, we should not think we have adequately grasped "'Nor did the prophet'" once we fit Pound into this particular Bible tale, a kind of ironic revenge against his anti-semitism. To begin with this would be merely to take on the judgmental role of Ezra for ourselves, putting Pound in his place. Zukofsky is not interested in publically giving Pound a piece of his mind, and there are still several stanzas we have yet to account for.

The enigmatic phrase that supplies the title for the poem appears in the last stanza of the original poem or main body (inside the framing stanzas): we will not and the prophet (Ezra) did not "much" mention David. This typical convolutedness can be annoying, but Zukofsky articulates a self-reflexive statement. "We" will not mention David because we do not want to stand in judgment of the Ezras, because if we occupy "this earth" in the manner represented by David the singer, then we cannot do so. However, the preceding stanzas have in fact mentioned David quite emphatically, so apparently silence is not a simple option as Zukofsky pointed out in his statement on the case of Pound. If this is not ambiguous enough, Zukofsky interpolates into the middle of this statement that the prophet did not mention David *much*. Are we to judge this a fault or the opposite? Ezra forgets David in his rantings; or, despite his rantings, what David represents remains and does not need to be explicitly mentioned much? As mentioned, what David represents is necessarily the grounds for what Ezra is ranting about, that is, the sense of wellbeing (*la promesse du bonheur*) or a society without oppression that is gestured at in the song from Canto 49. In this sense, if the *Cantos* seem dominated by historical analysis and cultural critique, nonetheless that ground does appear and is what necessarily underpins the whole. However, if we try to pin down what exactly Zukofsky is referring to, it is the manner that is finally of most importance, the reciprocal complexity of the stanza that does not allow us to come down firmly, Ezra-like, one way or the other. Particularly so, if we keep in mind that this inner statement is framed within a statement that says "we" will not mention David at all, which of course does precisely what it says it isn't—in fact the entire central body of the poem is a definition of what "David" means. True, that meaning can only be completely realized when it no longer needs to be said, but things being as they are…. "We" cannot simply stand outside and judge Pound, and therefore the central body of this poem performs an argument and judgment whose own ground turns on itself. This is an example of Zukofsky's "valid skepticism," a perspective that recognizes there are always other perspectives, a fugal perspective that instead of standing in judgment aspires to stand with the other, to create a sense of that measure of the ground that they occupy together. This at least is one way to understand Zukofsky's supposed difficulty or obscurity, and when speaking of Pound, is not the problem his demand for too much clarity?

If it were not for the title of the poem, we would probably tend to deemphasize this stanza as a characteristic bit of obscurity that does not seem necessary for the historical argument presented in the preceding six stanzas, nor does it obviously relate to the framing stanzas. Yet it is in these framing stanzas that the poet pulls us out of that historical argument, the kind of argument Pound allowed to dominate his poem, to the interpersonal relationship into which, however, all that historical weight is now concentrated. In this sense, the "title" stanza makes the link with the framing stanzas, but now the senses of "friend" mean considerably more than a relation between two specific individuals.

When we consider "'Nor did the prophet'" as a whole with its framing stanzas, its statement is essentially the same as in "*Work/Sundown*," although here in line with the more private nature of the subject it is friendship, that is, Pound's humanity that is emphasized rather than his art. The framing stanzas that affirm enduring friendship put the final emphasis on those lines about the morning grass after rain, to which are added birds, sun and music.

These stanzas can be imagined as if spoken to the poet's son (in which case the son's presence turns on a pun with "sun"), as if a fatherly explanation of a morally complicated case, although obviously the son stands in for the reader. Tonally this frame is at odds with the poem's central body, otherwise the latter could be deleted and the framing stanzas could stand on their own to say what Zukofsky wants above all to express. The poet, like us all, is implicated in Pound's failings, which are of the world, therefore the refrain, asserting friendship four times, sounds simultaneously sincere and fragile. The frame also notably emphasizes and itself attempts to perform music, where the phenomenological fullness gestured at by the morning after rain or by the singing before the tabernacle can be sensed, as well as the ethical entanglements of any human relationship. Whereas the body of the poem can be read as instigated by Pound's mention of David and the rebuilding of the Temple, the framing stanzas allude to another part of the *Pisan Cantos*, specifically to Canto 75 which famously reproduces the score for Clément Jannequin's *Le chant des oiseaux* transcribed for violin. This is one of Pound's versions of David's morning after rain or playing before the tabernacle and thus counter-balances the desire to rebuild the Temple; it is Pound re-finding and measuring his ground. The singing birds of the framing stanzas are conventional nature images but also are translated into composed music. This allusion has more personal significance for Zukofsky since it relates to the visit the Zukofskys made to St. Elizabeths in the summer of 1954, after the body of the poem was written, when Paul played Jannequin's music for Pound. Canto 75 presents Jannequin's score as coming out of or surviving Phlegethon, the flaming hell of the war, of a world of (economic) injustice or of Pound's personal situation. The score is an image of what Pound sought to realize, poetically and socially, but too often forgot in his fury at its too intermittent realization.

"4 Other Countries"

This long poem recounts the European trip the Zukofskys took in the summer of 1957, a tour that for Louis was washed over by memories of and reflections on Pound, Williams (*A Voyage to Pagany*) and Henry Adams (*Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* and *The Education of Henry Adams*). Two excerpts from this poem are included in "A"-17, the latter clearly alluding to the *Cantos* and is discussed in the Z-Notes commentary on that movement. The other excerpt in "A"-17 does not seem to have anything specifically to do with Williams or Pound, although it is surely not coincidental that it appears immediately following the passage describing a visit to Pound's old address in Rapallo, although at the time the latter was still in St. Elizabeths (*CSP* 179-180). Zukofsky is returning to the site of his 1933 visit, during his only previous trip to Europe, and finds that it is more than just Pound that is missing, but an entire "era." At Pound's old address, the Zukofskys encounter an elderly neighbor or friend who speaks to them from the balcony where Zukofsky had once looked out over the Mediterranean, but now, down at ground level, the sea is obscured by the noise and beach umbrellas of the tourists. The romance of the old world that so colored Pound's view is gone, although Zukofsky concludes this passage by affirming that the ancients or forefathers (*Antichi*) always live on—presumably not as preservation but as made new.

But before this conclusion Zukofsky is prompted to address Pound directly with a characteristically doubled statement: he did not speak out of fear that Pound did not want to hear or he did not speak because Pound out of fear did not want to hear. When it gets down to it these two readings are probably the same or mutually defining, the complexities of interpersonal relations that render such fear as reciprocal rather than simply locatable in one subject or the other. The statement is such that Zukofsky could be referring to what he wanted to say when he visited Pound in 1933—perhaps that Pound refused to hear the noise on the beach below his balcony indicating the dream he wanted to preserve was not there to save. Or perhaps Zukofsky wanted to speak in the present of the poem when he revisits

Rapallo in 1957, or for that matter any time in between. In any case, the form of this stanza should sound familiar as it echoes the penultimate stanza of "'Nor did the prophet'" where David is not to be mentioned much and before that "*Work/Sundown*" where he begins by saying he would rather say nothing. Again, this overt split between the content and the act of speaking sets off a series of ambiguities, turning a simple judgment into a more complicated and self-reflexive ethical situation, which in the end cannot be parsed except to simply acknowledge mutual humanity and friendship, that is, a "handshake." In this case the handshake is this stanza or poem. Zukofsky frames this statement with the word "understanding," but precisely which of these possible understandings he understands is not clear, which I take to mean that actually they are all bundled together and we can never take that balcony view over a situation in which we are always stuck. Where does Pound's responsibility and guilt end? And where does ours (Zukofsky's) begin? Fundamentally Zukofsky could not but believe Pound's intentions were good and selfless, and that we cannot simply stand in judgment over him without risking the same deafness of which we accuse him. The fear that prevents Pound from hearing and the fear that prevents Zukofsky from speaking are inextricably bound up with each other. But then here in this poem Zukofsky does speak, but will or can Pound hear?

"A"-13

The other notable appearance of Pound in Zukofsky's later poetry is in "A"-13 (1960). There is a passage giving an account of the Zukofskys' summer trip in 1954 mentioning the visit to St. Elizabeths, but somewhat unexpectedly there is no specific mention of Pound and the focus is entirely on young Paul's playing, both musically and literally (298). The movement does include not one but two thank-you notes from Pound, where again we encounter the dangerous complications to which Pound always seems to give rise.[22] In "A"-13 Zukofsky does not identify the author of these notes, although those familiar with Pound's distinctive letter-writing manner could reasonably divine their origin and in the first instance there is the proximate mention of "a madhouse." The first and most striking appears early in the movement when Pound thanks Zukofsky for the gift of some chocolates, apparently in the shape of babies—"*black bambini*" as Pound puts it (264-265). The lead into this note is a descriptive catalogue of domestic bric-a-brac and family heirlooms, whose seeming innocuousness nevertheless wanders into associations with historical violence and the bitterness of the world. The "madhouse" that is the world at large evokes Pound's incarceration in St. Elizabeths as well as his world view. This "courtesy" note still evidences Pound's inveterate provocativeness in the very need to humorously allude to the present of chocolate as black babies. Pound is a living demonstration that no language is innocent. The two stanzas immediately following jump to the larger madhouse that drove Pound over the edge: alluding to the candies or more precisely to Pound's reference to them, Zukofsky mentions "nigger babies," then Apartheid, de-colonializing Africa, the heritage of slavery, and then the Cold War. All this is presented in a typically elliptical, convoluted and heavily punning manner, with suggestions of the devil peering around every corner ("old pest," "Nick"). This is about as much of an outburst as one finds in the later Zukofsky, and it seems to me not by chance that it is apparently provoked by thoughts of Pound. The appearance of "nigger" here is almost unique in Zukofsky, and indeed strong language is rare at any time in

[22] Apparently the Zukofskys periodically sent a care package of candy or cookies to Pound while he was in St. Elizabeths, and a number of these short thank-you notes survive among Zukofsky's papers—the notes are scrawled large over an entire sheet of paper (HRC 26.9).

his work.[23] Here, it is surely deliberate and raises to the surface the specter of the entire present and historical nightmare that lies behind such a word—the kind of nightmare that drove Pound to fury but then also blinded him to the specific nightmare of racialized discourse. But the mention of slavery as "business" and America's entanglement with that heritage, "free root's old pest," hardly allow us to be overly judgmental of Pound, whose ultimate bugbear was economic injustice. The following stanza jumps to the Cold War, or so that is what seems to be implied in what is essentially a string of puns on the names Ike (Eisenhower), Stalin and Khrushchev, with an allusion no doubt to Nike missiles. One is justified in wondering what Zukofsky thinks he is up to in handling such political topics as a tangle of cute word play, and what does this have to do with Pound's note? Are the mentions of racism and the Cold War meant to critically answer Pound's apparently flip mention of "black bambini"? to gesture at the serious matters that lie behind such words? Or, are they gesturing at a context that frames Pound's predicament, the madness of the world that at least he sincerely attempted to address in his work, however erringly? Zukofsky's own manner suggests such questions and topics while deliberately refusing answers as inappropriate to the task of poetry. The problem is not that Pound engaged in history and politics in his poetry per se, since this is what the times demanded and no one could pretend to simply rise above—as Zukofsky pointed out, to avoid politics is itself a political statement. But the problem is believing poetry can intervene in such a direct manner and the temptation of that particular will to power when the intimate handing of textual materials shows us that everything relates and we are all complexly implicated with each other. Zukofsky's punning manner may seem a frivolous way to deal with the political, but this foregrounding of the figural presents an allegory of this inexorable interrelating, that everything and everybody relates and are in it together. These stanzas, this poem or any argument cannot demonstrate that truth, yet we observe and act out its truth at every moment. Zukofsky presents these bundles of complex relations in verbal form as poetry's task not simply to show but enact our always being together with others—start here (with this word) and you can end up anywhere. So it is legitimate to say that there is an implicit reprimand of Pound here, yet at the same time a recognition of the circumstances, the "madhouse" of the world that drove Pound's compulsions, and therefore entangled with critique is a defense of and sympathy with Pound, his humanity and courtesy which should not be cancelled out in the urge to judge.

The second note from Pound is found in the mailbox as the poet and son return from the long walk that structures the second part of in "A"-13 (288-289). As quoted here, it is simply a variation on the previous note, which if nothing else suggests there might be more to these notes' inclusion into the poem than might be initially apparent. In both notes, Pound pointedly allude to Zukofsky being a Jew, something Zukofsky himself rarely did, and one imagines he was not entirely pleased about this.[24] But it is perfectly typical of Pound's style

[23] There are two appearances earlier of "nigger" in "A"-6 and "A"-8, both in voices not the poet's, the latter in a quotation from Marx (29, 75).

[24] Pound's letters to Zukofsky during the St. Elizabeths period compulsively and provocatively prod Zukofsky with his anti-semitic obsessions. Since Zukofsky simply refused to respond in his own letters, Pound gradually ceased correspondence until by the time of his release Zukofsky reported that he no longer heard from Pound, even when he himself wrote (see letters to Cid Corman dated 28 March 1958 and 8 March 1959 (HRC 17.8, 18.1)). The short piece Williams wrote to be included in *"A" 1-12* (1959) refers to Zukofsky as a "modern Jew," which Zukofsky expressed some discomfort with, although he did not want to pester Williams with changes, especially as the latter was in very poor health (*SL* 242; *WCW/LZ* 530). This sort of finicky reticence is quite typical of Zukofsky (see remarks on "shying" in the Z-Notes commentary on "A"-15).

of humor to mention ethnic identities as signaling his straight talk, even to indicate that he knows Zukofsky knows he is not really anti-semitic. But the edge remains in Pound's seeming inability to get beyond precisely these filters, which were hardly individual to Pound but pervaded the time and culture in which he lived. However, Pound's note, as Zukofsky presents it, puts the final emphasis elsewhere with the enigmatic invitation to tell him the story of a candy shop. Perhaps Zukofsky mentioned a favorite candy shop that supplied this regular gift of sweets to Pound, or perhaps Pound noticed they came from the same shop, or perhaps it is simply another example of Pound's inscrutable references. In any case, it is the invitation to talk as a gesture of friendship, rather than a mere polite note of thanks, that matters here, and it is this that Zukofsky picks up on a few lines later with the mention of "care" in a world where not all friends are saints (Zukofsky expresses this the other way around). Again this is typical Zukofsky—Pound or Williams would have simply said "bastards." This entire passage remains quite enigmatic and trails off into silence, but the sense gestured at evidently requires a translation into the personal terms of the reader or else will not make sense at all. Perhaps it is not entirely irrelevant that intruding into this passage is mention of the Soviet spacecraft Lunik 3, which can be related to Pound in the madhouse that stands for us all in the madness of a Cold War world. Zukofsky did see the space race as a manifestation of the insatiability of socio-economic forces and therefore of the madness that drove Pound mad. But any mention of the lunar or lunik, including the space race, also relates to poets, those moony inhabitants who in just a moment will mockingly appear in the form of the 13th century poem about the Man in the Moon that concludes this part of "A"-13. Zukofsky does not find it easy to separate out who is and is not lunatic in the world he finds himself.

"A"-18

It is not surprising that the last reference to Pound in *"A"* is buried in "A"-18, the most vexed and querulous of the late movements, where among the clotted flood of details there is a passing reference to "Old Tacit" (394)—a bit obscure although indexed under "Pound."[25] This designation refers to the famous silence Pound fell into during the 1960s, although few silences have spoken so loudly. Pound asserts his presence throughout contemporary poetry, not least in *"A"*. Earlier, in "A"-12 and -13, Zukofsky uses the word "tacit" in relation to fugal form and measure and by extension to his own poetry, or really to any language use (*"A"* 131, 156, 276). "Tacit" is that ever-present counterpoint implied in any symbolic act, the not-said in the said—implicit others and contexts. Indeed, the tacit encompasses a good deal more than what is present or said. In considering the various appearances of Pound in Zukofsky's later poetry we have often noted the role of such silent presences: what Pound for all his talk did not hear or see, or what Zukofsky did or did not say, or what can only be said by not saying it. I think of this "Old Tacit" as an affectionate acknowledgement of Pound's fugal presence in Zukofsky's life and work, all the more notable embedded in arguably the most cacophonic of Zukofsky's late works. Yet the context of this reference mentions that Pound neglected to return a drawing—a drawing of four angels who are tipping their top hats to a tramp (if we assume that this description in fact refers to the drawing[26]). What precisely this signifies is enigmatic and seems to slip into the

[25] I am sparing the reader an examination of one further explicit reference to Pound in "A"-14.352.

[26] The punctuation of this particular passage makes the inference ambiguous, although in fact we have extra-textual evidence that this assumption is correct (*EP/LZ* 140).

silence of the purely private, although the tone of missed reciprocity suits this movement and much of Zukofsky's later relationship with Pound.[27]

Aside from these more or less direct appearances of Pound in Zukofsky's later poetry, there is ample scope for speculation on the impact of the *Cantos* on *"A"*. The fate of Pound and his poem undoubtedly played a role in Zukofsky's thinking about his own poem, particularly in the aftermath of World War II, and just what the demands of history amounted to. Judging from "A"-8 (1935-37), which is unimaginable without the prior example of the *Cantos*, Zukofsky had every intention that his poem engage quite directly with contemporary history in the best Poundian manner. While both personally and poetically Pound could not alter his commitments despite catastrophe on every front, Zukofsky did and recognized that with the re-configuration of contemporary history as the Cold War, politics as conceived and practiced in the 1930s was no longer viable. When in 1959 David Ignatow invited Zukofsky to contribute to a journal issue on political poetry, Zukofsky curtly responded that if it was political it was not poetry (*SL* 262). In this regard, Zukofsky was a man of the 1930s and politics meant affiliating oneself with specific ideologies and their apparatuses. Even in the 1930s when the times seemed to demand public commitment, Zukofsky felt a good deal of reluctance to do so, although the United Front period offered sufficient flexibility on the Left for him to maintain an ambivalent alignment (see Z-Notes commentary on the late 1930s). But Pound was a very real lesson in the problematic marriage of poetic and poetical commitments, which was not entirely due to Pound's specific political choices—there were plenty of salient Leftist exemplars for Zukofsky to contemplate as well. But Pound's problems were not merely political—they involved specific modes of reading history and of grounding language and values. Ultimately it was not politics that got Pound into trouble, but the specific ambitions of his poem that got him into political trouble. When Zukofsky returns to *"A"* on a large scale, in "A"-12 (composed 1951), there is no effort to directly engage with contemporary history, even though plenty of contemporary events intrude into the poem and there are even moments of what can be understood as critical commentary—for example, on Stalin (203-204). But there is no pretense that the poem can directly intervene in such matters, and so there are no overriding arguments or even developed themes, other than an affirmative sense of being in the world with others.

III

Neither Pound nor Williams was ever entirely comfortable with Zukofsky's poetry. Aside from whatever usefulness both felt he could serve in furthering their own interests, they were clearly convinced of his seriousness, critical acumen and latent talent as a poet—and both made considerable efforts to help publish and promote his work.[28] Yet at the same

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[27] One wonders whether this reference to Pound as "Old Tacit" was a response of sorts to a limerick, "Old Zuk," that Pound published in 1959 in a fascist journal, *The European* (Pound, *Poems and Translations* (2003): 1200). This limerick is in the form of an epitaph stating that Old Zuk died of a failure "to see." The ironies here are thick. Recently released from St. Elizabeths, Pound is still correcting others' failures to see the obvious at a time Zukofsky had for many years been slaving over *Bottom*'s dense meditations on seeing in Shakespeare and everywhere else.

[28] Aside from publishing "Poem beginning 'The'" in *The Exile* and persuading Harriet Monroe to allow the unknown Zukofsky to edit the "Objectivists" issue of *Poetry* (1931), Pound also published significant selections of his poetry in his two anthologies, *Profile* (1931) and *Active Anthology* (1933) and then dedicated *Guide to Kulchur* (1938) to Zukofsky and Bunting. For the next couple decades this dedication was the primary means by which

time they were at best only intermittently enthusiastic about specific poems. This is hardly surprising. From the beginning Zukofsky seems to have been able to critically assess his elders and to pursue the implications of their poetics further then they themselves were able or willing to go. It is as if Zukofsky took some of their own pronouncements more literally than they themselves could: such as Pound's insistence that poetry should never become too divorced from music or Williams' that a poem is a verbal object or a machine made out of words. It is obvious enough that what bothered both poets was the degree to which Zukofsky was willing to foreground and trust the verbal artifice. Both complained at times that Zukofsky's language seemed too divorced from "actual speech." A tell-tale response was that Zukofsky expected too much from his readers, which was true but he evidently believed the work must develop its own readers. Zukofsky routinely asked Williams for critical feedback and at times received quite blunt suggestions for significant changes, yet he rarely seems to have accepted them, in stark contrast to Williams' remarkable willingness to accept Zukofsky's suggestions. There is probably a fair dose of stubbornness involved, but also I suspect Zukofsky realized a difference of sensibility such that he had to trust his own feeling for what he was doing, even at times when Williams was one of his very few sympathetic readers.

Because of his early ties with Pound, including the seeming competitive matching described above, there has been a common assumption that Zukofsky can be approached as a Poundian poet, which invariably leads to problems. The obvious reasons why Pound could not countenance the work of Stein or the direction Joyce pursued with *Finnegans Wake* indicate why he would inevitable run into problems with Zukofsky's poetry, even while he recognized the sophistication of the craft. In notes tacked onto the end of his *Active Anthology*, Pound observed that many younger poets, "in particular Mr. Zukofsky's Objectivists" have "lost contact with language as language," and that an excessively "mathematical use" of language threatened to "[destroy] the feel of actual speech."[29] This is precisely how one would expect Pound to react to Zukofsky's work, and there is no surprise that he preferred "Poem beginning 'The,'" whose satiric manner Zukofsky never repeated. These comments are counter-balanced by the fact that Pound included a large selection of Zukofsky's verse in his anthology and also his strongly supportive remarks in an addendum to the preface when he reprinted it in *Polite Essays* (1937).[30] There is little surprise that

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their names came to anyone's attention. Aside from three reviews and an article, mentioned below, Williams was also largely responsible for persuading James Laughlin to include "A"-8 complete (1939) in *New Directions*, although Williams never succeeded in convincing New Directions to publish a book by Zukofsky.

[29] *Active Anthology*, ed. Ezra Pound (Faber & Faber, 1933): 253-254.

[30] The addendum is entitled "'Active Anthology' (Retrospect twenty months later)," in which Pound remarks: "A dislike of Bunting's poetry and Zukofsky's is possibly due to haste. Their verse is more thoughtful than toffee-lickers require. At intervals, months apart, I remember a passage, or I re-open my volume of excerpts and find something solid. It did not incinerate any Hudson river. Neither did Marianne Moore's when it first (20 years since) came to London. You have to read such verse slowly. Apart from Bunting and Zukofsky, Miss Moore's is the solidest stuff in the Anthology" (*Selected Prose 1909-1965*, ed. William Cookson (1973): 399). The *Active Anthology* presented Pound's assessment of the current state of poetry in English, poets actively contributing to the development of poetry, and included "Poem beginning 'The'" and "A"-4 & -5 (over 40 pages in all). This was a follow-up to *Profile* (1932), a fairly slim volume in which Pound presented a more narrative picture of the development of poetry in English over the preceding quarter century and included a handful of pages from "Poem beginning 'The.'"

Pound felt ambiguous about Zukofsky's work, which after all represented his own legacy, but as so often happens progeny discover possibilities in their inheritance one did not foresee or desire.

The dedication to Pound in *An "Objectivists" Anthology*, mentioned at the beginning of this commentary, suggests that he stopped at the breaking of the iambic pentameter, so that sensibly enough the line once liberated becomes the basic unit both in building cadences and meaning. Thus the *Cantos* are characterized by strongly stressed lines almost always consisting of one or two phrases, as Zukofsky points out. No matter how absorbent in terms of content and flexible in tone, particularly given Pound's technical sophistication, this formal machine is in place throughout and is readily recognizable. Pound attempted to charge his language with the full weight of the literary tradition, which entailed drawing on the repertoire of traditional poetic cadences, as well as the heavy use of allusion, including foreign languages whose precise tones and cadences gesture at the untranslatable. Pound's embrace was catholic—readily including doggerel, obscenity and slang—but its authority rested on this virtuositic sense of the tradition. Pound wrote for ideal readers who were an endangered species at the time and who are now quite extinct—those with at least a rudimentary education in the Western classics and romance philology. This of course is what Williams fumed about, even while he recognized the impressive authority and accomplishment of Pound's poetry—at least it lacked the class pretenses Williams found insufferable in Eliot.

Zukofsky's handling of language was always much closer to that of Williams than Pound. Allusion is not important, foreign languages rarely appear. While Zukofsky certainly took Pound's view that poetry should be maximally charged language, his was a constructivist approach that did not rely on resonating with a specific conception of a tradition. Each poem must create its own realization.[31] This, it seems to me, is what the discussions among the "Objectivists" comes down to: the integrity of the poem within the context of free verse that recognizes its necessary entanglement with the world yet must justify itself as an artifact on its own terms rather than lean on literary tradition or poetic content, much less self-expression.[32] With Williams, Zukofsky experimented with many forms and pushed a conception of song as the possibilities latent in any language, rather than as the evocation of the tunes of yesteryear. The tradition is always strongly present in the necessary history or socialization that informs any poet or reader's ability to hear orders or consonances, rather than as an allusive mechanism.

"A"-9 (first half)

If the first half of "A"-9 is unimaginable without Pound, the result is unimaginable as written by Pound, whose response was that it struck him as a "harmless undergrad/ exercise" (*EP/LZ* 200). Considered as a translation of Cavalcanti's canzone, Zukofsky took the opposite tack from Pound: he retained the original form and jettisoned the content. Already one can see an anticipation of his approach in *Catullus* two decades later. The refilling of Cavalcanti's form with (mostly) Marx can be seen as an updating of the content, a radically

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[31] See Peter Quartermain's valuable discussion of the similarities between Zukofsky and Williams and by implication their differences with Pound, "'Actual Word Stuff, Not Thoughts for Thoughts': Williams and Zukofsky" in *Disjunctive Poetics* (1992): esp. 98-103.

[32] By "Objectivists" I mean whatever discussion went on between a few poets—Zukofsky, Oppen, Williams and possibly Bunting—during a short period in 1929-1932. Reznikoff by all accounts never participated in such discussions and already had a set idea of his poetry, while Rakosi, Niedecker and others included in "Objectivists" collections did not physically meet the others until later and never participated in such discussions.

literal making it new. For Pound, Cavalcanti's canzone is a key site in the tradition of love as a form of knowledge that underpins both the poetic and historical narratives that structure the argument of the *Cantos*. In Canto I Pound famously presents a layered translation moving back through Anglo-Saxon and Latin to Homer, who himself is "making new" some archaic ritualistic lore in this visitation of the dead (the past) for clues about the future. This canto ends with fragmentary evocations of the Homeric Hymns to Aphrodite, the turn from the past toward an anticipation of the future, which presumably relates via complicated strands of transmission through the troubadours to Cavalcanti. In any case, Canto I brilliantly establishes an echo chamber effect upon which not only the elaborate arguments of the *Cantos* rely but the authority of Pound's verse, which informs the line with a sense of this historical backing supported by an unusually heavy deployment of allusive machinery. This in turn leads to a heavy use of the leitmotiv technique, phrases and images that repeat, as well as to a tendency toward verbal gestures—in theory the "luminous detail" is so precisely chosen and presented that it almost intuitively radiates its relations, but in practice it often ends up as a poetry of abbreviations.

The initial publication of *First Half of "A"-9* (1940) might appear to suggest that Zukofsky is attempting something analogous to Canto I's allusive effect, evoking Cavalcanti, Marx, Pound, modern science and even geometry, which he states hopefully "fluoresce as it were in the light of seven centuries of interrelated thought."[33] However, this is not really how the poem works, in the first place because *"A"* does not establish a resonating chamber in the way Pound does both within and without the *Cantos* and instead seems to expect an immanent resonance or fluorescence. Whereas Pound typically remains within a neat sense of literary tradition with a bit of the then fashionable anthropology that would trace cultural manifestations to primitive ritual, Zukofsky implies that his topic radiates through all textual manifestations and making it new is not a matter of recovery and conservation but what one necessarily is always actively doing anyway, reworking or rewriting whatever is inherited or at hand. The point of sieving Marx through the intricate form of the canzone is at least two-fold: on the one hand to make Marx sing and on the other to relate Marx to the tradition of love poetry—these are really the same. If Zukofsky makes Marx sing, this is only to draw out what is in Marx already, that he is a love poet, as we all are. The "things" that speak in the first half of "A"-9 are explicitly "words," and as such they necessarily speak love, they seek their "makers," that is, readers and speakers. Since the first half gives the negative, frustrated version of love, it is about how things/words come to be experienced as separated from and set over against their makers. Nevertheless, the "things" still necessarily speak out of love, their intrinsic desire to realize themselves (this is the Spinozianism already implicit in Zukofsky's use of Marx), but ultimately this is manifest less in what the "things" say, which is fairly obscure, than in the canzone itself which embodies the same point as does Cavalcanti, or Marx, Spinoza, geometry or physics: the human desire to realize oneself with others—love or labor.

Zukofsky's replication of the very intricate rhyme and syllable structure of the original canzone, even maintaining many of the rhyme words, can be taken to be a technical tour de force, although it could just as easily be taken as a stubbornly literalist exercise, as Pound seems to have seen it. The result certainly cannot pretend to sound like Cavalcanti beyond a certain sonic busyness which sings and signifies in a quite different manner than does the original. By approaching his formal task in this manner, Zukofsky was characteristically turning the words in on themselves, working by drawing out the latent possibilities he hears working with the words. In an important sense, Zukofsky was simply adopting a certain well-known virtue of conventional forms: their tendency to override simple

[33] *First Half of "A"-9* (self-published, 1940): 1.

expression and instead to throw the emphasis on the literal labor of composition, the invention that occurs in making it fit. The inputting of Marx (plus a bit of science and the geometric distribution of *r* and *n* sounds) simply adds restraints within restraints to this procedure. In the "Interpretation" added to "'Mantis,'" Zukofsky raised and responded to Williams' objection to using a fixed form and his insistence that the sonnet, as paradigmatic of all inherited poetic forms, was obsolete. Williams' assumption is not simply that the sonnet is a worn out form, but that it necessarily carries a certain form of thought or at least a restriction on thought, whereas his insistence was always on invention and beginning again.[34] Zukofsky disagreed because from his perspective one necessarily uses inherited forms and materials in any case, whatever one's culture and historical moment offers, so it is a matter of re-working or making new what is to hand in an ever-new context. In this sense, one might see Zukofsky as closer to Pound, yet the results are very un-Poundian because for the latter making new means retaining or recovering a cultural or spiritual essence, whereas Zukofsky might be seen as more materialist, literally reworking textual materials. This becomes paradigmatic of Zukofsky's primary *modus operandi*: taking found materials and reworking them, whether this means arranging or punching out quotations, rewriting (usually retaining many of the source words), translating (homophonically) and so on. What does not concern Zukofsky is the preservation of some conception of tradition, which for him takes place and is enacted whenever one (re-)writes and reads. This is so despite the fact that as a reader Zukofsky was even more conventionally canonical than Pound. But *"A"*, to take the main example, does not rely on alluding to or echoing a specific poetic tradition (a predetermined book list), beyond whatever a given reader necessarily will hear—"intended" or not. Nor does *"A"*, at least after "A"-10 (1940), offer frameworks of historical arguments or cultural critique that are normally taken for granted in the Poundian tradition. For Zukofsky it is all about love, that is, being with others: the love in working with inherited materials full of the ghosts of the past and writers/readers of the present and future; the love of reading, of the feel of words which are felt with others; the love (or labor) that words necessarily embody that seek their makers.

Without getting into the complexities of Pound's Cavalcanti, the canzone says that love acts to imprint or store beloved images in the memory where they actively seek to replicate themselves. This philosophic-psychological model is a type of utopia mechanism that builds and preserves an imagistic construct of beauty and thus becomes the basis for Pound's visionary moments and the efforts at building a paradiso in the late *Cantos*. If for the moment we assume that in some sense Zukofsky's use of Marx on the commodity form is intended to be analogous to Cavalcanti's canzone thesis, then under the aspect of exchange "things" forget their natural human use in the dialectic with their makers. The counter to this forgetting is not the recovery of those images or memory moments, but a more direct relationship with "things," that is, words. For Zukofsky everything is "now" (he was fond of quoting Hamlet's lines on "if it be now, 'tis not to come"[35]), the writer-reader dynamically absorbed in the text which necessarily aspires to states of love that may, in the end, be very similar to that imaged by Pound. But Zukofsky has little interest in the individualized, spiritualized rhetoric that tends to characterize Pound's articulations; rather, when we are dealing with words, we are being with others and utopian states are not based on singular states of existence but how we exist with others. The memories so fundamental to Pound's poetics and politics are registered and latent in words, but for Zukofsky cannot be generalized

[34] "*All* sonnets mean the same thing because it is the configuration of the words that is the major significance." Williams, *The Embodiment of Knowledge*, ed. Ron Loewinsohn (1974): 17.
[35] See *Bottom* 46, 106, 302, 358; "A"-18.406; *Prep*. 46.

for everyone, because that assumes a prescribed education, a certain reading list, the eternal continuity of certain experiences or a sensibility as defined by the poet. Cavalcanti, after all, says that his canzone is only for those capable of understanding it and that tautology is implanted in many of Pound's working assumptions. "A"-9 does not operate in this manner, but presents a verbal force field that intends to suggest a sense of dynamic balance or the aspiration toward such a state. While there is a good deal of wit in the conceit of "things" speaking on their fallen condition under capitalism, the poem does not require that the reader understand Marx on the commodity form—which is fortunate judging from some of the discussions of this poem. The basic dialectic of labor is already covered in quite assessable form in "A"-8 (see particularly 61-62). The utopian or paradisal, as expressed negatively by the "things" in the first half of "A"-9, is always latent in the words and everywhere in our world if we recognize them as embodied human labor. This is less a matter of recovery than of enactment or performance. The effect of Zukofsky's poem is a dynamicism that makes it difficult to fix the poem, it tends to reveal different possibilities or emphases with each reading, or one finds one's focus constantly shifting in the course of reading through the thicket of the poem—an effect familiar to readers of *"A"*. While Cavalcanti's canzone is obscure, judging from Pound's extensive commentary on it, the problem as he sees is a matter of a technical vocabulary now familiar only to specialists combined with engagements with theologico-philosophical polemics of the day that probably include heretical strands that had to be couched hermetically. Pound was quite fond of paranoid readings, especially of history. If Zukofsky may seem to be replicating such obscurities, this is not his intent but is an effect precisely of preventing such searching after esoteric or occult knowledge—something that endlessly fascinated Pound but held no interest for Zukofsky.

"A New Line is a New Measure"

The fact that Williams submitted "The Botticellian Trees" for the "Objectivists" issue of *Poetry* may have been mere happenstance, but it must have struck Zukofsky as remarkably prescient, and in many respects this self-reflexive doubling, the textualization of the "real" and its irresolvable play was paradigmatic of his own work. Yet at the same time, such a poem indicates the limit beyond which Williams would not go: even the poem as mere words must be grafted onto a myth of natural growth, of "real" spoken language. He could never in fact quite produce a machine made out of words, however often he insisted on this model. In a late suite of very short poems, "I's (pronounced *eyes*)," Zukofsky offers recognizably Williamsesque aperçu, each poem is a moment of attention wrestled out of the blur of the mundane. But here they all turn on the interrelations between the words themselves, as reflected in the title of the sequence itself. Such poems would never have been enough for Williams. Or, perhaps, they are too much since Zukofsky's minimalism insists on relations that tend to spiral beyond moments of quotidian awareness, but then Zukofsky would foreground the opening, "so much depends upon," of Williams' paradigmatic wheelbarrow poem. Both privately and publically, Williams was always supportive of Zukofsky even while privately he frequently expressed discomfort with the poetry. Nevertheless, Williams always recognized that he and Zukofsky were in an important sense working together, pursuing similar objectives for American poetry against the examples of Eliot and Pound.[36]

Williams tended to think of Zukofsky in terms of "objectivist" principles, which had little to do with the latter's supposed critical pronouncements on "Objectivist" poetics but were simply the model of the poem as self-sustaining. This of course is in line with Williams' own often stated pronouncements. Yet, we are hardly surprised when Williams complains that Zukofsky's poems "lack emotional impact," or are impenetrable (*WCW/LZ* 342), or he

[36] For further discussion, see Z-Notes commentaries on "A"-15 and especially "A"-17.

cannot figure out how different pieces of a poem go together.[37] At the same time Williams sensed that Zukofsky was pursuing more rigorously a sense of the "objective" that he himself advocated but could not practice.

Whereas Pound publicly supported Zukofsky primarily through publishing, Williams did so by publishing a series of reviews.[38] The most consequential of these is "A New Line Is a New Measure," his longish review of *Anew* (1946), a seminal volume in Zukofsky's oeuvre whose linguistic experimentation was more adventurous than anything he had yet done in *"A"*.[39] As so often with Williams' critical statements, this review is more a position paper than a specific critique of the poems supposedly under consideration and characteristically consists of a series of stabs that elude critical demands for paraphrasable coherence. His review attempts to define the tendency and significance of Zukofsky's work rather than to illuminate particulars, and in doing so expresses his own preoccupations. In the opening sentence Williams evokes the title, *Anew*, which would obviously appeal to him, and poetry's "objective." In a manner of speaking, Zukofsky represented the most rigorously experimental attempt to rethink what by this time Williams spoke of in terms of "measure." His key point is indicated in his title, but "measure" here means a good deal more than merely a matter of poetic technique. His claims are extravagant:

> […] a revolution in the line, maintained by first-rate work, gives a chance for vast revisions that potentially penetrate the very bases of knowledge and open up fields that might be exploited for a century. […] The poetic line can be the key opening a *way* to learning, the hidden implement which could, once learned and supposed by great *work*, poems, make knowledge work—though it lies in a stasis now (164).

A typical poet's boast, perhaps, although both the manner and the claims will be echoed by a good many New American poets. Williams is trying to express an ideal of the poem or line that is absolutely non-mimetic or expressive, that has "a tactile quality of the words, without which there is nothing" (167), so that the poem radiates its sense of measure, of being in the world in its very formal rigor and dynamicism. This is not literally what Zukofsky's or any poetry achieves, but it expresses an orientation, a possibility that form can redefine a sense of existence. Such an achieved formalism would let in more of the present world than is possible with conventional forms because such invention is itself an act in and with the world, a discovery of the possibilities that are there. Williams describes the poems in *Anew* as love poetry, not because many of them have love as their explicit theme, but because "love" is this augmented sense of existence. Love here is not a theme or feeling or mode of social behavior but "measure," that is, the basis of sensing our existence with the world. Such poems "seek to *embody* love in the words. To make love. Can there be no words for that in our language?" (167). The relevance of this is obvious, I hope, to the above remarks on the first half of "A"-9 as a love poem.

Williams concludes his review by quoting in its entirely the four pages of *Anew* 42 ("You three: —my wife"), which is not the poem many would choose as representing what is

[37] For Williams' private reactions to Zukofsky's poetry, often puzzled or uncomfortable, see *WCW/LZ* 13, 25, 202, 334, 342, 366, 368, 490. His most enthusiastic responses are always to Zukofsky's more discursive poems—*Anew* 42 ("You three: —my wife"), "A Song for the Year's End" and "4 Other Countries" (*WCW/LZ* 334, 355, 501).

[38] Williams wrote reviews of Zukofsky's first three published books of poetry (including *An "Objectivists" Anthology*) and late in life a short essay published as an afterword to *"A" 1-12* (1959). All of these are available in *Something to Say: William Carlos Williams on Younger Poets*, ed. James E.B. Breslin (1985).

[39] "A New Line Is a New Measure," *The New Quarterly of Poetry* 2.2 (Winter 1947-1948) in *Something to Say* (1985): 161-169.

most innovative about *Anew*, but is the poem we would expect to appeal to Williams and its open triadic stanzas are another anticipation of Williams' variable foot.[40] Williams' review projects an ideal or extreme of his own stated poetics beyond his own achievement, but possibly being approached by Zukofsky. It is a poetry he clearly is not entirely comfortable with, yet must by his own deep convictions approve of. He stresses that such poetry is not reliant on past usage but is entirely in "a present language," which we recognize as his old principle of always beginning again. This point is tacitly posed against Pound's attempt to charge his language with a maximal sense of the poetic tradition, a poetry of allusion, touchstones, gestures, to create an effect of vast reservoirs of the past. Williams argued for a sense of measure in which the inherent construction of the relations between words would exert its power, free of the self-conscious authority of history. This is what Williams suggests Zukofsky at his best achieves. In any case, there is no doubt that on this question, Zukofsky aligned himself with Williams against Pound, although he saw no reason to publically take sides on the matter, unless we read his homage to Williams in "A"-17 as such a statement.

"4 Other Countries" (again)

Zukofsky accepted the seminal breakthrough upon which the work of Pound and Williams is based: spoken vernacular as providing models and possibilities for poetic cadence against an insistence on meter. However, he went further and severed the tie to spoken speech as an authenticating motivation, instead turning the words in on themselves to find cadences out of their structural possibilities rather than in traces of "real" voices. From the perspective of Williams, one can question how firmly Pound himself maintained a basis in actual speech, and it is this concept of authentic speech that underpinned Williams later justifications for a new measure and the variable foot. *Paterson* goes to some extremes to allow in repressed and marginalized voices precisely because they seem more authentic, the more grotesque and agonized the better. The voice, however duplicitous its message, is the mark of the authentic.

In Zukofsky's well-known statement of his poetics as an integral of upper limit music and lower limit speech—which is just one of several different statements of poetics in "A"-12 alone—the importance of the tendency toward music is emphasized but should never be detached from nor understood as entirely sublimating speech. Zukofsky did not compose to poetic theory, nor did he advocate a concept of pure poetry. If "music" means a foregrounding of the material dimensions of the signifier transmuted beyond what might be plausibly spoken, this tendency always keeps in mind and operates with and against "speech." The latter in fact is the engine for poetry's music because it is precisely in the performative dynamic of speech where language constantly changes and discovers its latent possibilities and invention. Like any good modernist, Zukofsky allows in all manner of picked up voices, although there is little of the straining to include the repressed or marginalized as in *Paterson*. Rather it is as if he is constantly mouthing whatever he picks up—heard or read—to generate other possibilities, persistently massaging the fragments of language he encounters. Ultimately the difficulty with Zukofsky is not that he pushes toward the music limit, which at least conceptually has a perfectly venerable status in relation to poetry, but that he so deliberately mixes the possibilities within the integral, often very abruptly shifting between them. It is not simply that Zukofsky refuses to allow an

[40] Zukofsky composed this poem in 1943 and promptly sent it to Williams, who declared it his best poem. Williams enthusiasm allows him to express frankly his past dissatisfaction with much of Zukofsky's other poetry, stating that "You three: —my wife" marks a "more explicit style" that he hopes Zukofsky will follow up (*WCW/LZ* 334-335). Arguably it is Williams himself rather than Zukofsky who pursued the possibilities he detected in the poem.

argumentative or developmental framework to determine the relations of the particulars, but he also refuses a dominate tone or register to do so either.

If we take works like *Catullus* or "A"-22 & -23 as defining the trajectory of Zukofsky's work, then there is the evocation of multiple voices but not of any real voice. *Catullus* is particularly striking in this respect since Catullus is normally thought of as one of *the* distinctive poetic voices, at least in the limited selection that most readers think of as Catullus, but in the Zukofskys' rendition becomes a highly unstable soundscape. In developing a polyphonic conception of poetry, Zukofsky goes beyond the inclusion of diverse, competing voices. On the one hand, he tends to formally intertwine or cross-cut the voices so as to de-individualize them, while on the other, or perhaps as an extension of the first process, the individuality of the voices give way to further noises and meanings latent in but beyond the articulations of any given voice. As Robert Duncan put it, in the late Zukofsky "the 'feel' of actual speech has been enlarged for us to include in its range not only how we hear others talking but how others could talk."[41]

In the commentary on "A"-17, I note that the final entry of the movement, a selection from *Catullus*, marks both a point of convergence with Williams, as well as a decisive swerve away. On the one hand, the specific selection is Catullus' famous rendition of an even more famous poem by Sappho that Williams had translated and included in *Paterson* IV—so there is a neat aligning of both poets in the greater tradition as Catullus translates Sappho translated by Williams and then by Zukofsky. But within this acknowledgement of always working together within the tradition, the manner of Zukofsky's translation would be unimaginable for Williams, much less Pound. The Zukofskys' homophonic renditions not only break down the fourth wall of the distinctive voice that is normally taken to be the hallmark of a successful or even recognizable translation, but they allow the "original" language everywhere to bleed into or affect the target language choices. The result does not sound like Catullus or Zukofsky or any particular voice. The homophonic method does not so much suggest the sounded Latin of Catullus—and how many of us would recognize what that sounds like anyway?—as draw the reader into the sounded play of the text. So the result is a good deal more like a force field where the reader must indulge and indulge in the antic textual surface, and arguably it is in the longer mythic poems that these poems show to best advantage—verbally unpredictable and always humorous, regardless of the "original"'s tone. If extreme, *Catullus* nonetheless highlights Zukofsky's characteristic propensity to allow the poem its own lead, to reflexively discover its verbal connections and recurrences.[42]

However, I will conclude with a quick look at a detail of a poem self-consciously written in the mode of Williams. While "4 Other Countries" does not explicitly refer or allude to Williams, as it does to Pound, formally the poem has obvious similarities to Williams and the longish discursive poems he wrote in the last decade or so of his life, even while Zukofsky's use of flexible quatrains gives a more focused snap-shot effect than the insistent forwarding of Williams' variable foot. In the final stanza of this poem we encounter a railroad sign (*CSP* 198-199), the kind of object that Williams made it possible to write poetry with, and the context apparently is the American West—rather puzzling after 25 pages describing a trip to Europe but perhaps this is a reaffirmation of home ground, with a nod to "The Desert Music" and more distantly to *A Voyage to Pagany* and *In the American Grain*. However, Zukofsky's railroad sign characteristically turns the poem in on itself. The words of the sign are given twice: first in the original X-shape of the sign and then horizontalized

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[41] *Fictive Certainties* (1985): 214. Duncan then adds that whereas *Finnegans Wake* was for him "so much an extension of speech, for Pound [it] was a perversion of language."

[42] For more on these questions, see Z-Notes commentary on *Catullus*.

and block-like, which might remind us of the visual poem, “AN ERA,” that opens “A”-22. The two words of the sign—“railroad” and “crossing”—become four, thus drawing out the model of the poem as a chiasmic verbal machine, a crossing construction, as well as a crossroad where everything potentially meets and relates. That one of the four words is “sing” would automatically push one of Zukofsky’s buttons. If a railroad suggests a predetermined path, this is literally cut across here by singing, but finally the point would not be to privilege the latter over the former but to take them together as a dynamic, polyphonic structure. The final stanza of “4 Other Countries” repeats with variation the first, which consists of four words (not counting an article) plus the two lines—“of pastime / and good company”—that are also the final two lines of the poem. These opening four words stand for the four countries the poem visits—England, France, Italy and Switzerland respectively—and are all picked up later, in this sense the poem is generated out of these initial words. By the end of the poem, past time means history (the spectacle of Europe as the surviving rubble of history) as well as the pastime of being a tourist or of writing-reading poetry, and the good company, besides its various obvious meanings, is also the readers who have accompanied the poem on this trip. This is just scratching the surface of this puzzling concluding segment and does not address the “wreck” of the preceding stanza that the sign-poem hopes to avert. However, it is this manner of the poem turning on itself, generating itself out of its reflexive awareness of its verbal nature and its interaction with readers that is so characteristic of Zukofsky’s work across its multiple manifestations. Whether or not this is what Williams had in mind when he spoke of poetry making love, this is how Zukofsky understood it and why he wrote many poems as valentines, which in his mind is simply the model for any poetry.

If one looks for a precedent for Zukofsky’s handling of this railroad sign and more generally for the direction he pursued through his career, the most plausible candidate is Williams’ work of the 1920s when Zukofsky first encountered him. From the beginning he seems to have rigorously eschewed all mythopoetics or the need to ground the poem in some sense of the “real,” because for him language is thoroughly social, always implying an act of social bonding that must be enacted against all its alienating and coercive powers. The poet is always tilling—to use the word identified with Switzerland in “4 Other Countries,” which the poet describes as a “Liveable / place” (*CSP* 196)—reworking the cultural inheritance as an act of sociability.

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Correction 23 Sept. 2016